poems

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A Representative Modern Agony.

I.
He was of sanguine disposition,
Unbowed, unbloodyed.
He desired much to help those of his generation
Who were willing to desire help.
Of sanguine disposition.
Unbloomed.

II.
People laughing in groups
Deny stigmata.
Their faces fix themselves
In revelation.

III.
It seems, then, that I can write nothing
(Oh, glorious range of possibilities!) Nothing I shall write.
Nothing.
And two doves fly each other out of the window Unperplexed.
EXCUSE THE SMILE PLEASE.

When my well-being depends
On the starvation of five
It is well for me
Hermetically to fashion my world
So that I do not see.

Even hermits take up now
Valuable living room for their
Beds of nails.

This age cannot forget
The flavour of gas and corruption
That stains the soil,
While it is fed on, still,
The fertilizer from the factories of death.

But I see that you are in no joking mood.
Excuse me for a moment
While I correct
My bitter smile.
QUESTION ON NOTICE.

The barrier of flesh on forehead
Barriers billion thoughts
In a teeming world
Binds in teeming thoughts
That seek in mind escape

Escape do in mind escape
Since mind cannot grasp
Nor tongue express

Escape: Since tongue cannot grasp
Only prey lusting on life
Such life as by mouth-portal passes.

What warm-metalled gun muzzling against me
Will shoot me into the world?
Where will I find again womb-warmth
In cold or fear or famine? Or how seek
Ointment of words for balm?
NOTES UPON A CHINESE REVOLUTIONARY.

'Infinitely loyal,
Filled with profound class feelings,
Cherishing a boundless love for Chairman Mao'

Your aging work-tanned toil-lined face
Presents itself smiling
In a thousand carefully posed photographs,

So that the nations may see and observe,
And recognize,
The astonishing fruits of your fond labour;
So that they may recognize
The goodness too of your unsmiling leader

Who, if the saying is true
That the greatest teachers are those who teach
The greatest platitudes, tirelessly,
Is most certainly a great and tireless teacher;

Meanwhile for every smile lines
Like a recalcitrant schoolboy line
Your face and forehead,
The result doubtless (despite your smile)
Of your single-handedly pushing
Peasant responsibilities into the Twentieth Century.
Three Illuminations.

I.

That holy night was angel-torn,
Carol-tormented, though Mary
did not notice—
the central angels being
for her the more quiet.

II.

Rough Flanders men kneel round
And angels too (from different climes)—
That cow is quite amazed
At the translation.

III.

Mary may sleep the worse on her field of gold.
Which yet represents for those in vigil
An appeasement.
and therefore, she does sleep,
Riding home trainwards from Sydney
Passing houses, night-rivers, factories,
Synthetic cumulative noises around me.

A large man, bronzed in the dirty light,
Apparently strong, through his grey window
Beats unseen metal with perceivable force.

He is gone, or rather, I am gone.
Yet in a sense he is not gone
But remains
Visionary, striking that iron with his iron;
That tradesman's blow working on
(he is probably sleeping)
In daylight hours.
SECOND CLASS, RETURN.

Shall I compare thee to a microcosm?
O train, O travelled train, to which I am tied
By one half of a return ticket.

Peopled with unknown faces, voices unknown
In the noise
O train!
Interrupted by bridge under-ribs
Raising eyes from pages
Momentary train!
Binding your passengers
In unity of train and destination.
Though they are allowed the option
Of mediate disembarkation.

You, train, have no option.
Bound by tyrannous lines of shining steel
You snort and shudder.
Yet I feel you have also no desire;
So I shall disembark,
Comparing thee...
Melbourne Street by Night.

Taken from the architect's drawing-board
And added to it yet a third dimension
There is no more, and so it stands.

Vivaldi ought to be piped from the
Stobie poles
And Mr. Jolley to appear
Smiling from behind the grapes
(Hung carefully on the vines by his assistants).

In a strange delicatessen, selling
Onions, oranges and sausage,
A plain woman in a long old dress
Talks to another plain woman and then
(after the other has left)
Puts out the light.
Rushing water after rain
Indiscriminate flood washing down
Froth and floating logs
Debris of the storm.
Storm noise rises over
Noise of sleeping voices.

Home too heard at flood tide,
Wave meets rock and noises
News of sudden meeting,
Sudden resolution.
Storm and sea subside
To consummation after climax.

NATURE ONLY.

Nature only rains
Sends gloom to cover sun
Clouds barriers:
though sun
Is not despondent
But conquers after time again.
Then can I say nothing.
MOBILE IN MIRROR.

Fish swim languidly upwards:
Nosing noiselessly,
Slowly contented,
Their threads taut and straight
As if for all their content
Seeking escape.

ROOM.

In the half-darkened room
As I enter,
The chairs sit round primly;
Quiet, as though for a moment
They have paused their teacup conversation
To assess my entry.

PASSERS-BY.

The paths
Of an old man, black-baggy trousered,
Long brown coated, despite-himself fashioned,
And a black shiny-trousered
Striding shaven priest
Cross: I pause for thought.
The Inspectors.

They come not here to read;
Shuffling inspections.
Cases and books demonstrated;
Important portfolios open and closed...
He who shows points with his umbrella,
He who is shown
Looks along the line of the umbrella and sees,
And shuffles away.
I suspect a yawn.

They shall grow not more learned as we that are left.
Grow old.

Another Vision.

Behold! A congregation of potplants
Has gathered together
In the windy gallery of the Public Library.
Together they stand,
Growing mournfully:

but some

On their sides, asleep.
COMMUNION WITH MRS. COLLINS.

I respond towards the uneven candlesticks,
The fragments of the altar: the congregation respond
(Of which they say I am part)
Murmuring indistinctly.

Then at the rail
('Betwixt the stirrup and this holy ground')
The Host cleaves to my gums,
And Mrs. Collins, my neighbour, mouths God,
Louder than in response, more ambitiously.

I am drawn by that ineffective action -
All those ineffective actions;
By the cumulative imperfection of practice.

(I see out of the corner of my eye, Mrs. Collins
Reflecting uncertainly out of the passing cup.)

If True Humanity is perfect,
I am glad of inhumanity sometimes.
REVERIE.

The candle burns down
Flickering in the radiation of some
Ancient Choral Requiem—
In a mass-silver candlestick burns down,
Sadly but certainly,
As not hesitant nor hurrying.
The clock ticks our life away too.
Remnants of wax curl, or melt, or fall.
The strain dies away, is no more heard.
The clock too ticks our life away.

Looking deep down in that translucent cup
Only a strange blue flickering flame
Can be seen.
Poem for Two Voices.

Agnes Day puts on her face
In the dark dirty, still secluded place
She calls her home;
Then waits for him to come who
Who comes each evening punctually at eight
And who is seldom late.

Seen through those new-created eyes
Under the influence of moon or water
He seems to her strange,
Like a separate extension of her being;
And she is not sure
But only knows she loves,
And so gives herself
Punctually, each evening, at eight.

The room is dully lit
The candles dim as though ashamed of it.
Out of the crowded evening air
Two or three couples gathered there.
She enters, joins and enters - somehow the thing
Transiently is beauty, in the candles flickering.

Eyes half closed, made dull by wine or talk,
See the excited gesticulations of the candle,
Its jerking along predetermined lines. Then
Eyes open at the newcomers, are
Or are not stirred, yet feel perhaps
Some mutual feeling at their entry.
MOSES TO ISRAEL.

He waits the consummation of your eyes;
You bore him children, answered love's command,
Together traversed wide the promised land —
But now that fruit has snatched what was his prize.
He bears it yet, for men were born to part.
Instinctively he knew where love would stand.
After he stood alone upon your strand.
So now he gives to your own all his heart.
The mountain that he groans upon uplifts
Its clouded sadness to the parting sky.
While you and your forever children go.
Between you two your progress brings new rifts
Never to be healed. Soon he will die.
Return to the just God who used him so.

St. Ann's Aldinga, South Australia.

In a manner old generations before they were old.
On either altar-side they lie.
Dead within few years, sanctuary-separated,
Unknown by any than the unknowing marble
Carefully inscribed.
Thus they lie.
Riding home trainwards from Sydney
Passing houses, night-rivers, factories,
Synthetic cumulative noises around me.

A large man, bronzed in the dirty light,
Appareently strong, through his grey window
Beats unseen metal with perceivable force.

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