

POEMS

by J. AQUILINA

DYING

Dying must be an extraordinary experience,
A sort of examination one sits for only once
And can't afford to fail.
I wonder what it is like?
Do you know?
Can you tell?
Ever tried to find out?
Have you the feel of it
As one has the feel of ice or fire?
(No need to run away from what is as real as life).
You are not a coward, are you?
I imagine dying to be something like slipping
From one cocoon dream into another –
Or slimy slug zigzagging between two unrealities,
Perpetual cycle of life,
Tinsel and gossamer –
Wet, sticky eel that slips from between your fingers,
Or like falling off the arms of Mother Earth
To lie flat on the hard ground
Face upwards, eyes staring into a vacuum
Till you are covered over with dust –
Black dust, white dust, choking dust –
Metamorphosized
Into something different,
Perhaps rejuvenation
Of all dead bones and withered nerves,
Or like the scattering of seeds on a patch
Of barren soil
From season to season,
For ever and ever,
As we say in our prayers.
Really, I am at a loss for the right image.
But if you think this is not the right figure of speech,
See if you can find a better image yourself
To express the extraordinary experience of dying.

I prefer to compare it to
 Falling off the arms of Mother Earth
 Sixty, seventy years after birth
 (The Earth is a woman with a big belly, protracted
 parturition and hanging breasts,
 That is why she has always been considered our ancient Mother)
 Come on, you must agree that
 Dying can be fun –
 The flight of the butterfly
 From the husk of the cocoon:
 Do not be afraid to die.

20.vii.74

THE BONDSMEN

We have been given a Hobson's Choice
 – A very fine strait jacket and a gag,
 Or a pistol shot in the back;
 And because we do not want to be shot
 Like dogs
 (Could we but live twice over again!)
 We accept the gag
 And the strait jacket
 With a grin,
 A salaam and a hurrah, pain in the belly
 As we wave the Flag
 (*Achtung*, bloody fools, Superman's Fools!)
 And salute
 The Brute
 Praying inaudibly for the gale that will wash away
 The hovels of the pigs
 (Grunting, dirty pigs!).
 By this hope, only by this hope
 We put up with the bite of the gag
 And wave the Flag
 As we stand to attention
 (Ashen hatred burning dry hearts)
 To salute
 The Brute.

20.vii.74

EPITAPH ON A FANATIC POLITICIAN

Here lies one who died of a mysterious disease;
 Doctors have diagnosed it as a kind of obsession,
Morbus politicus, something like palsy of the knees,
 A tumour of the brain, diabolic possession.
 He lived for party politics, by party politics, all his life.
 Truly, *Signora Politica* was his only wife.

Pray for the repose of his soul in which he did not believe,
 But pity him – Wherever he is, he must neither fret nor grieve.
 After all, politics are a terrible obsession,
 Really a diabolic possession.
 A disorder of the mind: forget, be kind!

31.x.74

BURIAL

They slipped him down the grave, how quickly he went down,
 Adolph the politician who was also a clown!

31.x.74

POLITICAL POWER

A philosopher speaking in parables compared
 Political Power to an outsize cake,
 With arty icing, Yellow, Black, or Red,
 Marketed on the principle of give and take.
 How it makes your mouth water for a slice:
 Adolph, the Cook, obliges for a price.

31.x.74

LES BETES

The Adolphs and the Benitos continued the breeds
 Of the dastardly tyrants who rob us of our rights;
 Add Stalin to the *pot-pourri* and others of his ilk,
 And you'll get the sum of the Beasts that blew out the lights.
 Whilst the Beasts trample on corpses in concentration camps,
 What else is left for us to do but mend the broken lamps?

31.x.74

GLORIA MUNDI

Here lies one who in his long career won distinctions galore,
 Who, being very ambitions and always hungry, like Oliver Twist,
 asked for more:
 And when, alas, he reached the end of his adventurous career,
 And had nothing more to look forward to except the sexton
 and the bier,
 Found comfort in the thought that at least his funeral would be
 A Grand State Funeral different from the plebeian funeral of
 you and me.
 The glory of the world (tremendous spur!) was his sole
 passion and lust
 Till Death, that has a very wry sense of humour, struck him
 down and reduced him to dust.
 Be not hard in your judgement on the man who chased this
 ambitious dream;
 Are we not all of us, in one way or another, chasing the
 some elusive gleam?
 'The Glory of the World' – its Power and Wealth is what most
 of us live for:
 The Golden Calf that foolish mortals cheat for, kill for,
 hug and adore.

18.xii.74

EPITAPH

Here lie the bones of a distinguished civil servant
 Who climbed up the ladder obeying his master's orders
 Faithfully and uncritically, till Master Death
 Jealous of the bloated hero of personal cult,
 Bade him stop the nonsense, pack up and cross the borders.

5.vi.1975

FACES

Millions of faces that were
 Beautiful faces everywhere
 Faces dark faces fair
 Millions of faces that will be
 All these and more
 Flotsam on the sea
 Of eternity

29.vi.75

LOVE'S MISTAKE

He sat beside her
Remembering the time
When he had sat beside another girl
Of flowing hair and laughing eyes
Forty years before
Imagining the sudden return
Of his fair lady,
Beloved girl
Sitting beside him again
Shoulder to shoulder
Face to face
His arms round her waist
His fingers in her hair.
Closing his eyes
He whispered the lost tune
Of a romantic song of love
Till the girl beside him –
The girl in flesh and blood
Forty years younger – nudged him.
Mumbling his words, he apologised
For a silly mistake:
'Sorry', he told her,
'I mistook you for another girl.
Please, excuse me.
I had an appointment with her
forty years ago.
Good Lord!
I must not forget.
I must hurry to join her –
See you again, forty years hence.'