

COTERIE



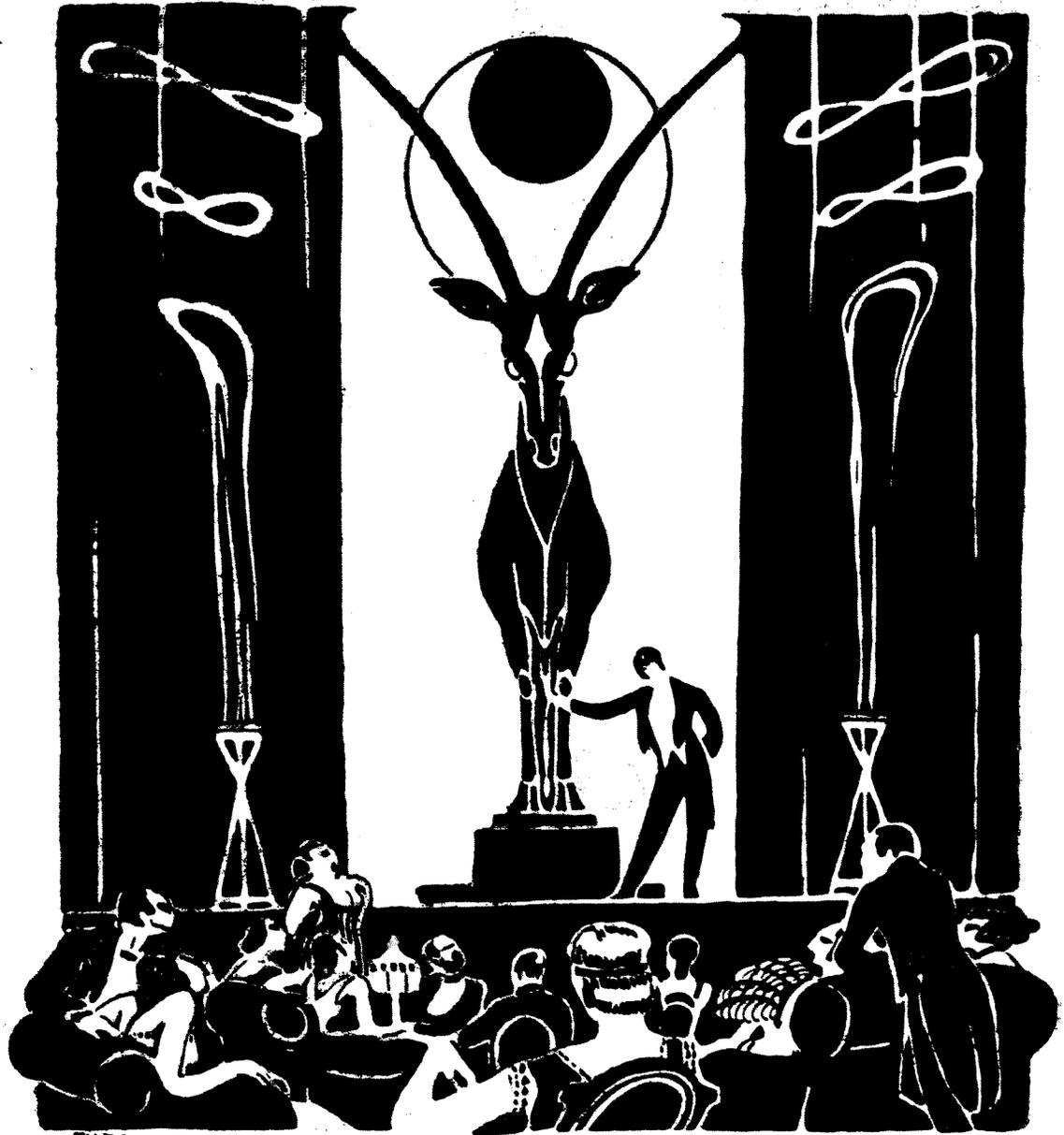
Robinson

No. 2.

September, 1919.

COTERIE

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FRANKSON

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CONRAD AIKEN

COUNTERPOINT: PRIAPUS AND THE POOL

. . . **W**AS God, then, so derisive, as to shape us
In the image of Priapus? . . .

(Priapus? Who was he?)

Are we never to be left by our desires,
But forever try to warm our foolish hearts
At these illusory fires? . . .

(Priapus! do you mean a terminal figure
In a garden by a sea?)

It is strange!—for one so easily conceives
A quieter world, in which the flesh and dust
Are contented, do not hunger, or thirst, or lust . . .

(Priapus! Well, I don't know who you mean . . .
Do you intimate God played some trick upon us? . . .
I will tell you about a pool that I have seen!

It is very old, it is very deep and clear,
No one knows how deep it is.
The ancient trees are about it in an ancient forest,
It is a pool of mysteries!)

. . . It is puzzling, none the less, to understand
How God, if He is less or more than flesh,
Could have devised for us, walking in His garden,
The delicate imperfections of this mesh! . . .

(When it is clear, the pool reflects the trees;
Look down, and you will see the flight of a bird
Among the wavering boughs! But when a breeze
Comes slowly from that wood, the pool is stirred
And a shadow like the skeleton of a cloud
Shivers like a ghost across it, puffs and passes . . .
When it is still the sky comes back again,
And at the fringes it reflects the grasses.)

. . . Must we always, like Priapus in a wood,
In the underbrush of our perplexities,
Pursue our maidens,—pursuer and pursued ? . . .
(I will not say it is not sometimes troubled !
It is very old : strange things are imaged there.
Out of its depths at night the stars have bubbled ;
And into those depths maidens have hung their hair.
Leaves have fallen into it without number
And never been found again . . .
Birds have sung above it in the ancient trees . . .
And sometimes raindrops fall upon it, and then
There are rings of silver upon it, spreading and fading,
Delicately intersecting . . .
But if you return again when the sky is cloudless,
You will find it clear again, and coldly reflecting . . .
Reflecting the silent trees of the ancient forest,
And the ancient leaves ready to fall once more,
And the blue sky under the leaves, old and empty,
And the savage grasses along the shore ! . . .)

. . . Priapus, himself, was never disenchanting . . .
Why, then, did God permit us to be haunted
By this sense of imperfections ? . . .

(But can a pool remember its reflections ?
That is the thing that troubles me !
Does it remember the cloud that falls upon it ?
Or the indignation of a tree ? . . .
Or suppose that once the image of Priapus
Fell quivering in ferocious sunlight there
As he came suddenly upon it from his forest,
With fir-cones in his hair,—
Would the pool, through the silences thereafter,
Recall that visitation and be stirred
Any more than it would hear and heed the laughter
Of a swinging ape, or the singing of a bird ?)

. . Was God then, so derisive as to shape us
In the image of Priapus ? . . .
(It is very old, it is very deep and clear,
No one knows how deep it is !
The ancient trees are about it in an ancient forest,
It is a pool of mysteries.)

WILFRED CHILDE

CHANT OF HIM WHO WAS CRUCIFIED

I WILL go forth like a flame over the hill-country of Anglia ;
and be as it were a white flame in the scarlet streets of the
City of Hild :

To raise up a noise of laughter where there has been wailing ;
to give roses instead of tears and instead of wounds to sow
kisses :

To issue forth in the morning like the white Sun out of his
fiery tabernacle : to shine forth upon the young green of the
wheat, to cause it to spring up and ripen and to bear bread :

To burn like the golden Moon in the violet vaults of the
evening : to smile upon the mouths of lovers and to melt the
high hearts in their breasts :

To ripen the apple till it turn ruddy on the tree ; to ripen
the poem in the womb of the poet's mind ; to adorn the flower
with honey and to draw thither the bee :

To fill the mouths of babes with honey and to cause the
virgins to conceive kings :

To go forth in the morning like a sword of Delight, to be a
Spear of Anger at noon, and to return in the evening like a
white Ox of Counsel, moon-browed, carrying many sheaves !

ABARIS : A RHAPSODY

WHAT plaintive magic, I wonder, dipped those old roofs
in so rich a scarlet and out of what romantic mystery
were evolved those rambling and peculiar lanes ? What wistful
Child-God, weary of His toys, set up for a jest this fantastic
city by the sea and dyed it in gold and vermilion, in sea-blue
and the dust of pearls, darkening its leaning alleys with rich
mirk and setting the children of the fishermen to brawl and

pipe in its twisted alleys like elfin dolls, painted and flax-haired ? And over it all did He not set up an Abbey, carven out of silver and with alabaster adorned, full of shaven men to chant and sing, till He grew weary of their ecstatic music and broke their house with a hammer ; so that the white seamews scream now where the incense used to rise and the brown-sailed fishing-boats go out to sea now with no haloed images in their bows ? Yes, certainly out of the mind of a dreaming Child-God, weary of His own gardens of Azure, issued forth those scarlet gables, and from the jewelled mystery of His sadness came forth this sea-city, where she lies like a fretted and misty Rose on the golden confines of Autumn, on waters where float the white breasts of clamorous gulls, betwixt the heath-country and the sea !

ROSE BLANCHE DES AUBES

FROM Eastaway she came
With the faint dawn-tide flame,
What time the cocks were crowing,
And the rivers of morning flowing :

And she bore in her bare hands
The perfume of Holy Lands ;
In her garments lingered the myrrh
Men burn at God's Sepulchre.

Knee-deep in marish flowers,
In those pale twilight hours,
The lowing oxen heard
The magic of her word.

In cities of hushed bells,
Abbeys and citadels,
Her fragrant footsteps lit
Sweet legends infinite.

Beauty was come again
Into the courts of men
Out of the ashen pain
And anguish of men slain.

With ivory feet she trod,
Like a Messenger of God ;
The wild anemones
Greeted her, and young trees.

Whiter than Death, more fair,
She burned through the still air :
The star-eyed Marigolds
Opened their chalice folds.

Out of the East she came,
A silver taper-flame
Of delicate dreaming Day,
White Rose from Eastaway !

RICHARD ALDINGTON

MINOR EXASPERATIONS

I. THE OCCULTISTS.

FIND love so very difficult a deed,
Theirs is so pure, so educational.

God ! I've been sensual enough,
You can call me beast,
But these, these finger-twitchers, neck-paddlers,
These "souls" with wrists and ankles
But no inwards—— !

Spit clean your mouth, Caligula ;
At least I'll set my teeth
Deep in the Dead Sea apple,
Not sniff and tongue and pat it
Like an eunuch monkey.

Rome, 1912.

II. VALHALLA.

THE war-worn heroes take their rest
In the mess ante-room . . .

Some sprawl asleep by the stove,
Some play bridge on green tables,
Some read novels,
Mournfully peering through smoky air.

Thus, O Athene, do the high heroes,
Even as Odysseus and the noble Menelaus,
Rest from the toils of war.

Newhaven, 1918.

III. MY COLONEL.

MY colonel has several dabs of bright colour
Over his left top pocket ;
He walks with harassed dignity ;
His gaze of intelligence is deceptive —
There is nothing in his head
But a précis of King's Regs.,
Crime sheets and military handbooks.

Every day he talks seriously to poor fools
Who have stayed out too late at night
Or lost a rifle or forgotten to shave ;
Nearly every day he condemns to prison
Some weak-minded son of Cain
For an absurd triviality.

I have never spoken unofficially to my colonel
But I suspect he is even more imbecile than I have painted him.

Newhaven, 1918.

IV. BREAKING-POINT.

HAVE I still three friends in the world
Untainted by moral cowardice,
By respect for institutions ?

I will dance a solemn war dance,
Crouching down, beating my hands,
Solemnly stamping my feet ;
I will dance on the grave of prosperity.
I lust for the scalp of smug security,
To rattle the bones of the bourgeois.

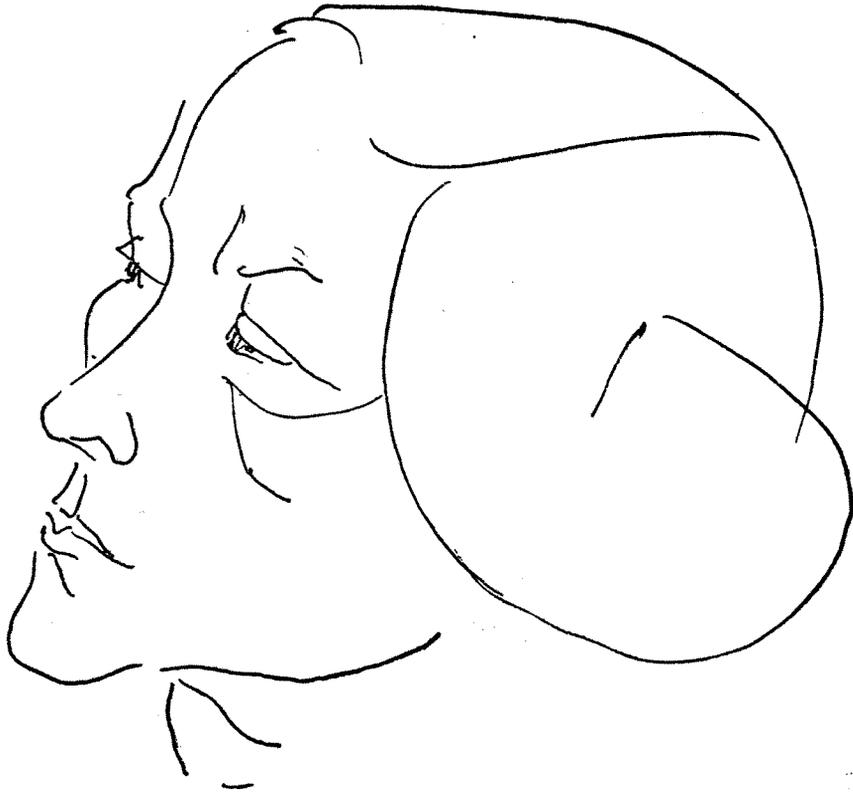
I will make mock of brass hats and brass buttons.
At a serious ceremonial moment
When the hero of a hundred newspapers
(The general who never saw the line)
Is inspecting a motionless brigade,
I will pierce the shocked air
With a laugh of preposterous ribaldry.

I will sneer at this silly war
(I have suffered, I can do as I please),
I will sneer at its bastard pomp,
Expose its flatulent hypocrisy.

O, I could charm the high gods
With a more than Aristophanic levity,
Deploy before their histrionic cachinnations
The biggest fraud in history ;
O, I could play hell with this epoch
Had I still three friends in the world
Untainted by moral cowardice,
By respect for institutions.

Newhaven, 1918.

HENRI GAUDIER-BRZESKA



HERBERT READ

SMOKER

THREE elaborate coons
Intone a melody . . .
Yakky-hikky-doolah . . .

Above the bleary swoon of smoke
The lamps like greasy moons
Preside with indecision.

Beneath them,
Reflecting the light of greasy moons,
The oily bright faces of the audience
Grimace and sing.

Moved in some current of laughter,
Their elastic cheeks
Oscillate from a rock of skulls
Like sea-anemones.

The blue Hawaiian bay . . .

The rhythm of this song
Ripples the pool of shiny faces.
Ultimate echoes
Quaver in the melon domes of annalists.

IN THE WEST RIDING

CANCROID irradiation
Of gritty gray hovel-blocks over the dull green
Excavated hills ;
The neat sheen
Of the sunlit serrated roofs of the mills
Against blue pyramids of vitreous furnace-cinders.

Squat gas-cylinders
Sink in the clutch of hexagonal frames. An hydraulic pump
With up-sob and down-sump
Glistens and flickers in its cavernous shed,
Impelling essential blood
Through the black dead
Carcase of the land. A sulphurous hood
Caps all—cowl of an earth-monk's meditation.

R. C. TREVELYAN

CLOUD-BIRTH

FROM a peak of Glaramara
I watch the clouds mist-born on Bow Fell's precipices,
Insensibly forming, swelling and severing,
Then one by one drifting away on the wind
To be lost from sight in the East.
Vainly I try to fix in memory
The image of each transitory cloud-shape.
Easier it were to remember
The thoughts that are born in the misty chasms of my mind,
Ceaselessly forming and changing,
Then floating away to fade into the past.

A CHILD'S BIRTHDAY

SIX years ago to-day, when first
On my senses the light burst,
When my mind became aware
Of strange brightness everywhere,
Did I then shut my eyes in fright,
And shrink back into friendly night ?
Or in troubled, sulky mood
Did I stare, and blink, and brood,
Teased by changing mysteries
That mocked the question of my eyes ?
Or in gladness and amaze
Quietly did I lie and gaze,
Till drowsiness upon me crept,
And with pleasure tired I slept ?
Or was then my mind so small
It had no room for thoughts at all,
But as a leaf or flower might,
Through wide eyes drank in the light ?

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER

AT SUNRISE

A WAVE hung over the city like an enormous cloud
Crested with smoky foam, and menaced him with death :
But he did not fear, for he had been blown out upon the sky
Like a tired swallow travelling to its nest against the eaves,
And through the great green wave, astonished, resolute,
He plunged . . .

The light went out and there was nothing left
But the grinding clash of waters, the whirling drift of spray :
Then he arose and saw
That the waters beat straight down
Till the houses of the city were invaded, washed away,
And there arose
Out of the surf and eddies no more men, but gods.

Gods with white laughter crowned arose and fought and sang,
Naked as time, through the blinding drift that beat about
 their knees,
They pelted each other with snowballs torn from a comet's tail,
They screamed and shook with laughter, they hugged and
 danced and sang,
And all about the bare horizon rang
With the glory that no memory could assail.

Yet all the while he lay still as death, still as death,
Still as white waters lapping softly under a lagging morn,
A tired swallow blown from its nest against the eaves,
He lay and listened secretly, and still the gusty breath
Of thunderous laughter crashed about the cloudless sky till
 noon.

THE FOREST OF NIGHT

IN the valley of vision are villages hidden in sleep,
In the valley of vision are whip-poor-wills crying aloud,
And a chill wind, flitting and sombre, brushes the tops of the
trees
In the valley of vision, where the pale light is outspread.

Slow drags the lagging October moon
Up through the mist—slowly waver
Golden trees, whispering, chattering,
Trailing their heavy branches.
Southward through the pale mist
The moon sleeps on lake and on river,
Motionless, brokenly gleaming
Down stretches of desolate forest.

In the valley of vision are passionate cries through the night :
The whip-poor-will never ceases his mournful, far-off complaint :
The trees creak and trail their great branches, the dry, sliding
sound of a snake
Moves for an instant amid the withered and pungent grasses ;
Afar in the stillness there is the harsh crack of a branch
And a startled leap in the darkness ;
Then stillness again but for a soft-hooting owl
Coming from nowhere to trouble an instant the silence.

Death broods under the yellow October moon,
Death broods solemnly
Over the world of dropping leaves, and grasses
Brittle and thin in the forest.
Death is very quiet ;
It takes with scarcely a whisper
Sorrowful autumn leaves and years and seasons,
And mournful rivers meandering off to the marshes.

In the valley of vision a black cloud scuds over the moon,
Like a dark cloth suddenly dropped upon a face that is silent ;
And the mournful sullen forest
Lies still and holds its breath :
The plumes of the funeral cypress
No longer lonesomely wave to the white-shining marshes,
And shadows walk out of the forest
And slowly climb up to the hills.

Passion has blotted out the waning October moon ;
Passion and sorrow
Have stifled the shining sky
To the last star's glimmer.
Passion that seeks in death
For love remembers
Its old inevitable failure,
And breaks in floods of tears.

In the valley of vision the lightning stalks through the night,
With winds howling and rains plashing and crash of branches ;
And, when the morning rises,
The valley is like a tomb,
With its network of naked branches
Swung over lofty columns,
And dry leaves spreading a carpet
For men unreturning, footfalls that never come back,
Dark longings for beauty
Utterly broken and shattered,
Dogging them down to the valley —
Whence there rises no cry of a bird nor a whisper to break their
bleak sleep.

H. J. MASSINGHAM

WAR—AND PEACE

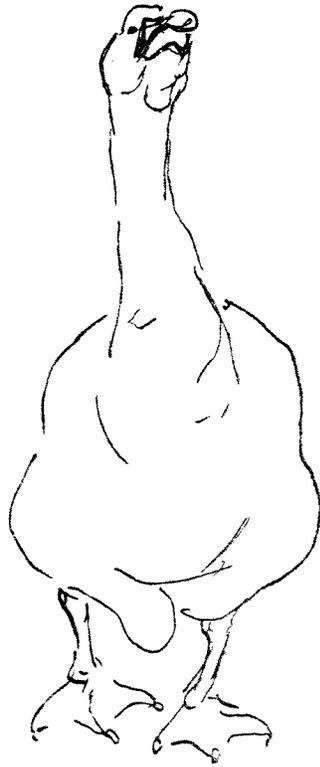
THEY died in millions : yes, that more may die,
For a few covetous old men ? for a lie ?
For fun ? for the jargon of policy ?
For a *petitio principii* ?
To make the State more heathen idol than
Worshipped the Hittite or Assyrian ?
For nought ? For the night mare Chimæra rides ?
Or for old Travesty to slap his sides ?
For the effective use of irony ?
To supply bishops with new blasphemy,
Contracts to swindlers, fallacies to fools,
Thoughts to wise men that harrow them like ghouls,
Per cent. to frenzy, dividends to death ?
To cosen that cheat life who gave us breath ?
For some huge paradox forged into laws ?
Because there was no other way ?—Because . . .
What then ? 'Tis pitiful ; but they are dead.
Flesh is grass ; there is no more to be said,
Or wept. I tell you they are blessed who stole
Hence, from this Lock Hospital of the soul.

SORS EXITURA

LITTLE oak-tree
Two inches high ;
You live, insect,
One day, then die ;
Old, very old oak
Now rots away ;
You, little insect,
Are born next day.

Death, you are buxom,
Cæsar, you're dead,
And old Mortality
Creeps home to bed.
But are you any older,
O cherub Love ?
Is your beard whiter
O God above ?

CORA GORDON



T. W. EARP

URBANITY

AFTER dinner, a little brandy
For meditation would be handy ;
Waiter ! A double cognac, please !
Now I can sit and take my ease,
Observing, with post-prandial face,
The various people in this place. —
Next me, the lady with a fan,
Sitting by that weak-chinned young man,
A Surbiton or Kew Euphemia,
Has been brought here to see Bohemia.
Half in fright, half in disgust,
She gazes hard, for gaze she must,
Across at a young smart town-lady
All too bright and all too shady ;
The girl laughs louder when she stares. —
Discussing intimate affairs,
A woman in a flaring hat
Smiles on an amorous lump of fat,
There in the corner ; farther on,
Sitting alone, and woe-begone
Because not yet quite drunk, a boy
Who comes in search of love and joy,
Anxiously hoping that he'll dare
Hail the next girl who passes there.
Beyond him, looking like a saint,
Sits a young artist who doesn't paint,
Talking to one who lets you know it
That by his hair he is a poet. —
Those two tired men, who's day's work's done,
Have come in here to see some fun ;
They watch a woman in the distance
Taking the line of least resistance,

Because she's got enough to pay
The drinks that help her to be gay. —
Not heeding her, just opposite,
Two big black-bearded Frenchmen sit,
Impassively playing dominoes ;
And so on, down the various rows,
Table on table, I can see
An infinite humanity,
And meet, where'er my gaze is bent,
The curious, the indifferent,
The drunk, the half-drunk, and the lusting. —
O soul, and it's to these I'm trusting
Your little hour 'twixt dark and dark,
And letting smoulder out your spark
Fitfully here in this false light ;
To these, because the London night
Here to this festering place drives in
Creatures of loneliness and sin,
And crushes us within its grip
To a despairing fellowship. —
O better any place or doom
Than sitting in the lonely room,
With London lying all about,
With siren London holding out
Promise of all its many blisses,
Laughter and talk and drinks and kisses ;
For though this whole place seems to lie
Like a painted smile, you can't deny
It's better than the sound of bells
That through a desolate attic swells,
Better than blank house-fronts that stare
Into the streets while you pass there,
Better than starveling ghosts of trees
Out in the square, or lights that freeze
And stab you with their sharp blue ray,
Better than hearing, far away,

Another haunted creature's feet
Upon the echoing pavement beat.—
Here at least there is a shelter
From the night, in this queer welter,
And a refuge from yourself.
Here, the little sceptic elf
Who pursues you with self-doubting
You've at last a chance of routing ;
For the individual grows dim,
Merged into the general swim,
And to the spirit of the crowd
The little private plaint is bowed.—
So we sit and smoke and pick up
Sounds of laughter, oath, and hiccup,
London's children, London's lost,
Foam o' the city, hither tossed,
Thinking that things aren't so bad,
Soothed by liqueurs, and each one glad
Because he sees a neighbour near,
Because we're all together here,
Dreading but the clock up there,
Murmuring but this one prayer,
As the hands move towards the chime—
Save us, God, from closing-time !

RUSSELL GREEN

AVE ATQUE VALE

AND you will stand in the remembered place
And hear new winds sigh their old refrain
Of love that comes and goes its way again
And beauty that endures for a space.

Over the northern moors of long ago
The dying memories will slowly fade like stars,
One by one,
And in their place memories I do not know.

EMBANKMENT NOCTURNE

SWIFT dreams of variable gold converge
From those far lamps on life's circumference
Into the egocentre of the sense.
Beneath the dreams the dead black waters surge
From hills they have forgotten to the sea,
The distant, unseen, legendary sea.

So be it! Let sun and stars, future and past,
Circle around my solitary pleasure!
Let all created beauty find its measure
In demiurgic self! Yet, at the last,
Now do I fear lest circle and centre go
Together down that silent underflow.

SONG

I WENT from boarding-house to boarding-house.
“Do you sing?” asked they. “Do you sing?”
“Yes! I sing,” said I. “Yes! I sing!
But my song is not of this world,
And my music is not of men.
It is not song that would rouse
The feet of men to a fling.
The kind of song that I sing
Would make you sleep in your chairs!
The first wild curve of the wing
Of the first swift swallow of spring;
Or the wind that blows on the fen
In November sunsets and bares
The last gray willow of leaves
And murmurs under the eaves
And murmuring goes from our ken;
The beauty deep in the heart
Whispering day after day
As I go along on my way.
Are these a song for you,
O boarders?
Or would you prefer a new
Bright thing from the last revue?”

SOLITUDE

HELL poured through woman's soul its levity,
Dissolving evil into luscious vapours
To infect all earth. O victory!
O peaceful penetration!
Levity! Thy name is woman.
Where are the strong and silent streams?
Where is the glory of the vast extremes,
The asymptotes of the immortal soul,

Sweeping down paths of the speedful universe,
Dynamic, slow, ponderous, good ?
“ They should not marry till they’re thirty-five ” ;
(And yet she takes advantage of her sex).
“ I think it’s really good to be alive.”
Oh God, oh God, fend this agony !
Dyke off the slime of this advancing tide !
Oh God immortal, kill us in the pride
Of our still beautiful youth before we fall,
Before we fall into this tide of trash, —
Seawrack and drifting corks and chips of wood
Seething along the fringe of the great seas,
The clean, great seas.
Death, death, is better than this agony, —
To be possessed by the desire of trash !
Barbarians we are, nude on the earth,
Crying for strips of gaudy frippery
That would not burn even in the fire of hell.
O little flames ! jets in the catacombs,
Light jets of nauseous gas throwing small shadows
To daze the wits of men who should know better !

* * * *

ERIC DICKINSON

THE ENTHUSIAST

NOW, who is that curious old man ?
He examines a catalogue
As though he would swim in it.
He searches like that every day —
I believe it's a question of man's immortality.
See, but now he has turned ;
With head set back he seeks the campanile.
Tenderly he caresses his moustache
As an abbot a stoup of malvoisie.
Behind the goggling glasses —
Pleonastically obtuse expression.
His crown is bald —
Yet a Pachmann setting
Lends a flavour of genius
To cheeks amazingly textured.
Grave, curious old man in the Bodleian,
How calm you stand !
Yet what is that sparkle, I wonder,
That gleam of the iris —
Is some demon down leaping
From a rim o' the stars,
Grave, curious old man in the Bodleian ?
Yet your pardon, sir,
Upstairs an intrigue attends me —
A matter of Degas :
“ Danseuses à leur toilette.”
You understand —
Now if only you were a ballet-master,
Grave, prying old man in the Bodleian !

CHAMAN LALL
THE MAN WHO WAS AFRAID

I

I HAVE heard their laughter, I have seen their tears,
I have heard the mad rush of years
Without hope or fears.
Was it in vain that the tide ebbed away ?
Why did the tide slink away
Like a shy man afraid to stay ?
I thought I would take a walk across the sands
When the sands are dry, the tide far away,
I thought, half-way, I would greet old Omar,
I would work a great Sin and say :
Life is but a gay misnomer
For the things one may not tell ;
And if in the end it is not well
I thought I would find the Unknown
In a wayside carven stone,
And I would touch its broken feet.
(I hold no Damascene sword in hand,
How should I turn into a dark lane,
To do high deeds maybe with Tamerlane ?).

And so the tide of my desires
(Drift and wane)
Slinked away
Like a shy man afraid to stay.

II

ONE came to me and said,
(As one in a difficulty might lose his head) :
“What have we two left to feel
Spending our lives like women at the wheel ?
Did we not scale the moon and empty the stars in one
experience ?

Our days were like the sea
When the sea is gold and ivory,
Inlaid with cloud and sun.
Is that past and done ?
Did we not pave our youth with questions ?
We are desolate, bereft ;
There is not another question left.

III

“ **S**HOULD God stare one in the face
And blink His eye with perfect lack of grace
As God might blink across a coffin
Whilst hired mourners trail their grin
Along cobbled streets
(Trailing like old women) ;
And should Death go hurrying by,
What would the four roses and a lily signify ?
Or the pose of a Mazarin with his mace,
The huddled volumes in your case,
The four gestures in your face ?

IV

“ **E**TERNITY one day will pay you an after-dinner call
When jesting guests are gathered in the hall ;
He in his hat, she with her shawl !
Beneath the jest, as if it were a shawl,
You will meet Eternity ;
And you will ask the meaning of it all ;
And of ten thousand years pencilled in a phrase,
Or it may be in a woman's praise.”
Is there a meaning after all ?

* * * *

I am Alnaschar tired of vague desires ;
I shall forever drift with my desires :
I shall forever build a golden chamber in the waters.

HELEN Rootham

(The Editor regrets that the article to which the following translations from "Les Illuminations," by Arthur Rimbaud, are appended as quotations, has been held over for a subsequent issue.)

MARINE

CHARIOTS of silver and of copper.
Prows of steel and of silver
Beat the foam,
Lift the stems of the brambles.
The streams of the barren parts
And the immense tracks of the ebb
Flow circularly towards the east,
Towards the pillars of the forest,
Towards the piles of the jetty,
Against whose angle are hurled whirlpools of light.
Behind the opera-bouffe huts one hears the cascade.
There are Catherine-wheels and revolving suns in
the orchards, and in the alleys near the maze;—
the setting sun paints the sky with green and red.
There are Horatian nymphs with their hair dressed
in the style of the First Empire, Siberian roundelays,
and Chinese ladies painted by Boucher.

METROPOLITAN

FROM the indigo straits to the seas of Ossian, on the rose
and orange sands which have been washed by the wine-
coloured sky, crystal boulevards have just arisen, inhabited
forthwith by young, poor families. They are fed at the
fruiterer's. There is nothing rich.—A town!

Flying from the bituminous desert, flying in a disordered
roul with masses of shifting fog surging hideously towards a
bending, changing sky (a sky formed of the black sinister
vapour which the mourning ocean breathes out) are helmets,
wheels, boats and cruppers.—A battle!

Raise your head ; see this arched wooden bridge, these last few kitchen-gardens, these coloured masks lighted up by the lamp which the cold night lashes, the giggling ninny naiad in the loud dress down by the river, the phosphorescent turnip-heads amongst the pea-plants, and the other phantasmagoria.—The country !

There are roads bordered with railings and walls which can scarcely contain their groves, with atrocious flowers which one is supposed to call one's brothers and sisters, damask of a damning languor—possessions of a fabled aristocracy, ultrarhenan, Japanese or Guarinno, the proper sort of people to receive the music of the ancients. There are inns which will never open again,—there are princesses, and if you are not too bored, there is the study of the stars.—Heaven !

There was the morning when, with Her, you struggled amongst those banks of snow, those green-lipped crevasses, that ice, those black flags and blue rays, and the purple perfumes of the polar sun.—Thy force !

BARBARIC

LONG after days and seasons, long after the creatures and the countries,

The scarlet pavilion was set up on the silk of the seas and of the Arctic flowers (which are not).

There arose remembrances of the fanfares of old heroic days,—which still attack our hearts and our heads,—far from assassins of old.

Behold ! The scarlet pavilion set up on the silk of the seas and of the Arctic flowers (which are not).

The brasiers scattering their showers of hoar frost.—Oh delight !—Those fires with sudden gusts and showers of diamonds, thrown off by the heart of the world eternally carbonised for us.—Oh world !

(How far are we from those by-gone haunts and flames that we hear and feel!)

The glowing fires and the foam on the waters! The music of the whirling of bottomless gulfs, and the clash of icebergs against the stars!

Oh Delight, oh World, oh Music! And there, shapes, vapours, hair and eyes floating in the vast! And tears, white and hot!—Oh Delight! and woman's voice reaching to the depths of Arctic caves and volcanoes . . . The Pavilion. . . .

FLOWERS

SEATED on a golden stair, amongst silken cords, grey gauzes, green velvets, and crystal disks which blacken in the sun-like bronze—I watch the foxglove open on a ground of filigree-work of silver, eyes and hair. Pieces of yellow gold lie scattered upon the agate, mahogany pillars support a dome of emeralds, white satin bouquets and slender twigs of rubies encircle the water-lily.

Like a blue-eyed god sculptured in snow, the sea and the sky allure to the marble terraces the crowd of strong young roses.

DEMOCRACY

“**T**HE flag is in keeping with the unclean landscape, and our jargon drowns the sound of the drum.”

“At certain centres we will encourage the most cynical prostitution. We will crush logical rebellion.”

“Let us go to dusty and exhausted countries—put ourselves at the service of monstrous industrial or military exploitations.”

“To our next meeting—here—no matter where! Conscripts of good intention, we shall have a ferocious philosophy. Dunces shall be devotees of knowledge, sybarites enthusiasts for comfort; and for this busy world there shall be dissolution. This is real progress! Forward! March!”

EDITH SITWELL

WHAT THE GOOSE-GIRL SAID ABOUT
THE DEAN

TURN again, turn again,
Goose Clothilda, Goosie Jane.

Bright wooden waves of people creak
From houses built with coloured straws
Of heat ; Dean Pappus' long nose snores
Harsh as a hautbois, marshy-weak.

The wooden waves of people creak
Through the fields all water-sleek.

And in among the straws of light
Those bumpkin hautbois-sounds take flight.

Whence he lies snoring like the moon
Clownish-white all afternoon.

Beneath the trees' arsenical
Sharp woodwind tunes ; heretical——

Blown like the wind's mane
(Creaking woodenly again).

His wandering thoughts escape like geese
Till he, their gooseherd, sets up chase,
And clouds of wool join the bright race
For scattered old simplicities.

“TOURNEZ, TOURNEZ, BON CHEVAUX
DE BOIS”

TURN, turn again,
Ape's blood in each vein !
The people that pass
Seem castles of glass,

The old and the good
 Giraffes of blue wood,
 The soldier, the nurse,
 Wooden-face and a curse,
 Are shadowed with plumage
 Like birds, by the gloomage.
 Blond hair like a clown's
 The music floats—drowns
 The creaking of ropes,
 The breaking of hopes.
 The wheezing, the old,
 Like harmoniums scold ;
 Go to Babylon, Rome,
 The brain-cells called home,
 The grave, new Jerusalem—
 Wrinkled Methusalem !
 From our floating hair
 Derived the first fair
 And queer inspiration
 Of music, the nation
 Of bright-plumèd trees
 And harpy-shrill breeze . . .
 * * * *
 Turn, turn again,
 Ape's blood in each vein !

BY CANDLELIGHT

HOUSES red as flower of bean,
 Flickering leaves and shadows lean !
 Pantalone, like a parrot,
 Sat and grumbled in the garret—
 Sat and growled and grumbled till
 Moon upon the window-sill
 Like a red geranium
 Scented his bald cranium.

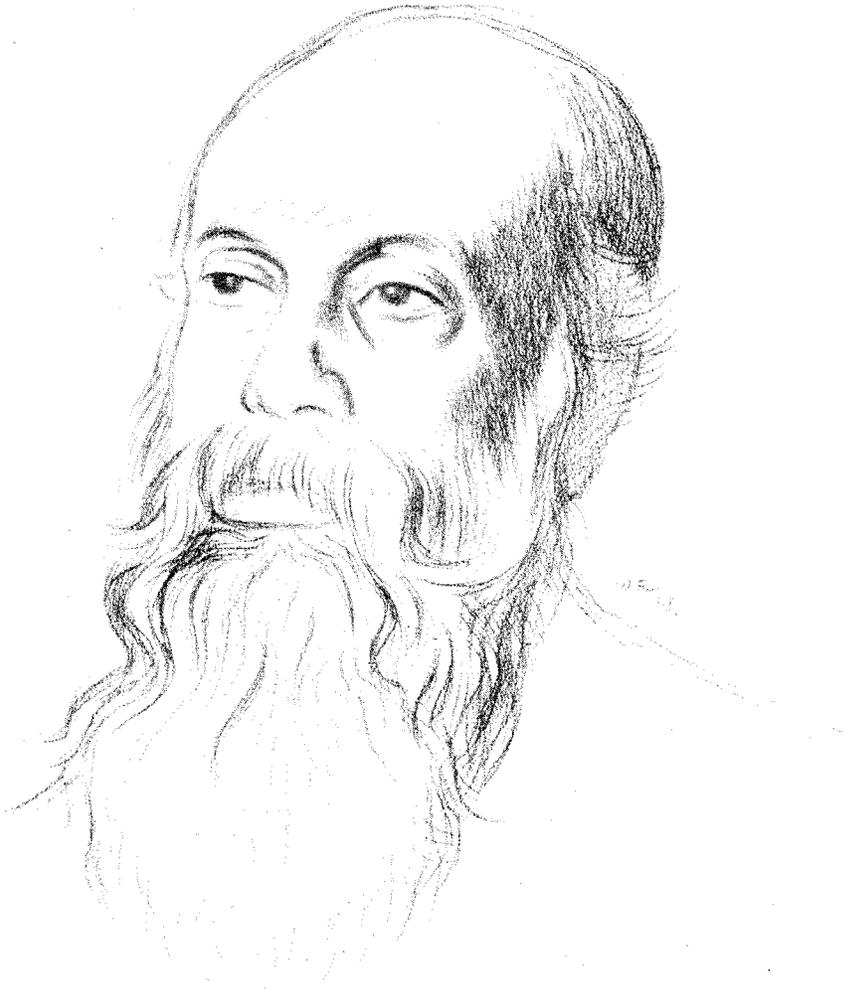
Said Brighella, meaning well :
“ Pack your box and—go to Hell !
Heat will cure your rheumatism ! ” . . .
Silence crowned this optimism—
Not a sound and not a wail :
But the fire (lush leafy vale)
Watched the angry feathers fly.
Pantalone 'gan to cry—
Could not, *would* not, pack his box !
Shadows (curtseying hens and cocks)
Pecking in the attic gloom
Tried to smother his tail-plume . . .
Till a cockscomb candle-flame
Crowing loudly, died : Dawn came.

WALTER SICKERT



W. ROTHENSTEIN

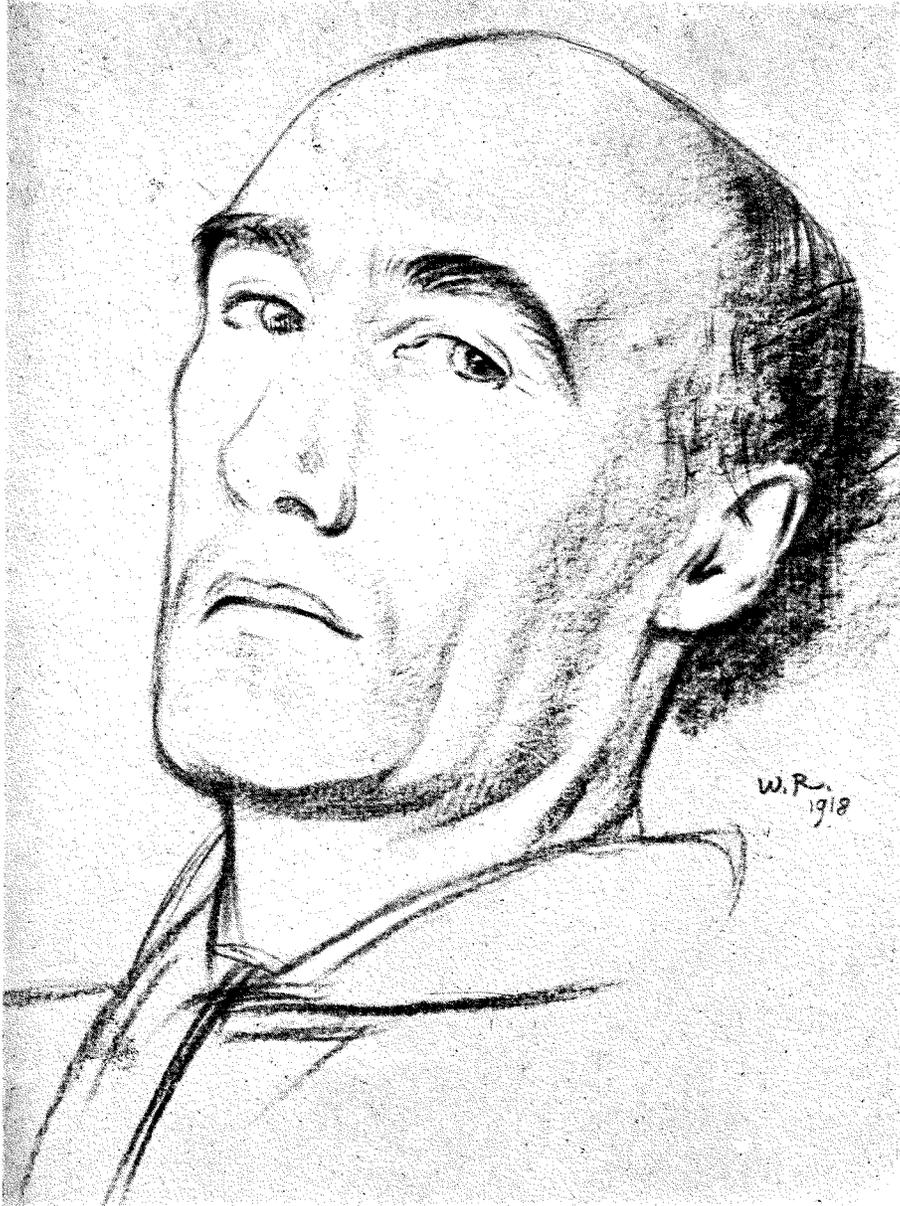
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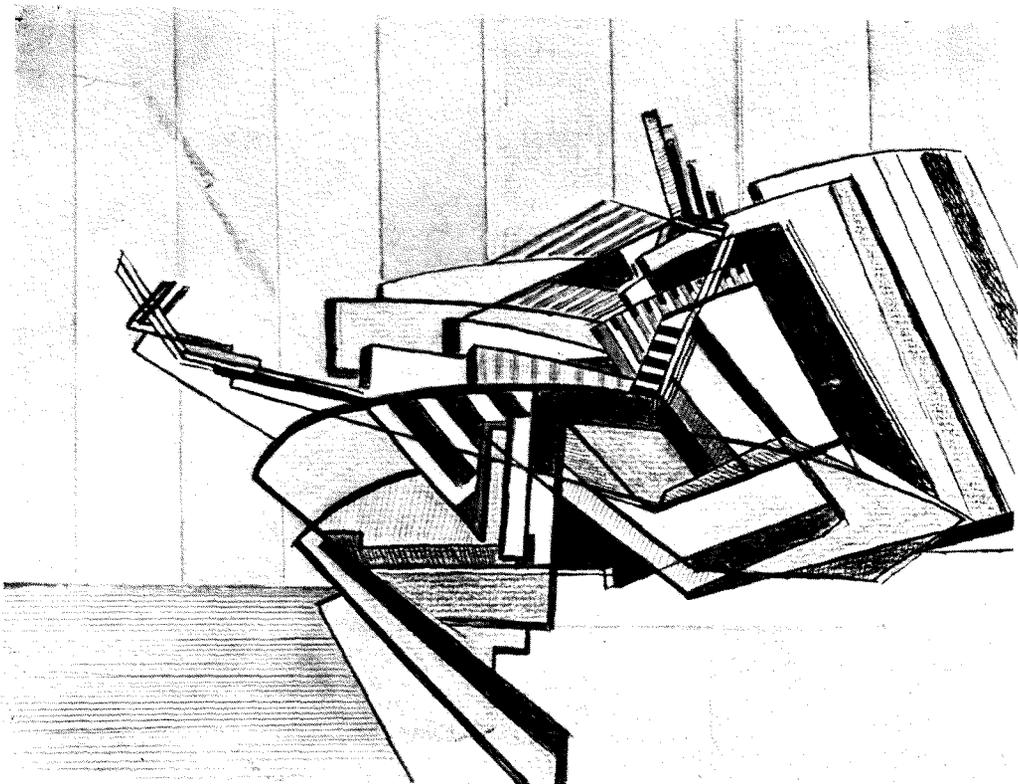
W. ROTHENSTEIN

II



ANDRÉ GIDE.

LAWRENCE ATKINSON



STILL LIFE.

A. E. COPPARD

THE STREAMS

HIDDEN by sweet bushes, where blooms an acacia tree,
Let a river be turning among its rocks :
I would sit on the bridge and think my thoughts—
The red streams of my heart to be going about
In riot among the rocks of the mind
And to be cloven by them—
Until the light was smitten from the hills,
And little splashing stars
Were come to be walking with the moon.

Now in this quiet house,
When the door and the half-door are bolted,
The woman with down-fallen hair smiles strangely towards me—
The clock is ticking,
The bird hops in its cage,
The child stirs not from its slumber—
Beautiful are her glances to me
As she lights the tall candle.

WISHES

AY, I may wound my heels on the stones of the street,
And break my heart for the things far out in the world,
But ever the wish of my mind waits for a thrust from me
That will not come.

How could I receive my wishes, who had but the heart of a hen ?
And lived but looking at things, and sighing for things
With the cry of a vexed bird, lonely
On this flat strand of the sea ?

But to lie down now, now in the sand of the shore, and watch
the plane,
The flying plane that hums at the hinge of heaven,
Or crawls like a flea
In the skin of the holy dog ;

And let me be covered with your caresses, green wandering
wave,
Your curving sea be spilled in my empty heart,
Lest I live vainly on :
This is my wish indeed.

L. A. G. STRONG

TO A NOSE

(After the Spanish of Villegas)

THERE was a nose grew on a man
(Stuck on with glue, ye might suppose),
A corpulent an' clerkly nose,
A scythe, an' it a hairy one.
A sundial visage turned about,
A chemist's bottle thinkin' hard :
An elephant's gob, would add a yard
To Ovid, old Rome's snouted bard.
'Twas like the beak of a ship of old
A pyramid blessed with the sense o' smell.
The whole ten tribes into one nose rolled,
A nose whose limit 'd fail ye to tell.
Ye could damn, O swaggerin' nose so bold,
The Jews' High Priest himself to Hell.

EENA-MEENA-MINA-MO

EENA—meena—mina—mo,
Catch a nigger by 'ees toe :
If 'e 'olleys let 'n go.
O—U—T spells out.
And out you must go :
You'm of it, O !

Children playing on the green.
Joe Treguddick, deathly ill,
Hears them very clearly still.
Silently with blinking eyes
Two great sons have dragged his bed
To the window, till he dies.

Now he is wandering in his fields
Where all things lose their certain shape . . .

The cows in munching quiet lie,
And on the orange of the sky
The trees stand out like scissored crape.

With deep, cool breaths he drinks the night :
Then in a sudden sweat of pain
He twists upon his bed again.

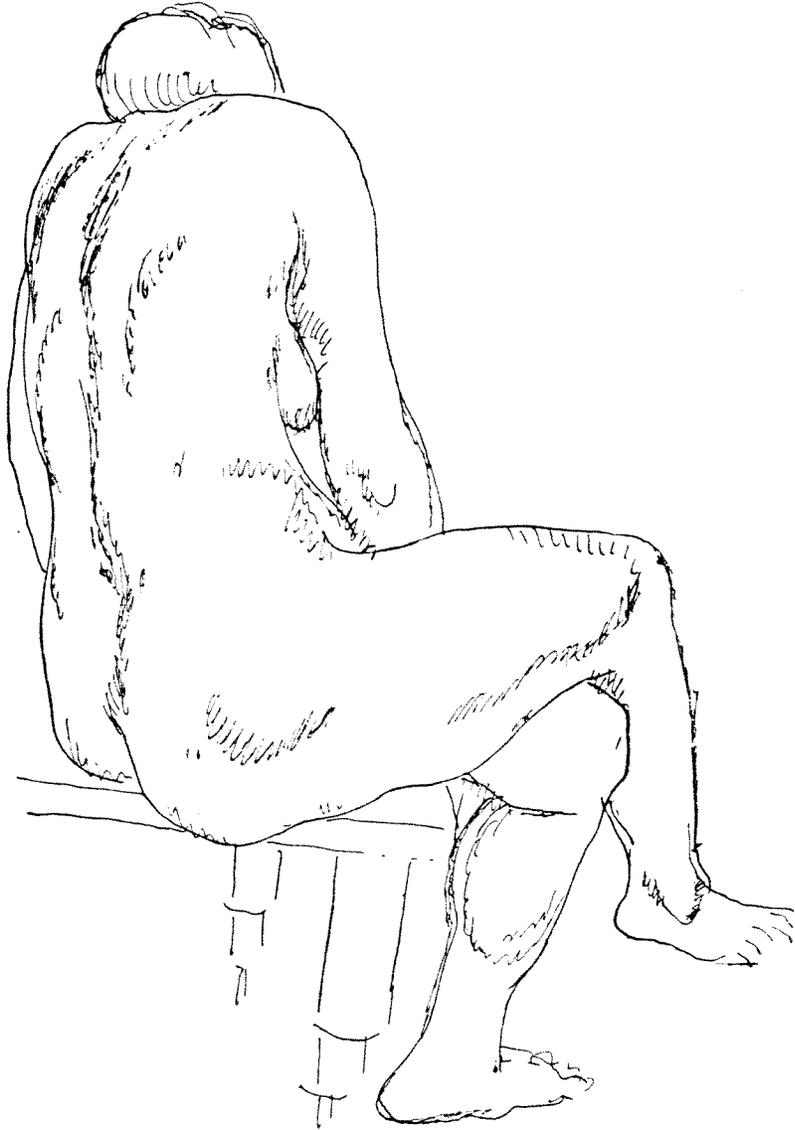
The children's voices die away,
And seldom now the footsteps pass :
A hobnailed tread upon the road
Falls sudden silent on the grass.

Still with throb and throb of pain
He hears the children at their play
Chanting insistent in his brain :

Coughs : and with a whistling breath,
Though he knows how the count will fall,
Turns to play the game with Death.
Turns to the last game of all.

Eena—meena—mina—mo,
Catch a nigger by 'ees toe :
If 'e 'olleys let'n go.
O—U—T spells out.
And out you must go :
You'm of it, Joe !

NINA HAMNETT



ALDOUS HUXLEY

LEDA

BROWN and bright as an agate, mountain-cool,
Eurotas singing slips from pool to pool ;
Down rocky gullies ; through the cavernous pines
And chestnut groves ; down where the terraced vines
And gardens overhang ; through valleys grey
With olive trees, into a soundless bay
Of the Ægean. Silent and asleep
Lie those pools now : but where they dream most deep,
Men sometimes see ripples of shining hair
And the young grace of bodies pale and bare,
Shimmering far down—the ghosts these mirrors hold
Of all the beauty they beheld of old,
White limbs and heavenly eyes and the hair's river of gold.
For once these banks were peopled : Spartan girls
Loosed here their maiden girdles and their curls,
And stooping o'er the level water stole
His darling mirror from the sun through whole
Rapturous hours of gazing.

The first star

Of all this milky constellation, far
Lovelier than any nymph of wood or green,
Was she whom Tyndarus had made his queen
For her sheer beauty and subtly moving grace—
Leda, the fairest of our mortal race.

Hymen had lit his torches but one week
About her bed (and still o'er her young cheek
Passed rosy shadows of those thoughts that sped
Across her mind, still virgin, still unwed,
For all her body was her own no more),
When Leda with her maidens to the shore
Of bright Eurotas came, to escape the heat
Of summer noon in waters coolly sweet.

By a brown pool which opened smooth and clear
 Below the wrinkled water of a weir.
 They sat them down under an old fir-tree
 To rest : and to the laughing melody
 Of their sweet speech the river's rippling bore
 A liquid burden, while the sun did pour
 Pure colour out of heaven upon the earth.
 The meadows seethed with the incessant mirth
 Of grasshoppers, seen only when they flew
 Their curves of scarlet or sudden dazzling blue.
 Within the fir-tree's round of unpierced shade
 The maidens sat with laughter and talk, or played,
 Gravely intent, their game of knuckle-bones ;
 Or tossed from hand to hand the old dry cones
 Littered about the tree. And one did sing
 A ballad of some far-off Spartan king,
 Who took a wife, but left her, well-away !
 Slain by his foes upon their wedding day.
 " That was a piteous story," Leda sighed,
 " To be a widow ere she was a bride."
 " Better," said one, " to live a virgin life
 Alone, and never know the name of wife
 And bear the ugly burden of a child
 And have great pain by it. Let me live wild,
 A bird untamed by man ! " " Nay," cried another,
 " I would be wife, if I should not be mother.
 Cypris I honour ; let the vulgar pay
 Their gross vows to Lucina when they pray.
 Our finer spirits would be blunted quite
 By bestial teeming ; but Love's rare delight
 Wings the rapt soul towards Olympus' height."
 " Delight ? " cried Leda. " Love to me has brought
 Nothing but pain and a world of shameful thought.
 When they say love is sweet, the poets lie ;
 'Tis but a trick to catch poor maidens by.

What are their boasted pleasures ? I am queen
To the most royal king the world has seen ;
Therefore I should, if any woman might,
Know at its full that exquisite delight.
Yet these few days since I was made a wife
Have held more bitterness than all my life,
While I was yet a child." The great bright tears
Slipped through her lashes. " Oh, my childish years !
Years that were all my own, too sadly few,
When I was happy—and yet never knew
How happy till to-day ! " Her maidens came
About her as she wept, whispering her name,
Leda, sweet Leda, with a hundred dear
Caressing words to soothe her heavy cheer.
At last she started up with a fierce pride
Upon her face. " I am a queen," she cried,
" But had forgotten it a while ; and you,
Wenches of mine, you were forgetful too.
Undress me. We would bathe ourself." So proud
A queen she stood, that all her maidens bowed
In trembling fear and scarcely dared approach
To do her bidding. But at last the brooch
Pinned at her shoulder is undone, the wide
Girdle of silk beneath her breasts untied ;
The tunic falls about her feet, and she
Steps from the crocus folds of drapery,
Dazzlingly naked, into the warm sun.
God-like she stood ; then broke into a run,
Leaping and laughing in the light, as though
Life through her veins coursed with so swift a flow
Of generous blood and fire that to remain
Too long in statued queenliness were pain
To that quick soul, avid of speed and joy.
She ran, easily bounding, like a boy,
Narrow of haunch and slim and firm of breast.

Lovelier she seemed in motion than at rest,
If that might be, when she was never less,
Moving or still, than perfect loveliness.
At last, with cheeks afire and heaving flank,
She checked her race, and on the river's bank
Stood looking down at her own echoed shape
And at the fish that, aimlessly agape,
Hung midway up their heaven of flawless glass,
Like angels waiting for eternity to pass.
Leda drew breath and plunged ; her gasping cry
Splashed up ; the water circled brokenly
Out from that pearly shudder of dipped limbs ;
The glittering pool laughed up its flowery brims,
And everything, save the poor fish, rejoiced :
Their idiot contemplation of the Moist,
The Cold, the Watery, was in a trice
Ended when Leda broke their crystal paradise.

Jove in his high Olympian chamber lay
Hugely supine, striving to charm away
In sleep the long, intolerable noon.
But heedless Morpheus still withheld his boon,
And Jove upon his silk-pavilioned bed
Tossed wrathful and awake. His fevered head
Swarmed with a thousand fancies, which forecast
Delights to be, or savoured pleasures past.
Closing his eyes, he saw his eagle swift,
Headlong as his own thunder, stoop and lift
On pinions upward labouring the prize
Of beauty ravished for the envious skies.
He saw again that bright, adulterous pair,
Trapped by the limping husband unaware,
Fast in each other's arms, and faster in the snare—
And laughed remembering. Sometimes his thought
Went wandering over the earth and sought
Familiar places—temples by the sea,

Cities and islands ; here a sacred tree
And there a cavern of shy nymphs.

He rolled

About his bed, in many a rich fold
Crumpling his Babylonian coverlet,
And yawned and stretched. The smell of his own sweat
Brought back to mind his Libyan desert-fane
Of mottled granite, with its endless train
Of pilgrim camels, reeking towards the sky
Ammonian incense to his horned deity ;
The while their masters worshipped, offering
Huge teeth of ivory, while some would bring
Their Ethiop wives—sleek wineskins of black silk,
Jellied and huge from drinking asses' milk
Through years of tropical idleness, to pray
For offspring (whom he ever sent away
With prayers unanswered, lest their ebon race
Might breed and blacken the earth's comely face).
Noon pressed on him a hotter, heavier weight.
O Love in Idleness ! how celibate
He felt ! Libido like a nemesis
Scourged him with itching memories of bliss.
The satin of imagined skin was sleek
And supple warm against his lips and cheek,
And deep within soft hair's dishevelled dusk
His eyelids fluttered ; like a flowery musk
The scent of a young body seemed to float
Faintly about him, close and yet remote—
For perfume and the essence of music dwell
In other worlds among the asphodel
Of unembodied life. Then all had flown ;
His dream had melted. In his bed, alone,
Jove sweating lay and moaned, and longed in vain
To still the pulses of his burning pain.
In sheer despair at last he leapt from bed,
Opened the window and thrust forth his head

Into Olympian ether. One fierce frown
Rifted the clouds, and he was looking down
Into a gulf of azure calm ; the rack
Seethed round about, tempestuously black ;
But the god's eye could hold its angry thunders back.
There lay the world, down through the chasméd blue,
Stretched out from edge to edge unto his view ;
And in the midst, bright as a summer's day
At breathless noon, the Mediterranean lay ;
And Ocean round the world's dim fringes tossed
His glaucous waves in mist and distance lost ;
And Pontus and the livid Caspian sea
Stirred in their nightmare sleep uneasily.
And 'twixt the seas rolled the wide fertile land,
Dappled with green and tracts of tawny sand,
And rich, dark fallows and fields of flowers aglow
And the white, changeless silences of snow ;
While here and there towns, like a living eye
Unclosed on earth's blind face, towards the sky
Glanced their bright conscious beauty. Yet the sight
Of his fair earth gave him but small delight
Now in his restlessness : its beauty could
Do nought to quench the fever in his blood.
Desire lends sharpness to his searching eyes ;
Over the world his focussed passion flies
Quicker than chasing sunlight on a day
Of storm and golden April. Far away
He sees the tranquil rivers of the East,
Mirrors of many a strange barbaric feast
Where un-Hellenic dancing-girls contort
Their yellow limbs, and gibbering masks make sport
Under the moons of many-coloured light
That swing their lantern-fruitage in the night
Of overarching trees. To him it seems
An alien world, peopled by insane dreams.

But these are nothing to the monstrous shapes—
Not men so much as bastardy of apes—
That meet his eyes in Africa. Between
Leaves of grey fungoid pulp and poisonous green,
White eyes from black and browless faces stare.
Dryads with star-flowers in their woolly hair
Dance to the flaccid clapping of their own
Black dangling dugs through forests overgrown,
Platted with writhing creepers. Horrified,
He sees them how they leap and dance, or glide,
Glimpse after black glimpse of a satin skin,
Among unthinkable flowers, to pause and grin
Out through a trellis of suppurating lips,
Of mottled tentacles barbed at the tips
And bloated hands and wattles and red lobes
Of pendulous gristle and enormous probes
Of pinked and slashed and tasselled flesh . . .

He turns

Northward his sickened sight. The desert burns
All life away. Here in the forkéd shade
Of twin-humped towering dromedaries laid,
A few gaunt folk are sleeping : fierce they seem
Even in sleep and restless as they dream.
He would be fearful of a desert bride
As of a brown asp at his sleeping side,
Fearful of her white teeth and cunning arts.
Further, yet further, to the ultimate parts
Of the wide earth he looks, where Britons go
Painted among their swamps, and through the snow
Huge hairy snuffling beasts pursue their prey—
Fierce men, as hairy and as huge as they.

Bewildered furrows deepen the Thunderer's scowl :
This world so vast, so variously foul—
Who can have made its ugliness ? In what
Revolted fancy were the Forms begot

Of all these monsters ? What strange deity—
So barbarously not a Greek !—was he
Who could mismake such beings in his own
Distorted image. Nay, the Greeks alone
Were men ; in Greece alone were bodies fair,
Minds comely. In that all-but-island there,
Cleaving the blue sea with its promontories,
Lies the world's hope, the seed of all the glories
That are to be ; there, too, must surely live
She who alone can medicinably give
Ease with her beauty to the Thunderer's pain.
Downwards he bends his fiery eyes again,
Glaring on Hellas. Like a beam of light,
His intent glances touch the mountain height
With passing flame and probe the valleys deep,
Rift the dense forest and the age-old sleep
Of vaulted antres on whose pebbly floor
Gallop the loud-hoofed Centaurs ; and the roar
Of more than human shouting underground
Pulses in living palpable waves of sound
From wall to wall, until it rumbles out
Into the air ; and at that hollow shout
That seems an utterance of the whole vast hill,
The shepherds cease their laughter and are still.
Cities asleep under the noonday sky
Stir at the passage of his burning eye ;
And in their huts the startled peasants blink
At the swift flash that bursts through every chink
Of wattled walls, hearkening in fearful wonder
Through lengthened seconds for the crash of thunder—
Which follows not : they are the more afraid.
Jove seeks amain. Many a country maid,
Whose sandalled feet pass down familiar ways
Among the olives, but whose spirit strays
Through lovelier lands of fancy suddenly
Starts broad awake out of her dream to see

A light that is not of the sun, a light
Darted by living eyes, consciously bright ;
She sees and feels it like a subtle flame
Mantling her limbs with fear and maiden shame
And strange desire. Longing and terrified,
She hides her face, like a new-wedded bride
Who feels rough hands that seize and hold her fast ;
And swooning falls. The terrible light has passed ;
She wakes ; the sun still shines, the olive trees
Tremble to whispering silver in the breeze
And all is as it was, save she alone
In whose dazed eyes this deathless light has shone :
For never, never from this day forth will she
In earth's poor passion find felicity,
Or love of mortal man. A god's desire
Has seared her soul ; nought but the same strong fire
Can kindle the dead ash to life again,
And all her years will be a lonely pain.

Many a thousand had he looked upon,
Thousands of mortals, young and old ; but none—
Virgin, or young ephebus, or the flower
Of womanhood culled in its full-blown hour—
Could please the Thunderer's sight or touch his mind :
The longed-for loveliness was yet to find.
Had beauty fled, and was there nothing fair
Under the moon ? The fury of despair
Raged in the breast of heaven's Almighty Lord ;
He gnashed his foamy teeth and rolled and roared
In bull-like agony. Then a great calm
Descended on him : cool and healing balm
Touched his immortal fury. He had spied
Young Leda where she stood, poised on the river-side.

Even as she broke the river's smooth expanse,
Leda was conscious of that hungry glance,

And knew it for an eye of fearful power
That did so hot and thunderously lour,
She knew not whence, on her frail nakedness.
Jove's heart held but one thought : he must possess
That perfect form or die—possess or die.
Unheeded prayers and supplications fly,
Thick as a flock of birds, about his ears,
And smoke of incense rises ; but he hears
Nought but the soft falls of that melody
Which is the speech of Leda ; he can see
Nought but that almost spiritual grace
Which is her body, and that heavenly face
Where gay, sweet thoughts shine through, and eyes are bright
With purity and the soul's inward light.
Have her he must : the tease-fingered burr
Sticks not so fast in a wild beast's tangled fur
As that insistent longing in the soul
Of mighty Jove. Gods, men, earth, heaven, the whole
Vast universe was blotted from his thought
And nought remained but Leda's laughter, nought
But Leda's eyes. Magnified by his lust,
She was the whole world now ; have her he must, he must . . .
His spirit worked : how should he gain his end
With most deliciousness ? What better friend,
What counsellor more subtle could he find
Than lovely Aphrodite, ever kind
To hapless lovers, ever cunning, too,
In all the tortuous ways of love to do
And plan the best ? To Paphos then ! His will
And act were one ; and straight, invisible,
He stood in Paphos, breathing the languid air
By Aphrodite's couch. O heavenly fair
She was, and smooth and marvellously young !
On Tyrian silk she lay, and purple hung
About her bed in folds of fluted light

And shadow, dark as wine. Two doves, more white
 Even than the white hand on the purple lying
 Like a pale flower wearily dropped, were flying
 With wings that made an odoriferous stir,
 Dropping faint dews of bakkaris and myrrh,
 Musk and the soul of sweet flowers cunningly
 Ravished from transient petals as they die.
 Two stripling cupids on her either hand
 Stood near with winnowing plumes and gently fanned
 Her hot, love-fevered cheeks and eyelids burning.
 Another, crouched at the bed's foot, was turning
 A mass of scattered parchments—vows or plaints
 Or glad triumphant thanks which Venus' saints,
 Martyrs and heroes on her altars strewed
 With bitterest tears or gifts of gratitude.
 From the pile heaped at Aphrodite's feet
 The boy would take a leaf, and in his sweet,
 Clear voice would read what mortal tongues can tell
 In stammering verse of those ineffable
 Pleasures and pains of love, heaven and uttermost hell.
 Jove hidden stood and heard him read these lines
 Of votive thanks—
 Cypris, this little silver lamp to thee
 I dedicate.
 It was my fellow watcher, shared with me
 Those swift, short hours, when raised above my fate
 In Sphenura's white arms I drank
 Of immortality.
 “A pretty lamp, and I will have it placed
 Beside the narrow bed of some too chaste
 Sister of virgin Artemis, to be
 A night-long witness of her cruelty.
 Read me another, boy,” and Venus bent
 Her ear to listen to this short lament.
 Cypris, Cypris, I am betrayed !

Under the same wide mantle laid
I found them, faithless, shameless pair !
Making love with tangled hair.
“ Alas,” the goddess cried, “ nor god, nor man,
Nor medicinale balm, nor magic can
Cast out the demon jealousy, whose breath
Withers the rose of life, save only time and death.”
Another sheet he took and read again.
Farewell to love, and hail the long, slow pain
Of memory that backward turns to joy.
 O I have danced enough and enough sung ;
 My feet shall be still now and my voice mute ;
 Thine are these withered wreaths, this Lydian flute,
 Cypris ; I once was young.
And piteous Aphrodite wept to think
How fadingly upon death’s very brink
Beauty and love take hands for one short kiss—
And then the wreaths are dust, the bright-eyed bliss
Perished, and the flute still. “ Read on, read on.”
But ere the page could start, a lightning shone
Suddenly through the room, and they were ware
Of some great terrible presence looming there.
And it took shape—huge limbs, whose every line
A symbol was of power and strength divine,
And it was Jove.
 “ Daughter, I come,” said he,
“ For counsel in a case that touches me
Close, to the very life.” And he straightway
Told her of all his restlessness that day
And of his sight of Leda, and how great
Was his desire. And so in close debate
Sat the two gods, planning their rape ; while she,
Who was to be their victim, joyously
Laughed like a child in the sudden breathless chill
And splashed and swam, forgetting every ill

And every fear and all, save only this :
That she was young and it was perfect bliss
To be alive where suns so goldenly shine
And bees go drunk with fragrant honey-wine,
And the cicadas sing from morn till night
And rivers run so cool and pure and bright . . .
Stretched all her length, arms under head, she lay
In the deep grass, while the sun kissed away
The drops that sleeked her skin. Slender and fine
As those old images of the gods that shine
With smooth-worn silver, polished through the years
By the touching lips of countless worshippers,
Her body was ; and the sun's golden heat
Clothed her in softest flame from head to feet
And was her mantle, that she scarcely knew
The conscious sense of nakedness. The blue,
Far hills and the faint fringes of the sky
Shimmered and pulsed in the heat uneasily,
And hidden in the grass, cicadas shrill
Dizzied the air with ceaseless noise, until
A listener might wonder if they cried
In his own head or in the world outside.
Sometimes she shut her eyelids, and wrapped round
In a red darkness, with the muffled sound
And throb of blood beating within her brain,
Savoured intensely to the verge of pain
Her own young life, hoarded it up behind
Her shuttered eyes, until, too long confined,
It burst them open and her prisoned soul
Flew forth and took possession of the whole
Exquisite world about her and was made
A part of it. Meanwhile her maidens played,
Singing an ancient song of death and birth,
Seed-time and harvest, old as the grey earth,
And moving to their music in a dance

As immemorial. A numbing trance
Came gradually over her, as though
Flake after downy-feathered flake of snow
Had muffled all her senses, drifting deep
And warm and quiet.

From this all-but sleep
She started into life again ; the sky
Was full of a strange tumult suddenly—
Beating of mighty wings and shrill-voiced fear
And the hoarse scream of rapine following near.
In the high windlessness above her flew,
Dazzlingly white on the untroubled blue,
A splendid swan, with outstretched neck and wing
Spread fathom wide, and closely following
An eagle, tawny and black. This god-like pair
Circled and swooped through the calm of upper air,
The eagle striking and the white swan still
'Scaping as though by happy miracle
The imminent talons. For the twentieth time
The furious hunter stooped, to miss and climb
A mounting spiral into the height again.
He hung there poised, eyeing the grassy plain
Far, far beneath, where the girls' upturned faces
Were like white flowers that bloom in open places
Among the scarcely budded woods. And they
Breathlessly watched and waited ; long he lay,
Becalmed upon that tideless sea of light,
While the great swan with slow and creaking flight
Went slanting down towards safety, where the stream
Shines through the trees below, with glance and gleam
Of blue aerial eyes that seem to give
Sense to the sightless earth and make it live.
The ponderous wings beat on and no pursuit :
Stiff as the painted kite that guards the fruit,
Afloat o'er orchards ripe, the eagle yet

Hung as at anchor, seeming to forget
His uncaught prey, his rage unsatisfied.
Still, quiet, dead . . . and then the quickest-eyed
Had lost him. Like a star unsphered, a stone
Dropped from the vault of heaven, a javelin thrown,
He swooped upon his prey. Down, down he came,
And through his plumes with a noise of wind-blown flame
Loud roared the air. From Leda's lips a cry
Broke, and she hid her face—she could not see him die,
Her lovely, hapless swan.

Ah, had she heard,

Even as the eagle hurtled past, the word
That treacherous pair exchanged. "Peace," cried the swan,
"Peace, daughter. All my strength will soon be gone,
Wasted in tedious flying, ere I come
Where my desire hath set its only home."
"Go," said the eagle, "I have played my part,
Roused pity for your plight in Leda's heart,
(Pity the mother of voluptuousness).
Go, father Jove; be happy; for success
Attends this moment."

On the queen's numbed sense

Fell a glad shout that ended sick suspense,
Bidding her lift once more towards the light
Her eyes, by pity closed against a sight
Of blood and death—her eyes, how happy now
To see the swan still safe, while far below,
Brought by the force of his eluded stroke
So near to earth that with his wings he woke
A gust whose sudden silvery motion stirred
The meadow grass, struggled the sombre bird
Of rage and rapine. Loud his scream and hoarse
With baffled fury as he urged his course
Upwards again on threshing pinions wide.
But the fair swan, not daring to abide

This last assault, dropped with the speed of fear
Towards the river. Like a winged spear,
Outstretching his long neck, rigid and straight,
Aimed at where Leda on the bank did wait
With open arms and kind, uplifted eyes
And voice of tender pity, down he flies.
Nearer, nearer, terribly swift, he sped
Directly at the queen ; then widely spread
Resisting wings, and breaking his descent
'Gainst its own wind, all speed and fury spent,
The great swan fluttered slowly down to rest
And sweet security on Leda's breast.
Menacingly the eagle wheeled above her ;
But Leda, like a noble hearted lover
Keeping his child-beloved from tyrannous harm,
Stood o'er the swan and, with one slender arm
Imperiously lifted, waved away
The savage foe, still hungry for his prey.
Baffled at last, he mounted out of sight
And the sky was void—save for a single white
Swan's feather moulted from a harassed wing
That down, down, with a rhythmic balancing
From side to side dropped sleeping on the air.
Down, slowly down over that dazzling pair,
Whose different grace in union was a birth
Of unimagined beauty on the earth :
So lovely that the maidens standing round
Dared scarcely look. Couched on the flowery ground
Young Leda lay, and to her side did press
The swan's proud-arching opulent loveliness,
Stroking the snow-soft plumage of his breast
With fingers slowly drawn, themselves caressed
By the warm softness where they lingered, loth
To break away. Sometimes against their growth
Ruffling the feathers inlaid like little scales

On his sleek neck, the pointed finger-nails
Rasped on the warm, dry, puckered skin beneath ;
And feeling it she shuddered, and her teeth
Grated on edge ; for there was something strange
And snake-like in the touch. He, in exchange
Gave back to her, stretching his eager neck,
For every kiss a little amorous peck ;
Rubbing his silver head on her gold tresses,
And with the nip of horny dry caresses
Leaving upon her young white breast and cheek
And arms the red print of his playful beak.
Closer he nestled, mingling with the slim
Austerity of virginal flank and limb
His curved and florid beauty, till she felt
That downy warmth strike through her flesh and melt
The bones and marrow of her strength away.
One lifted arm bent o'er her brow, she lay
With limbs relaxed, scarce breathing, deathly still ;
Save when a quick, involuntary thrill
Shook her sometimes with passing shudderings,
As though some hand had plucked the aching strings
Of life itself, tense with expectancy.
And over her the swan shook slowly free
The folded glory of his wings, and made
A white-walled tent of soft and luminous shade
To be her veil and keep her from the shame
Of naked light and the sun's noonday flame.

Hushed lay the earth and the wide, careless sky.
Then one sharp sound, that might have been a cry
Of utmost pleasure or of utmost pain,
Broke sobbing forth, and all was still again.

A. ODLE



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