

The poems of
Martin Seymour-Smith



POCKET POEMS

Contents

Introduction	15
A note on the text	21
Acknowledgements	23

Poems

HE CAME TO VISIT ME	26
THE SACRIFICE	27
GREEN WALL MY GRAVE	28
CHILD AFTER A STORM	30
FLIGHT OF A DOVE	31
IMAGINED CHILD	32
WEEK-END	33
MEN OF THE ISLAND	34
DESPAIR	36
WINTER FOR WILLIAM	37
ENTRANCE TO HELL	38
A MOTHER IN SUNLIGHT	39
SHE IS AFRAID OF DAWN	40
NEW YEAR	42
CURSED HARLEQUIN	43
ALL DEVILS FADING	44
LANCELOT	45
DON JUAN IN HELL	47
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST	48
VOYAGE TO AN ISLAND	49

The Fantasy Poets: Number Ten

FORTUNEMASTER	52
THE INFANT MAN	54
QUESTIONS ON THE STAIRCASE	55

THE SHAPE OF LOVE	56
THE DEAD LOVER	58

All Devils Fading

PRELUDE (<i>formerly</i> ELEGY)	60
FURIES	61
A TRIAL IN DREAM	62
BIRDS IN HIS HEAD	63
NO ONE WILL KNOW	64
THE POOL	65

Tea with Miss Stockport

THE LIGHTS ON THE WATER	68
THE VICTIMS	69
THE PUNISHMENT	70
FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS	71
WHAT SCHOOLMASTERS SAY	72
THE CHANGE	74
THE NORTHERN MONSTER	75
THE ROSY CAPTAIN	77
TO PASSERS-BY	80
BLITZENKRIEGER	81
THE LAST CHANCE	85
THE EXECUTION	89
FOUND ON A BUILDING SITE	91
THE ADMINISTRATORS	92
LIVING BY THE RIVER	95
REQUEST ON THE FIELD	96
POOR FATSO	97
HISTORY LESSON	98
TEA WITH MISS STOCKPORT	99

Reminiscences of Norma

TO SALLY CHILVER	104
SATIRES	
THE INVITATION	105
QUEEN LEER	108
CENSOR JACK	109
I HAVE NEVER FELT	110
SUNDAY MORNING WALK	112
THE CRUEL GRAVY	113
TO ALL WATCHERS OVER PUBLIC MORALITY	114
A VERSIFIER IN PRIVATE	115
THREE IMITATIONS	
1910 (INTERVAL)	117
WINTER NOON	118
POETS	119
REMINISCENCES OF NORMA	120
OTHER POEMS	
MISTRAL	132
THE BLUE TRUMPETER	134
PATHETIQUE	136
THE ANSWER	137
SAXELBY	138
IN THE MARKET-PLACE	139
PINCHBECK	140
AN OBSERVATION FOR UNVERIFIABLE RECONSIDERATION	
IN A GAME PERHAPS	141
THE CELLAR	142

WHY.....	145
TO MISS PARFITT (1934) SADLY: THIS POEM ABOUT DYING....	146
GIRL'S SONG.....	148
THE WORDS.....	149
SPEECH FROM A PLAY.....	150
QUESTIONS BEFORE PARTING.....	151
IN MEMORIAM BRIAN HIGGINS (1930-1965).....	152
BEACH, 1737.....	153
TUTHILL'S ENORMITIES.....	154
IN THE HOTEL.....	156
THE SHORE.....	157

Wilderness

WILDERNESS.....	160
THE LONELY GHOST.....	161
NORTH.....	162
OBSTACLES.....	163
INFLUENZAL.....	164
I WAS A YOUNG MAN ONCE.....	165
UNSMILING.....	166
TO MY WIFE IN HOSPITAL.....	167
A SCRAP OF MOONLIGHT.....	168
CHRYSANTHEMUMS.....	170
COLLOQUIES.....	171
THE WORD MACHINE.....	173
NOTHING.....	174
DIFFERENT IMAGINATIONS.....	175
THE MESSENGER.....	176
IN MY EYE.....	177
RACHMANINOV.....	179
SILVERHILL.....	181
APRÈS UN RÊVE.....	182

BEING INVENTED YOU	184
POOL OF LIGHT	185
THE LOVE TOUCAN	186
THE SHAWL	187
YOUR LOOK	188
APPETITE OF QUIET ENCHANTMENT	190
MARS IN SCORPIO	191
THERE WAS NEVER	192
FORGIVE US, WOMEN	193
AFTER TAGORE	194
A SORT OF LOVE	195
THE INTERNAL SABOTEUR	196
REFLECTIONS	198
EYEBRIGHT	200
LETTERS	201
SHE TO HIM	203
TO MY DAUGHTERS	204

The Liquid Rhinoceros and other uncollected poems

THE HOPE	206
VERLAINE	211
GOOD ON YOU ANNE OF NAILS TO SPEND	212
THE LIQUID RHINOCEROS	213
ON THE BEACH	220
LEARNING TO FALL OUT OF LOVE	221
GOLD	224
IT IS TRUE THAT IT IS A DAMNED LIE	226
MY COUSIN AGUEDA (Velarde)	229
END OF THE WORLD (Drummond de Andrade)	231
PERPLEXED CLUSTERS	233
THE BUDDHA IN A DISCUSSION WITH THE MONKS AT SAVATTHI	234

MASSEUSE.....	235
PECCATUM MOROSAE DELECTATIONIS.....	237

Other Poems

Uncollected Poems from *The Internal Saboteur*

II

AGED SPRING (Cernuda).....	240
IT FRIGHTENS ME THIS STREAM ... (Vallejo).....	241
FROM HIS LAST POEM (Mayakovsky).....	242
DROWNED ENCHANTER (Huidobro).....	243
SUNKEN OBOE (Quasimodo).....	244
SAN MARTINO DEL CARSO (Ungaretti).....	245
THE DARK MESSENGERS (Vallejo).....	246
THE ROLLER-COASTER (Parra).....	247
AUTUMN GARDEN (THE BOBOLI GARDENS) (Campana).....	248
DREGS (Vallejo).....	249
NOCTURNAL (Dario).....	250
SKYLIGHT (Campana).....	251
TWO POEMS (Li Po).....	252
ARSENIO (Montale).....	253
EASTBOURNE (Montale).....	255
DORA MARKUS (Montale).....	257
DEFORM THE NECK OF THIS DELUSIVE SWAN ... (Martinez).....	260

IV FRAGMENTS BIZARRE SATIRICAL OBSCENE EDUCATIONAL PRETTY CYNICAL PURE BRAVE VENIAL AND GROTESQUE

THE CLASH.....	261
SWARD.....	262
DO-IT-YOURSELF.....	263
FROM THE BAND SONNETS (HAVANA) OF CHARLES FISHER.....	265

HOMES	267
COMMON MARKET.....	268
CIVILIZATION	269
FEEL FREE.....	270
HUSBAND'S FUNERAL-DAY MESSAGE TO HIS WIFE	271
SUGARTAPIO	272
THE NEW ENGLAND.....	274
THE LOMAN KATHORIC FLOM HONG KONG & THE WHEERCHAIL CASE	275
AN ORDINARY LIFE	277

V

YOU READ TOO MUCH	279
B.H. 1930-65.....	280
PARTING WORDS	281

Two Poems from Priapus 6 (1966)

ON AGEING	282
TO ROBERT CREELEY WITH A BOOK OF POEMS.....	283

Selected Translations from Guide to Modern World Literature

ECHO OF OLD SONGS (Ady).....	286
TRANSCENDING ALL MIRACLES (Ady).....	287
THE ENVIOUS ANGEL (Alberti)	288
SEPTEMBER (Annensky).....	289
THE BAD MERCHANTS (Antoniou)	290
THE HORSEMAN'S FAREWELL (Apollinaire).....	291
CRIMINAL FINDS (Avidan).....	292
'YOU CAN NEVER AROUSE DIVINE CONSCIENCE ...' (Bahdanovich).....	293
CAVAFY WAS A POET, AS HE TOLD US ... (Betocchi).....	294
WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS (Cavafy)	295

TO GROW IN SPIRIT (Cavafy).....	297
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD (Drummond de Andrade).....	298
LA TARDA (Eguren).....	299
THE SONG OF EVIL (Freyre).....	300
<i>from</i> THE POET WENNERBOM (Fröding).....	301
THE SALT LAKE (Goll).....	302
BALLAD OF EXTERNAL LIFE (Hofmannsthal).....	303
I LOVE MOST THE TRANQUIL FORLORN THINGS ... (Ivanov)....	304
CLARA D'ELLÉBEUSE (Jammes).....	305
NOTHING AND EVERYTHING (Kaschnitz).....	306
BROTHER (Leśmian).....	307
THE CLOCK STRUCK TWELVE ... (Machado).....	308
I GO DREAMING PATHWAYS ... (Machado).....	309
A GHOST (Martínez).....	310
PRESENCE (Meireles).....	311
EXAMPLE (Mirón).....	312
THE FOREIGNER (Mistral).....	313
THE EEL (Montale).....	314
THE SAVAGE IDYLL, II (Othón).....	316
THE CYPRESS TREE (Palamas).....	317
MIRROR (Paz).....	318
SONNET (Pellicer).....	319
FROM THE FORTRESS OF UPPER BERGAMO (Quasimodo).....	320
RAZGLEDICA 4 (Radnóti).....	321
THE POWER OF MEMORY (Reyes).....	322
THE AUDIBLE AND THE INAUDIBLE (Ritsos).....	323
THE GOAT (Saba).....	324
IF EYES COULD HEAR ... (Salinas).....	325
DESOLATION (Thelemis).....	326
MASSES (Vallejo).....	327
ANGULAR FROM THE GREEN ARCH ... (Wen I-To/Yiduo).....	328
DEAD WATER (Wen I-To/Yiduo).....	329

Introduction

The reader who loves the work of Thomas Hardy or Robert Graves and turns to the best biography of each to find out more about the writer's life may not even register, at first, the name of that book's author. Likewise, the student who dips into the *Guide to Modern World Literature* may – after recovering from seeing some lauded writer cut down to size or neglected writer praised at last – fail initially to appreciate that this massive book is the work of a single man. But very soon the reader and the student will find themselves increasingly interested in, and then fascinated by, the mind and voice of that same man – the poet and critic Martin Seymour-Smith. The criticism and the biographical writing have made his name, but it is the poetry that reveals the man himself.

In the case of this extraordinary poet, the boy was father to the man. 'He Came to Visit Me' is a doppelgänger poem by a precocious fourteen-year-old boy. It introduces a unique voice to the canon of English poetry: a voice that, despite the poet's increasing sophistication and technical proficiency over the succeeding decades, remained remarkably consistent:

This sorrow on my face is but a hood;

Behind there is a blank white wall of skin –

An eyeless, mouthless, noseless face: neutrality.

It is dark death that lives behind the thin

Pale flesh. You have my eyes, I cannot see.

This 'other' of the poem – 'my mortal messenger' – reappears in a much later poem in a similar guise: that of 'the internal saboteur', a phrase used for the title of an unpublished collection that gathered together many of those poems that Seymour-Smith thought 'worth keeping', several of which appear here for the first time.

'He Came to Visit Me' was included in 'Poems' (1952), one of twenty poems by Seymour-Smith in a book that also featured the poems of Terence Hards and Rex Taylor. Two booklets in his own name appeared shortly after, one published as part of the 'Fantasy Poets' series and the other, *All Devils Fading*, by Robert Creeley's Divers Press in Mallorca. As well as unflinching self-scrutiny – facing up to oneself, warts and all – these early poems explore states of (inner and outer) exile, the loss of innocence as experience transforms us into 'dark birds ... with fatal knowledge', and – most of all – the psychological complexity of love, from rapt appreciation of the loved one's dazzlingness to the damage that lovers ultimately do to each other.

Yet many of these early poems of complex love are too sparing in detail: in comparison, the few doppelgänger poems are dramatic, swift and biting in their (self-)attack. Perhaps 'sparing' is indeed the word, as the poet may well have wanted to spare the loved one from such withering scrutiny. At times it is as if we are being given a post-mortem of love rather than witnessing the drama of its destruction.

By the time of *Tea with Miss Stockport* (1963), Seymour-Smith had learned (possibly, in part, from the example of Robert Browning) how to convey complex states of mind and feeling dramatically – and to do so at greater length, without sacrificing the lyricism of his original poetic impulse. The title poem shows a more sharply satirical but also humorous dimension to his work. And yet behind the story of three men who, 'trapped by charity', feel compelled to make their weekly visits to a religious old lady and end up being poisoned (two of them fatally) by her delicate sandwiches

is the concept of the Goddess-Muse in the form of a crone. The precocious 14-year-old had come to visit the poet Robert Graves in Devon during the war, and, while still in his teens, had ‘helped him in various ways with his “historical grammar of poetic myth”, *The White Goddess*’.

Of all the poets Seymour-Smith encountered in his life, Graves was undoubtedly the one who made the deepest impression on him. Their relationship was not a simple one of master and disciple: intellectually, Seymour-Smith was always his own man. The biography of Graves that he came to write – especially the expanded version published after Graves’s death – is so honest that it is painful to read at times. He had known Graves well, and had tutored his eldest son, William, in Graves’s Mallorcan home. He was accompanied in that three-year stay on the island by Janet de Glanville, marrying her in the British Consulate there. She assisted Graves with his book *The Greek Myths*.

The association with Graves has perhaps hampered his reputation as a poet. This is true of others who might be said to have lived in the master’s shadow – even so independently-minded and distinctive a poet as Norman Cameron. Seeing the work in full, observing its responsiveness to the contemporary foreign-language poetry that Graves (with a few notable exceptions) took little interest in, will surely dispel any notion that Seymour-Smith is a mere ‘Gravesian’. In his youth he may have been too much in awe of Graves to tell him plainly that he ought not to publish *The White Goddess*. His misgivings about the impact of the Goddess ‘scheme’ on Graves’s behaviour and writing are apparent in the poem ‘The Punishment’ (‘Of all men living, who could be most wise / Insists that women may put out men’s eyes ...’). In comparison with such a schematic approach, Seymour-Smith’s outlook seems more modern: based on the psychology of the actual, and (to use a word he used himself) phenomenological in approach. In the mid-twentieth



century, with the Existentialism of Camus and Sartre in vogue, the times were on the younger poet's side, even as the fame of the elder was rising.

Indeed the title sequence of the 1971 collection, *Reminiscences of Norma*, makes much contemporary poetry seem out-of-date. This 13-poem description – no, *enactment* – of a relationship gone wrong starts lightly, almost whimsically (as many romantic relationships do) and ends with a bleak ‘journey, not of miles, / To find in nothingness the love I can.’ Always the character of ‘Norma’ is vividly present: pasty, with brazen curls, with glasses and bad clothes, committing welfare in teenage coffee-bars, not caring for poetry. Readers picking up the present book uncertainly, wondering if Seymour-Smith’s poetry will be to their taste, would do well to turn to this sequence first of all: they will know soon enough, either way.

It was another 23 years before another book of Seymour-Smith’s poetry appeared, and it was a slender volume at that. Unlike its predecessor, *Wilderness* has no stunning centrepiece, but it does

reveal a further development, towards an almost Rilkean clarity of vision. The vision was perfected in the last few poems he included in correspondence to friends before his sudden death, in 1998, from a heart attack at the age of 70. These poems appear towards the end of *The Liquid Rhinoceros and other uncollected poems*, edited by his friend Robert Nye. The title sequence and stunning centrepiece of *that* posthumous booklet reveals Seymour-Smith's idiosyncratic style *in extremis*. Here is a poet who had learned from the likes of César Vallejo, the Peruvian poet whose work often tests the communicable boundaries of language itself. Seymour-Smith is difficult at times not because he has decided wilfully to be so, but because life is difficult. The 'absolute discord' of his wife's periodic instability had 'ghosted [him] indeed' ('The Hope'). And then there was also the strain of the always-difficult relations with (and then break in relations from) the woman who had so enthralled Graves, Laura Riding – whom Seymour-Smith regarded as the greatest woman poet of all time, and whose exacting nature had made both men, at different times, 'squirm justly in the eternal pure' ('The Internal Saboteur').

If Seymour-Smith the critic seems grudging in his appraisal of the poetic experimenters in English-language poetry, then it is not because he is against experiment *per se*, but rather that he finds the poets in question cold-hearted (Eliot), intrinsically minor (Williams), or empty (Olson). Many of the translations which make up roughly a quarter of this book demonstrate the kind of inwardly resonant, phenomenological poetry he favoured. As he said in relation to the work of the Polish poet Bolesław Leśmian: 'there is perhaps no clearer mirror of the external world than a faithfully rendered inner one.'

David Cameron

THE LIGHTS ON THE WATER

The drowned know the sea is wounded
In fame only, when those lights slash
Across the stillness of the port:
Within its honoured depths they taste
The salt of after-action's quiet.

THE VICTIMS

The bells ring signal of judgement at last,
Of immediate burning. We are among
The milling crowd to see this sentence passed,
And hear each whisper: 'What has he done wrong?'

Why are we here at all, who know the best?
Is it because we also have no wealth?
Because, like him, we have no purpose left?
(Who stands at all, stands where he stood himself.)

It is our own bells, swinging, will not spare
Our tender hearts. The congregation
Looks at God on the steeple, supreme up there,
Pointing them home after long conflagration.

But we are crushed by them, elbowed and spurned,
Who know each is the priest, the burner, and the burned.

THE PUNISHMENT

Of all men living, who could be most wise
Insists that women may put out men's eyes;
Yet is himself protected from this ban
On love without obedience: he can
Inform the world that he's contented now
In a serene potency, and broadcast how
He lives happy in a woman's grip –
Ignorant he holds the hand that holds the whip,
Whose punishments therefore produce
Routine reports, no more, in Love's Official News.

Has cold theory caught this rebel up at last?
Are his days of fruitfulness all past
Now he guides her by whom he says he's led?
Or, though he's not yet blinded, sacrificed or dead,
May not she, in fact, have sprung the last surprise,
Already used her cruelty – not his to subsidise –
To cut him, just a little, down to size,
By simply closing up, not putting out, his eyes?

Yet he's so restless on his tranquil rack
How harsh are we who wish such torments back
As would once more his whole frame wrench and crack?

FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS

How few are not possessed by private joy
When guns appear like magic in the hero's hands;
And mourn the bristly villain's duty to destroy
The nobler killer of the bright bad lands
Who, better groomed, his evil better understands.

Is this a wish to have correct careening?
Or does ashamed excitement really hide
A subtler facet of the story's meaning?
Do you not find yourself identified
More with the wicked than the righteous side?

The Macbeth type, who has an evil seed,
Avoids the sadness of life-sentence, or the rope
(His social end both censor and your pleasure need)
By dying in self-sacrifice on some sheer slope
Abandoning his natural but wrong-minded hope

He thrusts himself in front of child and wife,
Falls, victim to a gun that never missed.
Like you when plunging into normal life
Drilled full of holes by your psychiatrist,
Your unfired gun clenched threatening in your fist.

And he who killed you without caring,
That simpler villain, truth, dies drunk and swearing.
But will come back next week, and yet more daring.

WHAT SCHOOLMASTERS SAY

What schoolmasters say is not always wrong.
'You're a good chap, Smiggers, but don't go to seed'
Said Pettitt in bathtime at school long ago.
He seemed so earnest that I nearly cried;
But up until now I've laughed at his warning
Of where disregard of his words might lead –
Until last night when I dreamed I had died
And Pettitt was God.

Hank made us lay out our beds like soldiers;
After Cert. 'A' he summoned me, scowling
'Vile boy, I see that you've mucked it again!'
Of course, I didn't care then: I was proud
And resigned from the Corps against his advice –
But heard Hank's voice with its military sting
As today I strode through the playground crowd:
'Well, Smith, you've failed!'

I pity myself that now I'm a puppet
Like Hank, and Pettitt, and roaring Gubbo;
That I must answer, when asked by my friends
'If you take your pupils aside and say:
"Vile boys, this won't do, disobedience is wrong,
And if you don't know it I'll make you know!"
Do you *really* mean that those boys should obey?'
'I may, in a way.'

They are singing this morning before me
'How wonderful' etc. 'must thy sight be'
And if their croaking cannot quite mean God
Nor can it quite mean me. I ask myself: what
Should it mean? Their heads incline, I bow
My own, until a colleague warns: 'Hey, old
Boy! Head up, and watch for talking: *we're* not
Expected to pray!

THE CHANGE

I held you close O warm you lay
Where dank familiar peeling walls
Proclaimed an end of warmth and day.
‘Here, love, no gleam of daylight calls,’
I said. You answered with a sigh:
‘I am afraid of such nightfalls.
O do not let me die!’

‘But die,’ I said, ‘for death is night,
We are alone, these walls are steep,
You cannot climb from here to light,
Therefore give me your fear to keep.’
You did not love but you spoke gently,
So near you were to me and sleep:
‘Comfort me and I’ll die!’

My pleading now turns to despair:
The basement walls grow thin, recede
Till we inhabit empty air.
How shall I follow where you lead?
For you have wings, I cannot fly,
I drop to earth but for your need:
O do not let me die!

THE NORTHERN MONSTER

At my utmost North of endeavour,
Beyond experience or prayer (landscape
But in imagination's failure
Proved) a bloodless emblem of my hope

Shuffled alone to the enabled Pole
That bland monster of post-history
Which love itself, with pity's uncontrol,
Invents, to give the sensible cold eye

Promise of familiar heavens,
Convincing the heart wasted by desire
In apt intricate and mortal visions
Of the final wisdom of its fire.

Then, loved one, learning that all I longed for
Was real in you, I renounced hope and struck
Its sign from thought. I murdered metaphor.
I burned that beast and watched its smoke go up,

Love's ideology destroyed, your warmth
Its end. And I resolved therefore that you
Should occupy the impossible North,
Yourself its secret Pole to guide me to.

Oh, but compassion's gift is merciless,
Lover: delusion's ghost cannot forgive
That in its element, of my distress,
I cruelly make you, you unkindly, live.

Dumb ignorance which before had been
Prayer's effigy, as shrieking fire returned,
A corpse that would not be consumed, whose scream
Tormented me with how my purpose burned.

I had forgotten, in a mortal heat,
The distance of love's act from its intention:
That boundless North, which threatens to defeat
Both love's reality, and its invention,

To which I sent you home! The howling grave
Is innocent again, by your love calmed,
Made native there. But how like a beast I rage
To be your Northern monster now, transformed!

THE ROSY CAPTAIN

The mind destroys the scene before it sees:
Half-roses haunt their images that please,
And love itself, before it flowers, divides
Into an icon – and a fear which hides
In nightmares' fantasies, safe flights of prayer,
Catastrophes that threaten everywhere –
Hope's epicentre, whose focus is despair.

But all such phantoms loll drugged in the head
If he shams dead:
That captain whose deathless sleep preserves
The picture-roses mind's half-world deserves.

Beware of concentration's appetite:
The true rose challenges hedonic sight,
Its terror-half steals colour from delight –
The captain who was flesh, though pale and still,
Is now a doll, rose-cheeked. Roses can kill.

Eyes look inwards, then. In asylums' glare
See all that they'd shut out and could not bear;
They hunt a gleam of pity to reflect
Into the wrecked rage-dazzled intellect
But there's no pity there:
War's instruments rule all. The fingers itch
To speak, the mouth is drawn. But which is which?
What once was clear in view is killed by mind:
Escaping eyes turned outwards cannot find
Colour or brightness while freed phantoms sing
That true roses are the dangerous thing.

Scarred vanity must cancel waking quests
For beauty, as absurd; the captain's death
See as maturity's strange sign of age:
As we grow older we forget our rage
And plan more coldly to destroy, record
Half-truths whose chaos we have seen and heard
Too casually in memory; we make
Them into pretty views, appreciate
The clearer enmity of hostile day
Until love challenges the long delay
Of its whole rose, refuses the pretence
Of prayer's or dreaming's half-experience:
Its concentration's demons now demand
One rose, and seek the captain secretly.
Circumstance becomes an enemy
Whose hidden face is only never kind
Whether confronting, so un-care-lined,
The narrowed stare in its contorted frame
(Ghost waked by trouble to proscription's fame)
Or as disaster's dream, whose time and place
We torment into treason's single face.

Remember that pretty picture-postcard view
We'd tucked away? The road we never knew
To a white precipice; the squat homely
Hut of a coastguard who must be friendly
But was not there? Such unheeded pictures
Become histories of betrayal:
No one was near those cliffs who did not fall;
Assumption's weatherbeaten features
Reveal themselves as rosy-smooth, to teach us

How dishonour names the secrets that we live by –
Delusions in which madmen drown and die.

A face cast off as nightmare long ago
Could not inhabit landscape so
Innocently stored in mind, we say:
There is no terror-mask in ruin's day!

But wherever in death-giving rage we went
Was in bewilderment;
Could love itself be trusted to condone
What only unremembered dreams have known?
We walk down that simple road, go in
The hut, but find no coastguard there: instead
The rosy captain, with a doll's bright head,
Sits wooden there. So accusation's dead:
Obscured at last its stare? Destruction's bare,
Bereft of mind's phantoms? Are we safe here?

But as we watch, the eyes are opening:
The waxed cheeks crease and break; and menacing
A finger's raised ... We try to plead we meant
Peace only, or that anger's innocent –
But feel ourselves by puppet's wood weighed down
And paralysed our lidless gaze is shown
What waking we must bear before our own.

TO PASSERS-BY

I see you are puzzled in your endless queues
By this most thrilling of all thrilling views
From which your children do not run in fear:
A corpse whose patches of corruption stink
And yet whose eyes, it seems, are proud, and blink.
Believe me, I should speak if you would hear,
But as things are, the facts alone must say
That this glass coffin is my only way:
I am no museum-piece, you pay no fee,
Nor have I any manager but me,
Conditions are my sole publicity ...
So if you must file past, your note to make,
Muttering 'Christ crucified! He's not a fake!'
Of malice I bear you none, nor do I bite.
But do I not remind your gaping sight
That you will pay, and not a price you like,
For all the liberties you choose to take?

BLITZENKRIEGER

I woke on top of a lichenous mountain
From what seemed the sweetest sleep. My nostrils quivered
With non-expectation, though the air was sharp;
The sun did not exasperate my stare
In the morning's blue. And long lay I there
In the unthinking calm.
Birdsong enlightened the deserted sky
But still, still I lay, awaiting the silence
When darkness swallowed the ordinary day.

Darkness complete, birds folded in their sleep,
Not peace descended, but from somewhere far below
A cacophonous music surprised my ears,
Whose challenge to their quiet at last aroused me,
Outraged and curious, to scan the valley for its source.

I had not stood long enough on the brink
Even to peer a moment, when agitated men
In whose hands lanterns bobbed up and down nervously
Burst in upon me. One, whom I did not know, silly
In Austrian holiday-dress, seeing me, cried out.
His companions remained in a cautious knot,
But he strode towards me with purposeful respect
Odd in a stranger, his lantern held rudely high;
And when at lackey's distance, looked me in the eye.
Although forebodingly the feather stuck upwards
In his ridiculous, innocent Tyrolese hat,
I paid him regard no more irritably scant
Than his manner seemed to demand. 'You, there!' I said,
Gesturing downwards, 'you must have climbed up from that.
Whose is that music playing now, so cruel and dull?'