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THE REAL CLIMATE
I am attached by a chord to the world, the material scope of my language; the world fights in me, dances, cries and laughs. In my person the world finds itself, and the generations. From the depression into the winter I have travelled, and in midwinter now I write, where all things are, trying to take the big view, at the centre of reality, the source, not hanging on the tip of a detail, not retailing.

There are two main localities in my mind: a white birch wood, and an iron-ribbed concourse. I have lived in a parish and a city, in another city and in a field within a city, in suburbs and country solitude. I know the ways of my mind and the world, my only wisdom. The core of my thought is man, and the core of the world is my need. I have seen the world as a home of hunger, and I have felt my mind as need undefined. I need the world to define my need and to satisfy it, and the
world needs me to be fulfilled. Birch wood
and iron-ribbed concourse are stations on
the one same line. I refuse nothing, and I
transform everything, from the core.

So many attempts to crystallise the flow-
ing of my mind, to find the formula, the
natural form, the living shape. My poems
are the body of my mind. They form in me,
and I give them birth. Poetry is nothing I
say, if it is not a coming to life.

There are days when new patterns sud-
denly become evident, there are days full of
realisation, there are days when rage twists
in my belly and breaks out in spiritless
violence, days when my mind stares dully
and the world is transparent into nothing-
ness. I claim no perfection, and fabricate
none. I live my life, I try to give it room to
breathe and move in, I know of too many
men who died stifled. I am never concerned
with essence, but with milieu. The essence
can take care of itself, it needs no tampering
from me. I shall live it when the milieu is
right.

I live a sounding world, full of wild
rhythm. It is not music. It is a joyful noise.
I have always associated it with popularity
as against gentility. I am no gentleman poet.
Mine is the poetry of joyance and pain,
sudden and naked language, however long
the process in the dark and the confusion
and skill of the thrones, the reality is sudden
and naked. My poetry is like the prose of
a seagull. It is direct speech, rather than
indirect diction. Every vaguest idea con-
ceived has an unsuspected materiality and
words itself into evidence.

Suddenly to realise a living thing is mar-
vellous, even with all its imperfections. It
takes a high and wide view to see this, one
not obnubilated by ideas of moral perfection,
or intellectual perfection. It means seeing
the living thing—the human being, to take
the most complete example—against the
background of, and implicated in, all other
things. If you isolate the human being—
say, in the face of God, or an abstract idea
—he is miserable, but if you see him in
reality, in movement, in communication, the
outlook changes, you are aware of inner
forces. You no longer have merely an out-
look—you have an in-living.

Poetry is a shape of mind, it is nothing
so abstract or sterile as a state. There is

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such a thing as state-poetry and poetry in state, and there are stately poets and statesmen poets—but they are not what I call poets. I call poet a man with an active shape of mind; poetry is for me something natural and, being natural, necessary. When more people have come full circle, this natural necessity will come to be recognised. What seems an artifact at one stage of its process, a stage which some have isolated into absurdity, making artifact artificial and reserving the words artistic or scientific for their elucidations, is in perpetual growth and development; the artifice is only apparent. We have tended to see things as states instead of process, and some isolate one state, some another, and we have a world of separate states, each one busily worked at and elaborated by its upholders, and all tending towards absurdity and sterility. Whereas if we see things as shape rather than state, as process rather than essence, our notions of reality change, and our living. This change is becoming more and more evidently necessary.

Between accomplishment and endlessness, between product and process, the romantic stands with the question: what am I? and with the answer: I am nothing, what I seek is everything—I am what I seek. With romanticism, the idea of investigation enters literature—investigation of the past, of nature, investigation of the self, of the future. Art is no longer a talent to be explored, it is a faculty of questioning; it is no longer stationary, but in movement. The romantic poet is not only an emotive poet, he is a poet in movement. The emotion should not be considered as an end in itself, but as the concentration of a movement, like a knot in wood, or like the light-point in a painting. The poem as product and process, simultaneously and indivisibly, that is the romantic idea of creation. Nothing is, but it is becoming. The key word is nature—not to be understood as mere external reality, an object to be looked upon, but as movement, dynamic. And the paradox at the source of romanticism is something that might be called: natural thought—a state and working of the mind free of intellectual schematics and closed terms, a state of vacancy even, of openness, a space in which new combinations of sense will occur apparently of their own accord—a vacuum which nature will fill in its own way, a space which itself will react on nature. The brain is not a store-house, but a retort, a furnace, where things meet in activity.

The oriental idea of Spiritual Emptiness is united with western Concretion. That is essential romanticism.

Our age is concerned almost exclusively with production. I suggest it is essential to insist on what, liable to further definition, could be called: procession. I mean the flow of natural things, the interconnected forces. What we have today is the production (in series of isolated objects, though all alike) of goods which are then put into use, discarded, and simply make room for others; there is no continuity, only repetition. I say: procession, and I mean an interest in the how as well as the what, believing that the history of a thing is as important as its use, its function. I mean that history and function should not be separate. I mean that there should be awareness of continuity, evolution, that the history should be living and the functioning meaningful, not merely momentary and utilitarian. We tend to see only end-products, and we are blinded by the New (and, as a corollary, befogged by the old). Old and new are separate, both seen as end-products, neither in a process of being, they are results of fabrication, the new glorified for its newness, the old for its oldness, two sides of the same bad coin. History is for museums and art-collections, and newness for today's newspaper. Both are dead, the one with life choked within it (and the more choked, the more "artistic"), the other stillborn. It is a world of art-dealers and connoisseurs, and producers and consumers. It is not a living world, there is little felt living. Heard a woman complaining yesterday that the olive oil she had bought had had a smell; the new stuff is odourless, tasteless, lifeless, the perfect product for a senseless, gumptionless, lifeless people. It is the same with the bread—corps bread (that pale, wheatless substance) is fit only for corpses. Why does perfection have to mean deadness? I want bread with some wheat-force in it (and with that force, sun, climate and a bread-making I know) and so also I want men with some life-force in them, living men, not improved human products, or processed persons. I heard an American scientist announce the other day
that, in his opinion, the perfect man would be a mixture of Einstein and Albert Schweitzer, and he was confident that one day soon he and his colleagues would produce (due to manipulation of nuclear acids) just such perfect men, as many as you like. Isn’t that just dandy? Well, I include me out.

“Bedürftigkeit” is Hölderlin’s word: neediness, and awareness of the inadequacy of the self. Morally, it translates itself as a sense of obligation, a religious sense if you like; sensually, it is the desire for contact and merging—it is social and biological (it is no mere coincidence that romanticism should surge up at the time when Lamarck is grasping the first intuitions of biology). Neediness, a fundamental need, moral and physical, is at the basis of romanticism, not values to be propounded, not rules to be adhered to. Henceforth, there shall be no value that does not satisfy this need, this neediness—for it is not one single need, nor a series of individual needs (each to be satisfied in turn, and each one breeding another, ad infinitum), it is not a series of fanciful needs, but an experience of being. Romanticism derives from this experience of being and (progressive romanticism) strives to satisfy it.

Hölderlin, mad, in a tower on the banks of the Neckar, Hart Crane’s suicide by drowning, D. H. Lawrence’s hysterical solitude, Dylan Thomas’s drink, Robert Burns’s drink, old Walt Whitman in Camden writing away with half-a-brain, Nietzsche’s madness, the mad solitude of Lamarck—there they are, the neediness never satisfied, and the world takes the works and you have Hölderlin exegesis and translation, Burns’ Nights, crap lectures, films, adulation or condemnation of Poets—but these were men. And even yet there are Hölderlins, Burns, Whitmans, Nietzsches, yes, even yet—men, with that neediness, that vital neediness—and the world continues its narrow life and talks of Art. And everybody is full of regret for the past (for the geniuses) and of commiseration for the past (the fate of the geniuses), and the result is only a wailing, and a stupid, intellectual contentment.

History and biology, time and tissue, these are the sciences that have most to do with romanticism. It is historical and biological, aware of process and duration, of evolution. It is not concerned with the repetition of perfection, or the perfecting of almost-perfection, it is not interested in work according to an Idea—a double slavery, the work and the Idea—but in the movement of a life, of life in general, living time and tissue. For Schiller, to take an idealist par excellence, Greece never existed, it is an Idea, and he uses it merely to negate the society he sees around him (the way Pound uses Provence, and so on) whereas for Hölderlin, Greece is in time, he experiences Greece and he perpetuates it (that is, does not contemplate it) into the present. His Greece is not an idea, but part of him—his Greek culture only gave him a vocabulary for a greekness which was in himself. Finally, there is no Greece, there is only Hölderlin. Whereas, for Schiller, Greece is like a panoply, a shield of illusion he puts up against the real and sordid world. Hölderlin, ever with his Greece, remains naked, in time and tissue, his Greek thinking indeed probably helped him to this nakedness, whereas Schiller wraps himself up in Greece, wraps himself up in allegory, mythology, and moral abstractions. His Greece is a closed temple, Hölderlin’s is an open plain, and the sun blazing—’I am like a man struck by Apollo.’

Neediness. There can be a contradiction between its expression, and its satisfaction. I mean that the man who expresses his need may become so infatuated with the expression as such, that he will wish to go no further, will, on the contrary, nurse his neediness, coddle it, invent it even, since it provides him with an excuse for Creation, Poetry. This is the artistic deviation, and the claustration in the half-way house. Since we’ve got something, says the artist, let’s keep to it; and so he makes a fetish of it. Whereas the man writing, the man expressing his need—not allowing himself to be side-tracked into art (which is to real living what a sanatorium is to nature)—will continue on the way to satisfaction, ready to express that satisfaction (which may appear banal to the gratteurs-de-plate and the verbal chislers) whenever and wherever he finds it.

When Hölderlin talks about gods, they are forms of the godliness in himself—gobs of desire, galactic concretions of his neediness, and images of a possible satisfaction. The immediate object of this neediness, this dis-
satisfaction, is all one-sided, narrow existence, whether it be of art or bureaucracy, philosophy or stamp-collecting. What Hölderlin wants is to be himself. "To be oneself," he says, "that is life. We are only the dream of it" (Empedokles). Throughout the nineteenth century, art tended to become satisfied with the dream (I am referring to that simulacrum of romanticism called Symbolism; a one-sided romanticism) and it took non-artistic writers like D. H. Lawrence or Henry Miller to get beyond the dream, towards living reality, with still the awareness of neediness. That is, they are not "realistic," or "naturalists," they are romantics, with a vital need, and looking for its satisfaction through life. They are not dreamers, nor observers. They are seekers (not suckers). For Hölderlin, the man who has got beyond need—not into a dream-world, and not into art (i.e. neither symbolism, nor apocalypse, nor any other off-shoot of romanticism, nor objective verbal constructions prefacing or under-studying reality seen as static)—that man (having become something that can be called a man) strolls through his own world (Empedokles). And it is the word "stroll" (wandeln) that expresses all the possible Easiness of life not in the sense of facility, but meaning unconstrained, free. Stroll—Thoreau uses the word: saunter, and I think of him walking by Walden Pond, I think of Henry Miller walking up and down in China, I think of Whitman by Blue Ontario’s Shore and even Dylan Thomas under Milk Wood. These are men in their own world (though Thoreau still solitary, perhaps, like Rousseau on his walks, and even Baudelaire on his spleenetic walks through Paris). To stroll in one’s own world—that is the aim, not the production of Perfect Hypothetical Verbal Structure, and not the Grace of God Almighty in the desert.

Raw nature, says Hölderlin, is hated by the narrow intellect, but it is in close communion with vital thinking (Begeisterung). When a man thinks and acts with his soul, whole-heartedly, he can’t go wrong; he does not need intellect for there is no force against him. This idea that the forces of nature are not hostile, and that nature is not something to be mastered, is at the basis of what has been called romantic “nature-worship”: as usual the original intuition is more profound than the cheap farce the epigones make of it. The refusal of fabrication and intellect makes romanticism seem anachronistic in our time, where "natural" has become a useful word for the commercialisation of adulterated ("improved") products—there being still a natural "superstition" among the people. Once you begin to tamper with nature—tamper with, not live with—you institute a vicious circle. It is this vicious circle which we call progress. In order to initiate real progress we shall have to get out of the vicious circle. Rousseau had some intuition of this two centuries ago, when he talked about the return to nature. An intuition which provoked Voltaire's rejoinder (and probably wilful misunderstanding) that he for one refused to go back and walk on four paws, being old and ill, and in need of a European doctor. Rousseau was right, despite all his sentimentality, and Voltaire, despite his wit and hard-headedness, shows himself a narrower, inferior intelligence. To go "back to nature" means a restatement of premises, whereas what intelligence we have today—mostly of the narrow, inferior
type I talked about—never gets out of a fixed set of ideas and conventions, along which lines progress will not lead us to the four-footed beasts so mocked by Voltaire, but to what a recent book calls Insects (meaning simulacra of men). It is no accident that Kafka's story, The Transformation, should be concerned with just this phenomenon of a man becoming an insect. His longer stories, such as The Castle, or The Trial, show clearly the moral aspects of the Vicious Circle. To get out of the Vicious Circle is, in simple terms, to get back to innocence, not as a paradisal state, but as a faculty of living and thinking outside the mental caste we have made for ourselves.

Hölderlin looks back to a time when holy air and the Soul of the World surrounded men or, as he says elsewhere, to a time when gods and men were one, before things divided into art, religion and daily living. But this looking back is by no means a static contemplation of a past—worse, of a past that never existed. It is in him a feeling, an experience, and a stimulus towards the creation of what he calls the Freistaat, the world of freedom. What he wants is a world of men, and he says explicitly that to stand among men, to be surrounded by faith in life and joy, is better than the mere contemplation of all the beauties of nature. It is life-faith and joy (better still is Coleridge's word, 'joyance') he is seeking, which he feels is there, as a possibility, if only we would give it space, if only we would leave ourselves open enough—outwith the dead wood and the walls—for it to take root and flourish. An original world, a world in contact with the sources of life, not a sterile world of contemplation coupled with one of confused activity. What Hölderlin looked for was "the real climate (das echte Klima)—and I think of Nietzsche saying only two things matter: the choice of a diet and the choice of a climate. And I think again of Milton who was afraid the dull climate of England would cramp his genius. Nietzsche and Milton both meant climate in the physical sense, Hölderlin meant it in a moral sense. Both senses are important, and must be stressed especially in our day when not only the moral climate stinks (or is purely odourless) but even the physical atmosphere is being polluted.

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the girl,
am I
punchy?

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engage
the
profound
through
horror
said
the crippled
Old
Spider

O
my darling
you didn't
get
it
back right
said
the
lady
to the drunk
as he failed
to close
the match cover.

Was that dear old lady.
just talking to me
my mother?

No, said the girl
it was
disappointed love.
THE GENTLEMAN
THE YOUNG LADY
THE SALESMAN

Frogs are heard croaking, then hens cackling, cocks crowing, a cow mooing and other farm-yard noises. Knocking at a door.

THE GENTLEMAN: Good morning, Miss. This is the Motor Show I believe?

YOUNG LADY: Why yes, Sir. What did you think it was?

GENTLEMAN: I beg your pardon. I was blinded by the headlights. (A bell rings). You see what a noise they make!

YOUNG LADY: Once you get used to it, you won’t notice it at all!

GENTLEMAN: Very regrettable, in some ways!

YOUNG LADY: Don’t say: very regrettable. Say: Rather a pity! One should never speak or write as one reads.

GENTLEMAN: Or vice versa.

YOUNG LADY: Have you come to the Motor Show to take lessons in grammar? It’s six francs each and a half-ration of bubble and squeak! Or else we can provide you with a Standing Committee of nine Directors and one sitting hen.

GENTLEMAN: No, thank you very much. I’ve just come to the Motor Show to buy some car.

(farmyard noises)

YOUNG LADY: By the pound?

GENTLEMAN: No, a whole piece.

YOUNG LADY: In that case, I’ll introduce you to my colleague. Shall we go and look for him? There’s no need. He’s quite close to us. He’s trailing us like a shadow, here he is between us.

SALESMAN: Good morning, sir. The salesman, that’s me, as Louis xiv said. Are you a buyer? What do you want to buy?

YOUNG LADY: The gentleman wants to buy some car.

SALESMAN: Male or female?

GENTLEMAN: Both. In order to have the couple. I don’t like breaking up a happy home.

YOUNG LADY: Show the gentleman your latest models.

SALESMAN: Do you like your cars genuine, genial, or tinged with green?

GENTLEMAN: So that I can see a little better, I wonder, Miss, if you’d lend me your nose? I’ll let you have it back before I go.

YOUNG LADY: (indifferently). Here. You can keep it.

GENTLEMAN: Thank you. A nose that sees is worth two that sniff.

SALESMAN: Will you come with me, sir?

GENTLEMAN: Why yes, of course, right now, ow, ow, ow, etc. . . .

SALESMAN: Stop barking, please, sir. This is our first model. It’s a fifteen-wheeled spearshaker!

GENTLEMAN: Fifteen?

SALESMAN: Yes, fifteen, but you can easily have a fourth put on.
GENTLEMAN: No need to tell me that. Everyone knows that fifteen wheels really make twelve. Admiration for your ironmongery could lead us to the very brink of destruction.

SALESMAN: She's a nice piece of work. Pinch her. *(A trumpet is heard).* You see, fast in her reactions.

GENTLEMAN: And that one over there? May I pinch her too?

SALESMAN: Try her, sir. But of course, try her. *(A neigh is heard).*

GENTLEMAN: Ouch! That gave me a fright!

SALESMAN: Oh, I'm so sorry, sir... I didn't do it.

GENTLEMAN: It's the bull.

SALESMAN: How is he employed?

GENTLEMAN: As a tenor!... to take the place of the bass... if you don't mind.

YOUNG LADY: Oh, sir, please sir, give me back my nose; I want to blow it.

GENTLEMAN: I had no idea you were so romantic! Here's your nose back again. All is over between us. Don't ask me for anything else.

YOUNG LADY: *(weeping).* Oh! My poor nose! Look at the state it's in! It's quite dishevelled.

SALESMAN: Shall we go on with our inspection, sir?

GENTLEMAN: Oh, what a lovely car!

SALESMAN: It's a protector, a five-horse governess.

GENTLEMAN: What's she worth?

SALESMAN: That depends on the price.

GENTLEMAN: I like this one too. She's very nice.

SALESMAN: *(Noise of a heavy object falling on the floor).*

What did I tell you?

GENTLEMAN: Has he got turgo-dyfractors?

SALESMAN: Yes, sir.

GENTLEMAN: None of them missing?

SALESMAN: None, sir.

GENTLEMAN: All in good condition?

SALESMAN: Naturally, sir. All our goods are of fine quality. You can easily test it for yourself. Try it.

*(Sound of a typewriter)*

Try it again.

*(A factory siren)*

You see, the turgo-dyfractors function perfectly. Don't be afraid, sir.

GENTLEMAN: May I?

SALESMAN: But I insist.

*(Railway noises, a guitar, "comment allez-vous?," a saw: The Gentleman's voice: DAMN, THAT'S SHARP!; trumpet, old iron, and, once more, the sound of something heavy falling on the floor)*
SALESMAN: Well, what do you say?

GENTLEMAN: She looks . . . I beg your pardon . . . I mean, He looks a nice little bus! He works all right. Still, I'm rather afraid there's a spoke in the binders. It often happens.

SALESMAN: You can be quite confident, sir. I give you my personal guarantee.

GENTLEMAN: Is this car . . . is he provided with a tetralogical apparatus?

SALESMAN: I beg pardon, sir?

GENTLEMAN: Is he furnished with a tetralogical apparatus?

SALESMAN: Oh no, sir. A good healthy logical system, but not tetralogical. He's not of Swedish manufacture. As French as you can make him. An authentic Cartesian model.

GENTLEMAN: And the brakes, do they work on a fixed guarantee, or are they fully empowered?

SALESMAN: By pneumatic circulation. It's the latest novelty. Listen. (Ringing of various types of bells, farmyard noises)


SALESMAN: Right. I'll introduce you to this young blonde vehicle.

YOUNG LADY: Hallo, sir, it's me.

SALESMAN: She's got good tyres (a few notes of jazz), attractive cushions, very pretty legs (military march), charming figure, excellent motor (noise of a defective motor), delightful steering-wheel, brand-new coachwork, an adorable smile and highly personal radiation.

GENTLEMAN: Oh, but I know her, I recognise her, I idolize her! It's the young lady of just now . . . and always. I should certainly like to buy you. Is she strong?

SALESMAN: She'll carry you easily; you and three or four others as well!

GENTLEMAN: I'll take her.

YOUNG LADY: Thank you, sir.

SALESMAN: And the other car, too, sir?

GENTLEMAN: Oh no! I'll be the male car.

SALESMAN: As you wish, sir.

YOUNG LADY: Am I really going to be your car, then? Thank you so much. Put my head-lamps on and we'll get married at once; I'm ready.

(Very loud farmyard noises, croaking, neighing and mooing)

GENTLEMAN: Tell me, Salesman, what are all these animals doing at the Motor Show?

SALESMAN: I've no idea, sir. Long live the bride and groom.

YOUNG LADY: Don't worry, we will, we will.
Now, look, boys, I'm going to say it simple-country simple. Martin is "time." Martin is "reality." Martin is blind. Mars Martin is a blind cave organism—old and evil presence from an old and evil cave. He orients himself by radar that is word lines. Shift cut tangle Martin's word lines and he can't find you. He can't find himself. Martin, you always tell your reporters to get the address. When you want to block some one out of present time you shift the address say from Git-le-Coeur to L'île de la Cite or was it St Louis? the time say from August to October, or maybe you put something there that isn't there like the tables in front of 9 Rue Git-Le-Coeur or the universities in Morocco. Well, boys, shift cut tangle Martin's address. The Retroactive Kid is on stage, Martin, also known as Amnesia Allen. He is forgetting you right off stage, Martin. Such a lot of words and pictures, a whole warehouse full of garbage, no wonder you can't exactly remember and they all run together now—Your home office in Minnesota wasn't it?—The Old Flatiron Building on Market Street only it wasn't Market Street then it was just Mark Street named after the survey line run right
through there and it turned out a heap of folks didn’t own what they thought they owned after the Big Survey . . . On this historic date, Monday May 25, 1963, 25th anniversary of Word Picture Daily, or was it weekly? or monthly? surely Mr Martin, you remember your offices—your address? Get research on the intercom. They can refresh your fading memory with a brief history of the Word Picture story: Took over a defunct humor magazine known as Ballyhoo in 1929 and built it into a vast empire of word and image not in all respects candid or complete to be sure with branch offices in major cities of the world. Let me list a few of your branch offices, Mr Martin; always of course designed with a keen eye for local architectural styles, an unobtrusive but imposing appropriateness: In the flourishing Peruvian city of Shell Mara, oil capital of South America, and the bustling port city of Esmeraldas—on the outskirts of Mogador rising from the sheer cliffs of Imshallah—overlooking the exclusive Barrio Chino in Barcelona where the old movies come to die and 1920 gangsters send tracer bullets flashing out across the Bay of Biscay from broken film—on the palm fringed archipelago that stretches from Macao to the lovely tropical island of Formosa ruled by a hereditary sultanate—and the Paris office on the historic Ile de la Cite or was it St Louis?—the Seine glittering far away in the distance through the fashionable suburbs of Meudon—And remember the side walk cafes along Git-Le-Coeur where you used to lunch with your staff?—and in London a discreet four storey building located at 6 Cambridge Square a stone’s throw from the Crystal Palace adjoining the editorial offices of The Daily Observer. Now the word and image horde, constantly shifted from one office to the other to accommodate the necessities of time, was guarded by a fleet of armoured trucks against possible hijackers—The truck routes were plotted by secret formulae and all the secret formulae had to be guarded of course like the formulae of Shitola so the staff went about handcuffed to brief cases and to each other—whole clusters of them often entrapped the unwilling passer by into the service of time like a netted fish. This grew until the entire staff was handcuffed together and you conveyed your instructions by pulling the chains. However, this system tended to
immobilise your staff and you saw fit to establish under each of them a chemical toilet. Time passed, and cess pools of the world ground with word and image waste. Disposal was always your big problem was it not? So you called in the technical department and they arranged a system of direct vein feeding for your staff from a central tank of nutrient fluid on the roof.—the waste products being all urine and your executives now housed over the trough of a vast urinal. Breakdowns were frequent and despite the most modern artificial kidney provided for each cell block the silent portentous smell of uremia seeped out and blanketed the planet with a suffocating yellow smog and piss backed up and up. There was no place for it to go. But you were busy perfecting the system and installed transmitters in all your executive brains controlled by one super efficient composite brain housed in a lead cylinder. The location of central intelligence was special top secret and the cylinder was guarded in your fleet of trucks now cruising round the clock like Strategic Air Command. But the disposal problem is not to be ignored. Scientists shook their heads and stated they could not answer for the consequences if the Earth’s crust, already buckling ominously, were to give way under the accumulated weight of time, and this ocean of urine were to flood the planet’s molten core—and there were sullen mutters of revolt from the peasantry sloshing to work in rubber suits through shallow canals of piss not infrequently run down by the cruising lorries which were now amphibious. So Martin turned his blind visionary gaze on space. He took all the words and image and all his executives and technicians and processed them down to time meal under a cyclatron, a compact yellow substance like crystallised urine. This was the answer. He would transport this time meal to another planet where it would hatch out the whole beautiful cycle of word and image. Of course in the fullness of time he would have to move again, but there was always plenty of time in the bank. However, the board of health had got wind of his malodorous plan to move around through the cosmos, planets blowing up behind him like rusty boilers, trailing a nebula of scalding piss in his wake. And they moved with inflexible authority to forestall ‘Martin’s Folly’ before he could, by any means at his disposal, carry out his unsanitary purpose. Martin, meanwhile, had procured a pack train of kangaroos and loaded the precious time meal into their pouches. His preparations were completed. It was time for the countdown. And then a goof on the launching platform panicked his kangaroos and they bounded away in all directions scattering the time meal which hatched out every which way, clusters of sabre-toothed tigers, atomic physicists, reporters and centurions, savage tribes and Western gun fighters. Decent American youths were dragged from their TV sets and sacrificed by Aztec priests to the waltzes of Old Vienna while Ghengis Khan looted New York. General Lee clashed with Spartacus and Bolivar liberated everything in sight. Cross your cancelled skies, Martin, nothing nothing nothing at all. They all went away. You can look any place. No good. No bueno. Adios Meester Martin. 

No Time.
The Milkman

The doorbell rang and I had hoped it would be her.

It was the milkman wanting five shillings for seven pints,
which seemed to me excessive.

He asked me if I was aware there was a shortage of milkbottles.
Kids were swiping them and selling them for four pence.

I said I knew, I had read it in the papers.

He replied that that was why I was being charged
five shillings for seven pints, which seemed excessive.

I sympathised, and said I hoped the dairies
would be able to blow more bottles,
or whatever they do to make bottles these days.

He answered that they could only afford it if people like you sir
paid five shillings for seven pints
which you sir regard as excessive. I paid five shillings.

Only when he had gone away did I remember
that I had had no milk that week,
that the milkman doesn't come on Sunday nights,
that there was a shortage of cows not bottles.
ANDREI

VOSNESENSKY

translated by EDWIN MORGAN

FOGGY STREET

Fog scumbles the suburbs like tumbling pigeons.
   Policemen bob like corks.
Fog stations!
Fog century is it? Pleistocene epoch?
Everything in pieces, disconnected as delirium.
   People have been screwed loose . . .
I drift along.
No I don't. I'm wrestling in a cottonwool noose.
   They loom double: what a hall of mirrors!
Galoshes all right?
Watch your loaf with your feet there!
Like a woman who's just left your kisses,
   blurring out and yet returning to vividness—
a widow, no longer your lover—
   yes she's yours—no she's a stranger . . .
   Venus! Ice-cream? Sorry! . . .
People I know?
Nah! Iagos in homespun, what a story!
You?!! Standing there squeezing your ears,
   by yourself, in a man-sized coat!—
with whiskers?!!
And that hairy ear—is that hoarfrost on it or not?
I stumble about, I struggle, I'm alive though,
   fog, fog—undissolving.
Whose cheek is this—brushed against in the mist?—Hullo!
Hoy there! O
   fog, fog . . . voices . . . unavailing . . .
Great to unveil this fog and send it sailing!
Clouds for layabouts!

What hammocks!

The gods are for the birds.
The birds are for the birds.

What about wings,
all that paraphernalia?
It's too weird; I tell you.
What did the ancients see in these things?
Nearer and nearer
to the fuselage
clouds press them in,
to a vestige-
ality of winginess on our things,
our marvel-machines, strange
to them. Men have unslung
something new, men don't hang
out wings, men are with it, bang.
Man, men are winged!
The gods are dozing like slummocks—

I am Goya!
The enemy flew like ravens over my appalling
field: picked out my
eye sockets.

I am sorrow.

I am war's own
voice, I am cities fired in the storms of
nineteen-forty-
one.

I am hunger-horror.

I am also the throttled
neck of the old woman hanged in the naked square, her body
like a bell rocking—

I am Goya!

O grapes of wrath! I
have driven on the West, have launched my volleys—
I am the ash of the uninvited guest!
And I have hammered in hard stars like coffin-
nails on the memorial sky.

I,
Goya.
The poet we hope for

His hearers were attacked on three sides simultaneously.
They saw pictures, heard music,
And a certain incantation of words
Moved on their minds. Any one of these things
Would have been incomplete,
Perhaps unintelligible, by itself.
And any two of them without the third
Would have still left something to be desired.
The three accomplished an enormous result. They recited
The physical history of the Highlands of Scotland,
Analysed its economic geography,
Exposed in full the tragedy of its waste,
Announced a programme whereby its wealth could be restored.
And they did all this in a rhythm
Irresistible, exciting,
And, however sophisticated its source,
Transparent.
The pictures went from mouth to mouth,
And from glen to glen,
To the rivers, the crofts, the deer forests,
The aluminium works, bridges, new roads, afforestation areas,
And water-power plants,
While the music ranged with variations
Over the universe of our folk music,
And meanwhile too the voice was saying
A poem that went on down hundreds of names
And through hundreds of ideas,
All of them chanting at us while we heard and saw
Two-thirds of Scotland on the move.
The vastness of the theme, the speed and brevity
With which is was handled, and the apparent lightness

24
These in their combination achieved an effect
More moving than anything his audience had heard before,
Not merely the power melodiously to arrange words
But the power to suggest human values...  

What he did for Scotland, by a brilliant operation,
Of almost inconceivable complexity,
Was akin to what evolution had done
With regard to the pineal body.

He concentrated on the one special projicient sense of right
Whose peculiar privilege it is to carry the self
Outward to meet surrounding and distant objects.

Our eyes are either glorified warm spots
Or they may be organs developed out of small areas of skin
Peculiarly sensitive to pressure
And registering a greater and greater delicacy
To the touch of the finger of light.

We may characterize the pineal body
As an organ of exceeding impressionability,
Functioning on the upper surface
Of the sensitive brain mass,
As a register of pure pressure from light,
And becoming so efficient and supersensitive
That it needed special protection.
So in the plesiosaurus
It may have been a third parietal eye
As the beast fumbled about with his nose in the marsh
Half-in and half-out of the water.
We can imagine it surviving in primitive creatures
Like hag-fish and lampreys, as an eye or pair of eyes,
With suitable lens of water above them.

But descending for protection into the skull
In crocodiles and lizards, and finally coming to rest
In the safest place in the centre of the head
Between the two cerebral hemispheres in man,
And above the medial nucleus of the thalamus,
Where its sensitive soul must rest in peace,
Because there is no safer place.

In Scotland it had failed to develop normally,
It was not in the right place
(Or perhaps Scottish heads were far too thick
And it had sunk too deeply in
And become as safe as the buried dead)
It remained rudimentary and diseased to boot,
And had, indeed, become little more
Than, as he called it,
The “wandering abscess” of the English influence.

As for the elaborate arrangements with crossed and uncrossed fibres
(As in the lower mammals all fibres are crossed
So it was with most Scots, whereas in more highly developed men
A quarter of all fibres are direct)
For overlapping the fields of vision and centring the sight,
For focussing both eyes on varying distances,
For adaptation of scotopic vision in the dark
Or for photopic vision in the light
And for perceiving colour vibrations
Space fails me to indicate them here,
But—probably through the comparatively small group of optic fibres,
Dispatched to the pulvinar in the lateral nucleus of the optic thalamus,
The eye can pull the whole body about and adjust
Hands, trunk, and position of head
For their purpose of preparing the frame and active muscles
For instantaneous motor action in connection with light.

Scotland had not developed or had lost
This provision or allowed it to become atrophied.
It could not move its own members about
But it was hypnotically controlled from London.
Thanks to him it has regained its own outlook
And power of immediate appropriate action.
It can act off its own bat now.
It has got the thing clear once and for all.
It can see for itself.
It can see as well as can be seen anywhere,
Its sight is properly centred
And it can focus both eyes perfectly
On all the distances there are
Including, as was least of all the case before,
Even those nearest to it.
SAME RAIN

Astrid Gillis

Same rain, falling lines, captured light falling, rustle, nibble and wall upon wall. A glass-like house. Time falling. Light rising. Movement down, movement up.

In this little room, now and four thousand raindrops ago...

The lucid door slammed hard against your eyes.

Run run run: through the dripping-dark caves: run run.

Rustle and crumple and slide and swish. Trail your long fingers, like your long dress, among squiggling mice, through long long corridors, lo—

Skate upon glass window. Skim. SkimskimskimmmFORWARD.

Just move: up and down, backwards and forwards, through.

My eye fell. And then fell. After my heart. A lot is built on this experience. As far as I can, I know one man—through the cubes of his movement, through the perspective of his eyes and supposed planes of his mouth, through the color among sunlight on his wrist in a bus. To be sentimental, since I am sentimental, this was Perfect Love—so perfect that it couldn’t exist. The usual schoolgirl crush, he spoke to me twice. From this I built Perfect Love. The love I created for him towards me, moved me deeply. Still moves.

A dark wall—high, thick, brown. Yes... The shadowy man ploughs the dim field from end to Beginning. Quaint clothes! A very dark gold sunset through unglazed windows. Of course knights. Well?

The hanging man swung softly, his violent hands grew heavy, his swinging mouth was crooked. He dripped sweet rain. Through my crooked lip the sweet blood flows still flows.

water
water
water
water water water water water water

Then the children shouted and some cried. Pick the fourth century up. He’s got a straight mouth and wet blue eyes. He cries and cries. Lift him up in my heavy arms, cuddle him, comfort him, kiss him with my crooked mouth.

rain fell
rain fell

Sweet warm rain fell. You were an existentialist leaf! First, you were green, guiltless, and everything else that a leaf “is.” Then you were still green, still guiltless, still a leaf, but a green, guiltless WET leaf. And the sweet warm rain?

An old woman—blue blank eyes and falling hair, turned and stared with blue blank eyes. Into mine. She screamed. Baby screamed. Still screams.

The same rain fell. Still falls.

The handle rustled and turned. Footsteps fell. No one came. Ah well, flow on.

A bird sang through the flowing rain.

“Don’t,” I said, “you’re singing in the present!”

“I’m singing among silver leaves and golden apples when the prince rode through your arms.”

When she was five, the big man said, let me see your knee. Sit on the wall, screw up to hide your wet blue eyes, bite your crooked lip straight and swing your little other leg.

“It’ll soon be better. see the nice plaster, honestly, try and walk. come on now pet.”

Well, so you could walk. You walked. But the cows still chased. They thundered behind, didn’t reach you ever—yet. You ran fast, faster, didn’t move—so far. They ran. You ran. They ran you ran you they you they you they you ran, ran, ran ran ran ran...
THE SEVENTH LADY

She could never pass a department store without
buying a toothbrush
that is how she caught my eye in Oxford Street
her pockets sprouting with toothbrushes
and a big bunch in her hand
she had lovely teeth and couldn’t explain it

All over town All over town
Small bombs of love explode without a sound

She said she was a poor cactus so carelessly potted
grown askew
yet she was sweet and thick and coffee strong
but hated light so at night she caught you
unawares with sudden brutal flowers
her husband had run down the street with cackling ankles

Big bombs go mega-bang! Big bombs go mega-boom!
Small bombs of love are tested in a small dark room
She stood and smiled in doorways of dimlit hotels
leaning her head medusa-like
against the neon jamb but when you stopped to ask her
the time of night
she looked at you round-eyed and said
O it wasn’t you it wasn’t you

Some rockets go! Some don’t get off the ground
Some droop too soon Some make it to the moon

She always dreamt of midsummer’s nights up north
sitting in a tree in a white nightie
yet even in those dreams only
the owls came
to nest in her laps
though once a fox stood watching her green-eyed

All over town All over town
Small hopeless bombs of love explode without a sound

She spent her weekends sitting in the Savoy Grill
with a gin and lime and a haughty look
not waiting for a prince
but for the dragon to swish in across the marble floor
with a Navy Cut pipe and a
savage promise in his fiery tail

Bad missiles flop Good missiles fly
But timid missiles do not even try

She said I am a stranger born I can never make love
to people I know
this is the last time I’ll speak to you
please give me the fare to Bergen or Cedar Rapids
that’s all I ask of you
darling she said adjusting her seams

Big bombs go mega-boom! Big bombs go mega-bong!
The seventh lady comes to end this song

She wrote me a letter from Malta saying
‘there’s always one more of us
than we suspect
one morning I wake to find I have forgotten
the toothbrushes my husband the dragon the quest and even
the owls yes even the owls

So let us test again Explode again!
I’m seven ladies! You are seven men!
And many more And many more
There is no end to this seven-years’ war”

All over town! All over town!
Small bombs of love explode without a sound
ENVOI

A Song for the 7th Lady

Young
Orpheus
To the castle gates came
The castle gates
Of Hades

he sang to the beast
that had nine heads,
he charmed the snakes
in the stone flower beds
And well he pleased the lost ladies.

They came dancing out
But he wasn't there
Six ladies
Shouting
Enraptured

but he was a voice
and only a voice and
not so easily captured.
His song stood in the noon—

Summer's air
But
In a garden
Shady

Pan Orpheus
As sly as fair

Slept with the seventh (lost) lady...
They came out noisy from the dining hall and spread and their noise spread with them over the dirt playground. Up from the table now he remembered that he wore short trousers, and he looked, fiducial and non-conformist and afraid, at all his teammates inconsistent in their toy-size longs. Part of the fan of children opening out to their various lunch-hour pastimes he moved over to the wall of the school just outside the staffroom where those who could have protected him had retired as if they didn’t care whether he was beaten up or not. But while he stayed by the staffroom window he would be safe from all but threats and mockery, at least till four o’clock.

Then he noticed big Bert Patterson and Rob walking out through the gate and over to the football pitch for a kick around. They didn’t even look his road, so it wasn’t a day for a thumping. So he hurried off out the gate on the other side of the playground and down the street. He could see Peemie just turning the corner at the end on his way home, and ran to catch up with him.

‘Any comics the day, Peemie?’

Peemie turned and grinned at him as if there was something funny about him and then shook his head and still grinning turned back to look the road he was on. Peemie was thin, and not so tall as the bullies, but he was fast and had a filthy mouth which could always raise a laugh so he never got into a fight. He didn’t set out to protect John from his enemies, but somehow John never got much involved with them when he was with Peemie. And Peemie enjoyed the free feeling, patronising this sook who was nice to him for the sake of his old comics and having someone to talk to.

‘Maybe there is, and maybe there’s no,’ said Peemie, knowing he’d be accompanied home and back for as much. He jostled along, nimble on great rubber soles, kicking a stone over the cobbles between the roadway and the pavement, running round in exaggerated arcs to deal with all its deviations from the straight line home. From time to time he called out a greeting to
some acquaintance, or smiled broadly at a passer-by as if in self mockery for being seen in such company. Then the pebble ran up a runnel cut in the stone pavement and lodged in the mouth of the drainpipe which marked the division between Peemie's house and his neighbour's. Peemie went in the open door while John stood waiting on the pavement trying not to gaze directly at Peemie's mother, visible through the inside room door. She was large and silent, with a great hat of straggling white hair. The dirty white apron with blue flowers on it seemed to cover and hide everything else she wore except for an old pair of slippers, and brown woollen stockings which made lots of rings round her ankles. Peemie came out with his mouth open and full of cake and offered a piece in his hand to John. John said no, thanks just the same, unsniling and confused. He wasn't fussy specially, but he felt a bit sick just after school dinner seeing the piece of cake lying there, broken and crumbly, in Peemie's dirty hand. There was a bundle of folded comics under Peemie's arm, and after slapping the extra bit cake into his slowly chewing mouth, he handed them over. John made the expected show of surprised gratitude though he was long since tired of the football stories and the puzzles and would pass them on unread to his brother. When Peemie had shifted enough cake from his mouth to allow him to grin, he grinned.

"See Hunter there?" he demanded on their way back to school, pointing to a small redhead who was now left school and working in the local grocer's. "She'll no look the road we're on the day, but you should of seen her last Setterday."

"What way?"

"Ah got ma hand in!" Peemie's hands were in his trouser pockets. Wish I could but I'd drop these comics.

"Ye didnae."

Back at school, in the lavvies, Peemie adduced circumstantial evidence, from a matchbox.
LEAVING FOR BUENOS AIRES

Do not go John said
you will regret
the sun the lack of contact
the sun and buildings like
the sun a cube of salt and
the sun dried army blood on
the sun white walls where she
the sun sits weeping beside
the sun a door; this
the sun is a mistake
the sun the net is still in
the sun your mind; you and
the sun she cannot excise
the sun the dream; there is
the sun no humming bird but
the sun a London sparrow
the sun dead on
the sun dead ground
do not go said John.

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Flying not to
Lose sight of it
Not going far
In angles out
Of ovals of
Dances filled up
The field the green
With light above
With the one hand
In the other.

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