

GEORGE BARKER

SEVEN PACIFIC SONNETS

[From a cycle of thirty]

Those whom I may not meet pester me now
Like dogs I lost seem leaping at my breast,
But lost, lost across space, found in a daydream
Only, or foundered in the floundering west
Go under whispering messages that blow
Over the world and pester me with home.

And O more lonely than the only John
Who found his paradise on a minor island,
I sit among the hands and faces that mop and mow
Among the smothering mountains of my silence
Like lizards of reminiscence flashing recollection,
They glitter at me from rocks and peaks
And my heart begs that one of them speaks,
The apocalyptic faces that pester me now.

ii

And in these islands hung on the fringe of Asia,
The herbaceous border of the Siberian waste,
Where I move giddily in disgust or aphasia
Straddling the huts of paper and paste,
Here is this vacuum where goldfish float
Between transparent planes of mental negation
But are called thoughts, here on this glass
I see reflected the mechanism of fate
Evolving the instruments of destruction
For all that I've left, the Europe that was,
Whose historical frieze, in its seizure,
Shrieks with the voice of Sibelius, crying
Like a violin in the middle of the sea:
'I am dying!'

iii

By the now westward China, and, to the East,
The spoiling, coiling, terrible, helluva sea,
All my thinking is now circumvented
And sleep that takes me home again is best.
Not the September typhoon or earthquake indented
Shore, the cholera epidemic or the war
Punishes my nights with such violence
Or crushes my days between such extremity:

So much as absence whispers in the evening
The sentimental commitments I have broken,
And the images I've known and the words I've spoken
O crush me between them where they grieve
Like clouds. So that all my thinking is
Circumvented by memory and a kiss.

iv

The Hawaiian aerodromes, the Pekin Summer Palace,
Cyclonic Kamchatka, the yellow archipelago,
Laokoon China and the circles of snow,
I look among them for the herbs of solace
To soothe an absence, or to find a place
Where among the amazing masks and the ginko,
The seismics, the diseases, the natural disasters,
I can clear a space for my own past.

But always the riverside willows tease
My eyes to tears; the message criss-crossed sea
Goes mocking backwards and forwards but not for me;
And the huge Clippers, skimming the parallels,
Their language of birds, taking the wrong course,
Tells me nothing but what a silence tells.

Note. The China and California Clippers carry mail between
America and the Orient.

v

Therefore not beautiful Jerusalem or any remove
Of once exotic geography, not the small monument
Of dogs and poets and homosexual love

HORIZON

Lying embalmed in the sea off the dangerous continent,
 Not to the tongues of the Mexican guitar, or
 In the moustachioed coxcomberly of the Latin zone,
 Or in a white villa on the expensive blue shore
 Among the disgustingly rich, O no in none
 Can you or I lay down our head and rest:
 For although the bird and the beast have a nest,
 We have one only, and that one is so lonely
 That only the Chatterton boy or Antony man
 Is brave enough to lie alone in the grave.
 But you and I, O it is love we must have.

vi

And now there is nothing left to celebrate
 But the individual death in a ditch or a plane
 Like the cock o' the north in a hurricane.
 Out of the bogus glory and the synthetic hate,
 The welter of nations and the speeches, O step down
 You corpse in the gold and blue, out of a cloud,
 My dragon fly, step down into your own:
 The ditch and the dislocated wings and the cold
 Kiss of the not to be monumental stone.

This is the only dignity left, the single
 Death without purpose and without understanding
 Like birds boys drop with catapults. Not comprehending
 Denudes us of the personal aim and angle,
 And so we are perfect sacrifice to nothing.

vii

To any member of my generation

What is it you remember?—the summer mornings
 Down by the river at Richmond with a girl,
 And as you kissed, clumsy in bathing costumes,
 History guffawed in a rosebush. What a warning!—
 If only we had known, if only we had known.
 And when you looked in mirrors was this meaning
 Plain as the pain in the centre of a pearl?
 Horrible to-morrow in God-damning postures
 Making absurd the past we cannot disown.

SEVEN PACIFIC SONNETS

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Whenever we kissed we cocked the future's rifles
And from our wild-oat words like dragons' teeth
Death underfoot now arises: when we were gay,
Dancing together in what we hoped was life
Who was it in our arms but the whores of death
Whom we have found in our beds to-day, to-day?

FRANCIS SCARFE

THE POETRY OF DYLAN THOMAS

I

DYLAN THOMAS is one of the most promising of the poets under thirty, but he has suffered through catching the public eye a little too early, which resulted in unfounded criticism by both his supporters and detractors. He was promising in 1934 (*Eighteen Poems*. Parton Press) and promising in 1936 (*Twenty-five Poems*. Dent). To those who have followed his production since then he is still promising, and this premature estimate of him is being made to clarify the nature of that promise.

For many people his poems are puzzles, seeming to offer at first reading no more than a forbidding cliff, impenetrable to reason, from which there jut great crags of capricious imagery. Some people (notably Miss Sitwell) read him for his sound, but though the words peal fully and roundly, the rhythms are monotonous enough to make this pall. But many a good poet is monotonous. The only satisfactory approach seems to be to plumb these images and verbal din and see what lies beyond.

The poems, especially in the 1934 and 1936 volumes, seem to have three noticeable points of contact. Discussion of the metaphysicals, sitwellism and surrealism are irrelevant. The dominant points of contact seem to be James Joyce, the Bible, and Freud. The personal habits of language and mythology of Dylan Thomas can readily be identified through these three sources. The first is linguistic, the second mythological, the third psycho-pathological, the key to his interpretation of his world.

II

It is agreed that James Joyce's language in *Ulysses* is simple enough. It appears difficult only when sentences and parts of sentences do not appear logically related. *Ulysses* is the masterpiece of the unexpected: the element of surprise, so puffed by Poe and Baudelaire, and so unclassical, dominates every page. The words are not