

‘Here, you!’ he yells, clutching a small man by his shoulders, ‘what do you think of it?’

Lucky he chose a small man. Anyway, I don’t think Hugh and I would tour well together. I invite Frank Owen. There is only one thing that worries me about my invitation. Before then, may not the bombs have interfered with all our plans. I mean, last night in — it was really quite nasty. But then, I pull myself together, and over me steals the old quiet confidence. I turn once more to the treasure trove of memory. From the pages of the mind’s scrapbook I pick an article by Frank Owen, written before Munich, boosting our anti-aircraft guns. What infinite consolation I derive from his sentence—what consolation for Warsaw, Rotterdam, Birmingham, too—‘We have got the bomber under control at last’ (19.8.38). At last—oh blast, there’s the scrunching of bombs falling again. Soon the siren will go? . . .

ROY FULLER

AUGUST 1940

I

Charing Cross: where trains depart for the bombardment
And the leave-taking is particularly ardent;
The obelisk in the court-yard is streaming with lime,
The doves are crying in the dusk, and Time

*Says: I am money, I am all these people,
The quality in light which changes to purple
When goods have been left with the owner of the mill
And the authority is his to sell.*

*I wipe my fingers on the hurrying faces,
And implant the wish to be in different places.
I am Too Late, I am the trees which grow
In everyone and blossom pale and grey.*

2

The edges of the country are fraying with
Too much use; the ports are visited by wrath
In the shapes of the metal diver and the dart
With screaming feathers and explosive heart,

And the ships are guilty of a desire to return
To land, to three mile pits and the moulding urn.
England no longer is shaped like a begging dog,
Its shape is the shape of a state in the central bog,

With frontiers which change at the yawn of a tired ruler;
At last the push of time has reached it; realer
Today than for centuries, England is on the map
As a place where something occurs, as a spring-board or trap.

Oh what is to happen? Does that depend on Time
Alone? Will change of country eventually come
As slow erosion by the wind of mountains,
And of love as the green-slimed Cupid of the fountain?

Only people and not places are able to resist
Time for a space, to race their daily ghost
In the projectile of violent change: the power
Is in the people to pool their collective hours,

And reply to Time: *You are not all the people,
You are the weak man underneath the steeple,
You are the exploiter and appropriator,
The hurt philosopher who murmurs Later,*

*You are all those who assisted death, who weighted
The curve with war and a system of hatred.
You are condemned as a reward or lash,
As an explosion, as a fear or wish.*

3

*Will you depart now? Will you become a place?
There is really no penalty, there may be peace.
Will you add yourself in the calculation of
The perimeter, the coast-line lost to love?*

The third voice says this; it is almost our own.
The voice of pigeons as they drop from stone,
From the cornices of banks, the premises
Of rings and trusts, from all betrayed promises;

The voice of wings attractive to the cripple,
The soothing voice of tobacco pipe and nipple,
Of introvert ambition which Icarus heard,
The voice of the weeping and isolated bird.

ROBERT MELVILLE

‘THE TEMPTATION’ OF HIERONYMUS BOSCH

HIERONYMUS BOSCH lived in seclusion at s’Hertogenbosch, and his work bears the stamp of the recluse: he was morbidly pre-occupied with the baseness of man, and his pictorial language was encumbered by complicated private symbols. His paintings of subjects which do not present an opportunity of analysing a state of mind are marred by the intrusion of symbols which are merely riddles without answers, and even the lovely ‘St. Christopher’ in the Boymans Museum is rendered gratuitously disquieting by misplaced ambiguities. But fortunately he had a wonderful gift for finding subjects of public interest which yielded to his highly introspective treatment, and his several paintings of the humiliation of Christ and the temptation of St. Anthony are infused with a vivid and searching analysis of his own experience.

No theme could have been more suited to Bosch than the Temptation of St. Anthony, for his own solitariness enabled him to give the spiritual problems of the hermit an autobiographical poignancy. He painted three versions: the famous hinged altarpiece at Lisbon, a side panel of a triptych of hermits at Venice, and a small oil on wood in the Prado. In the order I have named them they are representative of his development as an artist and provide us with evidence of his struggle for lucidity in the interpretation of a theme and of his progress towards a heroic self-discipline.