

W. H. AUDEN

AT THE GRAVE OF HENRY JAMES

The snow, less intransigent than their marble,
Has left the defence of whiteness to these tombs;
 For all the pools at my feet
Accommodate blue, now, and echo such clouds as occur
To the sky, and whatever bird or mourner the passing
 Moment remarks they repeat.

While the rocks, named after singular spaces
Within which images wandered once that caused
 All to tremble and offend,
Stand here in an innocent stillness, each marking the spot
Where one more series of errors lost its uniqueness
 And novelty came to an end.

To whose real advantage were such transactions
When worlds of reflection were exchanged for trees?
 What living occasion can
Be just to the absent? O noon but reflects on itself,
And the small taciturn stone that is the only witness
 To a great and talkative man,

Has no more judgment than my ignorant shadow
Of odious comparisons or distant clocks
 Which challenge and interfere
With the heart's instantaneous reading of time, time that is
A warm enigma no longer in you for whom I
 Surrender my private cheer.

Startling the awkward footsteps of my apprehension,
The flushed assault of your recognition is
 The donnée of this doubtful hour:
O stern proconsul of intractable provinces,
O poet of the difficult, dear addicted artist,
 Assent to my soil and flower.

As I stand awake on our solar fabric,
That primary machine, the earth, which gendarmes, banks,
And aspirin presuppose,
On which the clumsy and sad may all sit down, and any who will
Say their a-ha to the beautiful, the common locus
Of the master and the rose.

Our theatre, scaffold, and erotic city
Where all the infirm species are partners in the act
Of encroachment bodies crave,
Though solitude in death is *de rigueur* for their flesh,
And the self-denying hermit flies as it approaches
Like the carnivore to a cave.

That its plural numbers may unite in meaning,
Its vulgar tongues unravel the knotted mass
Of the improperly conjunct,
Open my eyes now to its hinted significant figures,
Sharpen my ears to detect amid its brilliant uproar
The low thud of the defunct.

O dwell ironic at my living centre,
Half ancestor, half child; because the actual self
Round whom time revolves so fast
Is so afraid of what its motions might possibly do,
That the actor is never there when his really important
Acts happen. Only the past

Is present, no one about but the dead as,
Equipped with a few inherited odds and ends,
One after another we are
Fired into life to seek that unseen target where all
Our equivocal judgments are judged and resolved in
One whole alas or hurrah.

And only the unborn mark the disaster
When, though it makes no difference to the pretty airs
The bird of Appetite sings,
And Amour Propre is his usual amusing self,
Out from the jungle of an undistinguished moment
The flexible Shadow springs.

Perhaps the honour of a great house, perhaps its
 Cradles and tombs may persuade the bravado of
 The bachelor mind to doubt
 The dishonest path, or save from disgraceful collapse
 The creature's shrinking withness bellowed at and tickled
 By the huge Immodest Without.

Now more than ever when torches and snare-drum
 Excite the squat women of the saurian brain
 Till a milling mob of fears
 Break in insultingly on anywhere, when in our dreams
 Pigs play on the organs and the blue sky runs shrieking
 As the Crack of Doom appears,

Are the good ghosts needed with the white magic
 Of their subtle loves. War has no ambiguities
 Like a marriage; the result
 Required of its *affaire fatale* is simple and sad,
 The physical removal of all human objects
 That conceal the Difficult.

Then remember me that I may remember
 The test we have to learn to shudder for is not
 An historical event,
 That neither the low democracy of a nightmare nor
 An army's primitive tidings may deceive me
 About our predicament.

That catastrophic situation which neither
 Victory nor defeat can annul: to be
 Deaf yet determined to sing,
 To be lame and blind yet burning for the Great Good Place,
 To be essentially corrupt yet mournfully attracted
 By the Real Distinguished Thing.

Let this orchard point to its stable arrangement
 Of accomplished bones as a proof that our lives
 Conceal a pattern which shows
 A tendency to execute formative movements, to have
 Definite experiences in their execution,
 To rejoice in knowing it grows.

And shall I not specially bless you as, vexed with
My little inferior questions, to-day I stand
Beside the bed where you rest
Who opened such passionate arms to your Bon when it ran
Towards you with its overwhelming reasons pleading
All beautifully in its breast?

O with what innocence your hand submitted
To those formal rules that help a child to play,
While your heart, fastidious as
A delicate nun, remained true to the rare noblesse
Of your lucid gift, and for its own sake ignored the
Resentful muttering Mass.

Whose ruminant hatred of all which cannot
Be simplified or stolen is still at large;
No death can assuage its lust
To vilify the landscape of Distinction and see
The heart of the Personal brought to a systolic standstill,
The Tall to diminished dust.

Preserve me, Master, from its vague incitement,
Yours be the disciplinary image that holds
Me back from agreeable wrong,
And the clutch of eddying muddle, lest Proportion shed
The alpine chill of her shrugging editorial shoulder
On my loose impromptu song.

Suggest; so may I segregate my disorder
Into districts of prospective value: approve;
Lightly, lightly then may I dance
Over the frontier of the obvious and fumble no more
In the old limp pocket of the minor exhibition,
Nor riot with irrelevance.

And no longer shoe geese or water stakes but
Bolt in my day my grain of truth to the barn
Where tribulations may leap
With their long-lost brothers at last in the festival
Of which not one has a dissenting image, and the
Flushed immediacy sleep.

Knowing myself a mobile animal descended
 From an ancient line of respectable fish,
 With a certain méchant charm,
 Occupying the earth for a grass-grown interval between
 Two oscillations of polar ice, engaged in weaving
 His conscience upon its calm.

Despising Now yet afraid of Hereafter,
 Unable in spite of his stop-watch and lens
 To imagine the rising Rome
 To which his tools and tales migrate, to guess from what shore
 The signal will flash, to observe the anarchist's gestation
 In the smug constricted home.

Into this city from the shining lowlands
 Blows a wind that whispers of uncovered skulls
 And fresh ruins under the moon,
 Of hopes that will not survive the *secousse* of this spring,
 Of blood and flames, of the terror that walks by night and
 The sickness that strikes at noon.

All will be judged. Master of nuance and scruple,
 Pray for me and for all writers living or dead;
 Because there are many whose works
 Are in better taste than their lives, because there is no end
 To the vanity of our calling: make intercession
 For the treason of all clerks.

Because the darkness is never so distant,
 And there is never much time for the arrogant
 Spirit to flutter its wings,
 Or the broken bone to rejoice, or the cruel to cry,
 For Him whose property is always to have mercy, the author
 And giver of all good things.

A. L. ROWSE

DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

'The world at large wants a clear lead, and it is from the artists, writers and teachers, to whom Horizon appeals, that plain directives must come, if they are to come at all.'—H. G. WELLS.

THE trouble with so much of our talk about democracy is that with the talk the concept has become progressively emptied of meaning. We are supposed—and as I think rightly, if we understand all that it implies—to be fighting this war for the cause of democracy. Yet I doubt if there are many who are at all clear about what is meant by it, or are in fact roused to enthusiasm by the name under which they fight. So many of those who think must have been depressed by the hesitations, the incompetences, disillusionments, fraudulences of the past decade—the most disgusting and disquieting in our latter history, that has led us not surprisingly to where we are to-day—that they may think of the standard of democracy as rather moth-eaten. Yet they would not be wholly right, in spite of so many evidences on the surface of our political life, any more than Mr. Eliot was wholly right in regarding liberalism as 'worm-eaten'—though again there was a good deal in what he said. We must, in short—it is a matter of urgent necessity—do some new and plain thinking on this subject, disregarding the clichés and soft illusions with which the 'supporters' of democracy have coddled themselves and us into so many defeats that need never have been. If we are to win, we must at least have the intellectual courage to face unpleasant truths about our own cause.

It is only comparatively recently that the meaning of democracy has become so vague—as vague and diffuse as 'socialism,' or 'liberty.' The nineteenth century—to take such admirable writers as Cornewall Lewis or Bagehot—attached a perfectly clear meaning to the term: they meant, as Aristotle meant, a form of government determined by the predominance of the propertyless