

Extracts from *Sleeping with Icons*, Norman Buller

D.H. Lawrence

A delicate brat with a sniffy nose
moving about lean Eastwood streets
where gas-lamps bled their yellow light
through the slurried shadow of the mine
and pianos were only a blind groping
for beauty needed more than bread.

Their first meeting, a blaze about him
torching her marriage, a bird in flames
picking about her gravel. The machine
was a failed god, mankind a dying
tree; he and she would be a door
through which to embrace the universe.

The war-crazed Cornish feared his frau,
fired both foxes from their lair.
England was killing them. Where now
that rainbow spanning the wilderness?
Peace let them sail, watching their England
sink like a coffin into the sea.

Now he has seeped through that barren landscape
to reach the impulse of all blossom.
Nothing had mattered but the longest journey
to enter as seed into virgin earth,
borne by the love of woman, finding
his way by the blue, forked torch of a flower.

Sketches from Ireland

Plunge into Dublin's tangle,
flow with its current
which never rests,
drink its heady froth
and dark decay
where night-bridges
stride the Liffey
in a spangle of light.

Spring comes later here;
leaves are still furled
in foetal green;
a soft day in the morning,
gorse hedges glowing Sligo gold,
even in the rain,
and Ben Bulbin frowning
on Yeats's dowdy grave.

Houses stand proud
in many-coloured Clifden
where Connemara urges its rock
into the Atlantic
and harbour lanterns lay their pencils
of light upon the water
while Wexford points out to sea,
the Hook lighthouse at its finger-end.

The Villa at Lullingstone

Fertile prize for conquerors
transplanting their sophisticated lives
in northern soil.

They bathe in steamy air,
with slaves to towel and pamper,
wiping the sweat
that beads their bodies clean.

Later to dine with guests
admiring white-and-terracotta mosaic
inched-in beneath their feet,
their host explaining
its mythological theme:
a maiden ravished by a bull
as Virgil tells it.

None of them dreamed
the crude barbarian
would force them back to Rome,
rape their women,
crucify their nuns,
flood up the rivers
to torch their prizes down.

We gaze now on these relics
tracing a Roman finger in the dust.

Conscience at Midnight

After Charles Baudelaire

As it strikes midnight, let the clock
ironically judge our deeds
throughout this day which now recedes
into our memory, take stock
of our ridiculous pose. The trick
is, somehow we should recognize
that what we did was just a guise,
like when we played the heretic

blaspheming against Christ, that rare,
least-questionable god. It's like
acting how some obnoxious tyke
sucks up to a fat millionaire
who's worth only the goriest
fate in hell. What do we prove
by desecrating all we love
and praising all that we detest?

Just like a servile torturer,
we heaped scorn on a helpless man
reviled by others. Then we ran
to laud stupidity. We err
in kissing mindless matter, pray
avidly to it. We'd not guessed
our crass subservience as we blessed
the sickly radiance of decay.

Finally, as if we could
reduce mind's vortex to a daze,
we priests of language should give praise
to rapture of sad themes. We stood,
however, in a different place,
drank without thirst and over-ate
without hunger. Obliterate
that light so darkness hides our face!

Song Without a Name

After an anonymous German lyric, date unknown

Last night as I lay sleeping,
a nightmare came to me:
there grew within my garden
a tree of rosemary.

My garden was a churchyard,
each bed of flowers a tomb
and falling to the flowerbeds
was every leaf and bloom.

I took a golden vessel
to catch the falling dead;
it slipped and shattered; from it
ran pearls of rosy red.

I fear those pearls, my darling;
come, hurry to my side.
What is their crimson meaning?
My loved one – have you died?