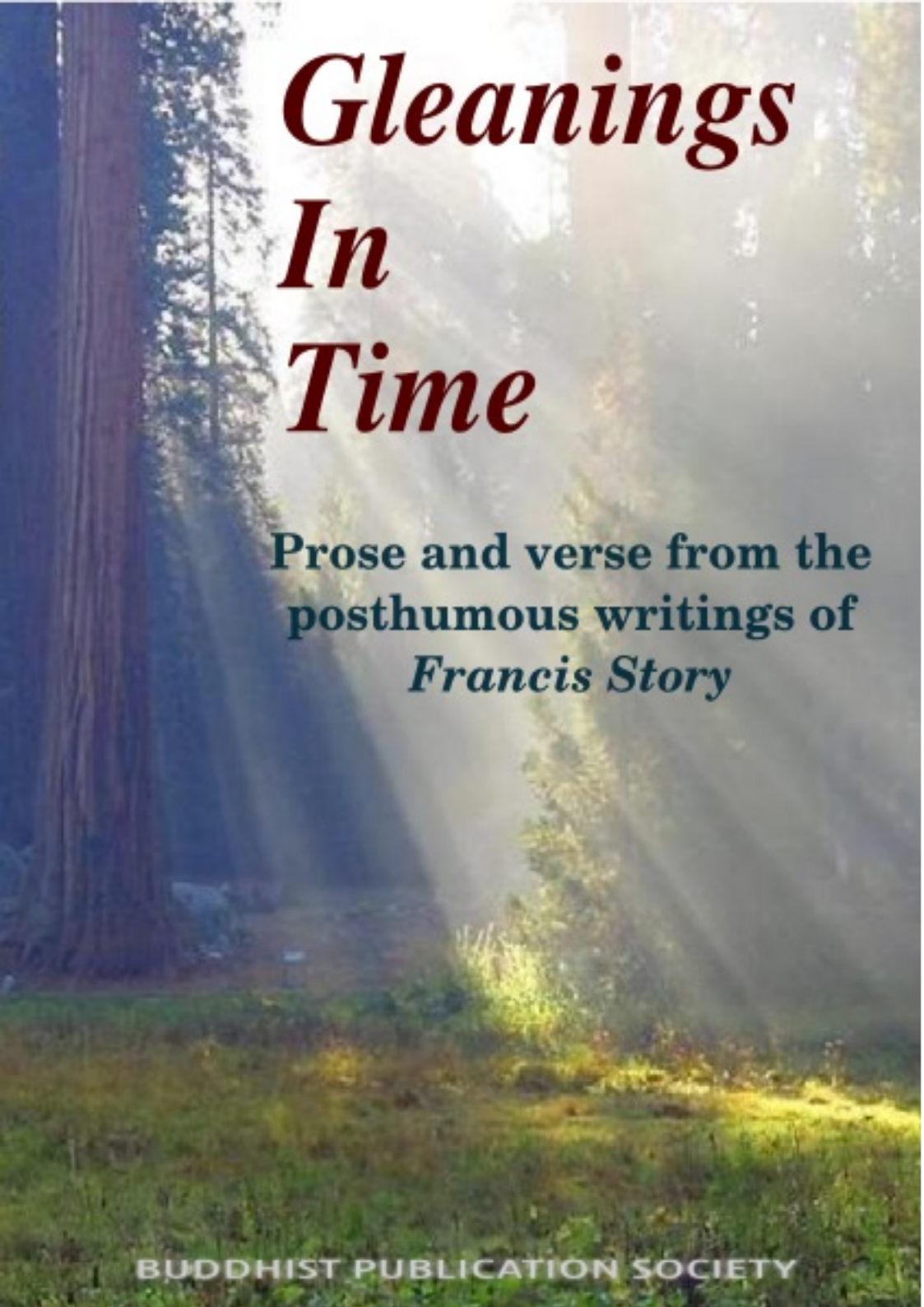
Gleanings
In
Time
Prose and verse from the
posthumous writings of
Francis Story
BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY

GLEANINGS IN TIME

Prose and Verse

From the
Posthumous Writings
of

FRANCIS STORY

The Forest Hermitage, Kandy

1976

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Editor's Preface

As a tribute to the memory of a dear and esteemed friend and of a brilliant and creative mind, these pages gleaned from his posthumous papers are here presented. They have been written in various periods of the author's life and hence have been called *Gleanings in Time* — a title suggested by a phrase in one of the poems.

Francis Story (1910–1971), an Englishman by birth and a Buddhist by conviction, was since 1946 chiefly known as a distinguished writer on Buddhist subjects. For acquainting his friends and readers with other facets of his brilliant mind, this selection from his non-Buddhist writings has been compiled. These pages start with two tales, which, it is felt, are of great literary merit. In particular, the deeply moving story, "The Mother", deserves a wider reading public than that which might be reached by the present publication.

The bulk of Francis Story's literary work on Buddhism is available in the three volumes of his "Collected Writings", issued by the Buddhist Publication Society (P. O. Box 61, Kandy, Sri Lanka). The first volume, "The Buddhist Outlook", also contains biographical material. A memorial booklet issued on the occasion of the author's death, can be

obtained from the same Society, which may also be approached for reprint permission of material contained in this volume.

Nyānaponika
Forest Hermitage
Kandy, Sri Lanka
January 1976.

TALES

The Mother

When the pain was over she lay slack and exhausted on the straw. By the dim light of the lantern that hung from a low beam overhead she could see the outline of the child resting in the crook of her arm, close up against her breast. It had not cried, only stared at her with strange, new-opened eyes as she wrapped it in a fold of her garment.

The stone outbuilding was cold, with a bitter draught coiling about the floor; and the strong earthy smell of the cattle was in her nostrils. Her husband had done his best to keep out the chill night air with straw and mats from their baggage piled in the corner, but still she did not feel warm. He sat silent beside her now, head sunk on his chest. In her own weariness she pitied the lines of strain in his lowered face, sharply furrowed by the light from above.

She closed her eyes, sinking into a sea of troubled thoughts. At once it seemed as though again she felt the stumbling and swaying of the tired asunder her, the rough chafing of the rug against her legs as they plodded on and on, interminably. Even the sharp pains of her labour could not wash out that memory.

Again she saw the long, straggling line of people, shoulders bowed and hopeless, moving endlessly before her on the road: old and young, the weak and the strong, a slow unchanging panorama of her people.

Drowsing, she woke with a start. A voice rang in her ears, as it seemed from ages of racial memory, that cried, "Absalom, my son — my son, Absalom! My son, my son!"

She eased the position of her cramped limbs and drew the child nearer to her, to the warmth of her body. The lantern was swaying slightly in the draught, so that the hut was alive with stealthy shadows. Hearing the soft movements of the cattle she felt reassured. Their faces were empty, indifferent and without cruelty. She felt a sudden love for them, as though they, more than the oppressors or the oppressed, were her kindred.

The patch of yellow light and the shadows blurred before her eyes. In the confusion of remembered events, impressions and fears her mind reached out for oblivion, for the cessation of feeling, but cessation would not come. The future stood at her side, a veiled threat, and all the time she was aware of the child sheltered in her arm. Her son.

Her thoughts drifted from level to level of consciousness, one impression giving place to another, sometimes two at the same moment, curiously and frighteningly mingled. Once she was on a bleak hillside, dark with a sense of unutterable woe. Shadows stretched on the ground before her, three black, enormously extended fingers. She was

searching for her son, but dared not lift her eyes from the ground. And again, a mass of people, seething and gesticulating: in their midst someone whom she thought was her son, yet, incomprehensibly, was not her son. And she was unable to reach him.

With an effort of will she lifted herself to another level, shaking off the terror that surrounded her. Then she was among a group of grave men, priests, in a temple. They were telling her that her son was hers no longer, that he belonged to mankind, to a destiny that was away and beyond her. Fiercely she protested, claiming him, her son, claiming him for the humble, secure life that was theirs. Fiercely, unavailingly; they were too strong for her, and agony swept over her, the bitter, hot tears running down her cheeks. What did they want of him? Why did they seek to take him from her — for the appeasement of their own dark tortured hearts — ruthlessly, with the strength of fate behind them? What did it mean?

She dragged herself out of the sickening dream, to the yellow light and shadows once more. Tears were wet on her aching eyes, and she saw everything through their mist; the stained floor, the beams and the cattle in their stalls. The actuality was less real than the dream. She pressed the child's small body to hers, protectingly. It moved slightly under the covering, and she tried to see its face in the uncertain light. A great, unspeakable tenderness enveloped her: it had the sharpness of hunger.

Drowsiness again, and once more the confusion of restless images. The acrid smell of the cattle gave place to something different, a heavy perfume that seems to rise and float about her. She was standing in a vast, high chamber, lit with candles and filled with indistinct forms. She tried to move, but it was as though the paralysis of nightmare was upon her; her limbs were rigid. A great weight rested on her shoulders, and a heavy robe, stiff with ornaments, constricted her body. Her feet were tightly encased in embroidered shoes. She tried to break free of the oppression that gripped her, but felt herself powerless to move. The weight of the robes and the thick perfume stifled her, making her gasp for breath. And all the time there was a low murmur of many voices in her ears. Then something told her, with desperate certainty, that she was trapped for all eternity, frozen into stiff immobility by the will of many millions of people. Looking down at her hands, she saw that they had become wax, and a waxen child was lying in them. And the thought came to her mind, "They have taken away my son, and given me — this!"

The heavy embroidered robe was too imprisoning: she must rid herself of it, and of the gripping shoes. With a quick, desperate movement she thrust back the rugs and shawl that covered her, stretching her legs, feeling the blood urgent in her veins once more. The cold air wakened her, but for a moment she lay thus, in the blessed relief of freedom.

The man beside her stirred and looked up. Then he rose and

gently replaced the rough coverings. For comfort she put her hand on his as he tucked the rug about her. Once more her eyelids dropped, and the same procession of scenes moved before her. In all of them she was seeking, ever seeking, for her son. But wherever she found herself he was not there; or else an intangible barrier lay between them. She saw him with many people, strangers: some were reviling him, others bowed themselves down to him. Yet whatever they did, she knew them for her enemies —those who placed themselves between her and her firstborn, eternally separating them. And once she saw him led before a man seated like a judge, on a high place. This man's face was very distinct to her, and she looked at it with eagerness and dread, as though she felt that it held the key to all these mysteries. And what she saw there made her shrink with greater horror than even cruelty would have done, for it was a face of grief and fear and weakness, like the face of one self-damned — the face of Man, who sits in judgment upon himself, and is his own executioner.

A loud clamour sounded in her ears, which she fancied came from a mob in the courtyard. She roused herself, and for a moment the courtyard of her dreams and the courtyard of the Inn became identified. Someone had been knocking on the door.

Her husband came up to where she lay. There were three dark forms behind him. His simple, homely face wore a bewildered expression.

“There are three men here, who have come to see our child,” he said.

She drew back, huddled in the straw, clutching the child to her breast.

“They shall not take him,” she sobbed. “They shall not take my son. I know what they have come for.”

“Hush, my dear. There is nothing to fear. They are not the Governor’s men, but plain, poor people like ourselves. I do not know what has brought them here. They are shepherds, and they say they saw a star ……”

The three men came forward into the lamplight. Silently, without a word, they sank to their knees, shaggy heads bowed.

The mother gazed at them with terror-filled eyes. It had begun.

Ah, my son, my son!

(1947)

The Wolf

Jake got the pup from old Tom Fletcher who had it bedded down on a heap of gunny-sacks in the lean-to behind his store. Jake had been doing a job of repairing to the old man's fence, and when he saw the pup, crouched shivering away from the raw air, he felt the familiar sensation, like something moving way down in his diaphragm, that he had known since he was a child.

"That dawg aint no use," old Tom said. "There's wolf in him, sure 'nuff. Wolf and police-dog both, I reckon. Guess I'll have to drown the runt when the tank thaws out."

Jake folded his long legs to bring him within reach and stretched out his hand, slipping it under the pup's belly. He gathered the scrawny body in his hand and lifted it up. Angular brittle bones under a tangle of rough hair, and two sharp eyes edged with fear. The pup wriggled in his grasp, uneasy, making small ineffective biting movements with its weak jaws. He felt its ribs against his palm, and its warm, soft belly.

"Don't do that," Jake said. "I'll take him."

Walking back home with the pup folded in the lining of his coat, warm against his body, Jake felt something in him

appeased. The faint troubling movement somewhere between his chest and midriff, that he got whenever something reminded him of the helplessness of living creatures, had sunk to a purring warmth, like a kitten curled there, replete and at ease. He whistled in time to his steps on the frosty road.

At six months old, no one would have called the pup handsome. Its legs had outgrown the rest of its body, and it loped along on large uncouth paws that gave promise, or threat, of more growth to come. It was shy in the presence of humans, and whenever a stranger came into the house it would retreat under a couch and lie with bristling hackles, fear showing in the whites of its eyes. Its coat was unlovely; a coarse mat in colour between brown and grey, that all Jake's efforts with a steel comb failed to keep untangled.

Jake was the only person it would allow to touch it, and even to him it showed only occasional response, just an occasional flick of a rough tongue against his hand. With the rest of the family it preserved a suspicious aloofness. It showed no active hostility except when someone approached it with overtures of friendship. Then a low, deep-throated growl, like that of a much older dog, warned the stranger to keep his distance. The family reconciled themselves to it with difficulty. Jake had always brought waifs and strays of various kinds into the house since boyhood, and time, it appears, had not cured him. Mostly they had been harmless animals, with nothing worse than dirt in their disfavour. When Jake was a boy his father had

sometimes been obliged to engineer the death, under mysterious circumstances, of unwanted animals, though this always had to be done without Jake's knowledge.

This pup, however, was different. The family was conscious of a certain menace in its presence; it made them uneasy. At the same time, because it was always with Jake, and Jake was no longer a boy, it was impossible to do anything about it.

"I tell you, that isn't a dog at all," Jake's father told him. "Old Tom Fletcher was riding you for a sucker. It's pure wolf. If you don't drive it away you'll be sorry, mark my words."

He was right, of course. That was one of the things about Pop that Jake found most difficult to forgive, that perpetual rightness of his. It enforced respect, but excluded love — at least, what Jake meant by love, which in some dim way he associated with that queer feeling in his chest. Jake never contradicted his father at such times. He called the pup, "Bongo!" and went out, the ungainly creature at his heels.

As time went on, Jake and the dog established a unique relationship. Unique, because Jake was the dog's only human friend. They were together all the time, in the fields and woods, and ranging the mountain tracks when Jake felt the urge to get away from the four walls of the house into the wider liberty of sky and far, low horizons. Then, with no other humans around to bring the nameless fear upon him, the dog would share Jake's solitary world with something

more than the ordinary companionship between man and dog. When Jake, tired of trekking, threw himself down on a green slope, Bongo would come and press his angular head against his body and look up at him with a kind of questioning look in eyes that had lost, for a time, their disturbing wildness. At such times it seemed to Jake as though the dog was puzzled, yet inarticulately glad, to find himself in that queer relationship with a human; as though there was something in him not quite prepared for it, and he found it strange. As though there was no background of instinct, or racial memory that fitted in with this situation.

Jake understood that look. He knew that feeling of not belonging, vaguely recognised its counterpart in himself. He too belonged somewhere else, somewhere far away.

The dog grew bigger; it was now larger than a police dog. Its sharp muzzle showed fangs that were bared in a gleaming threat when the mouth was curled back, in fear or anger. At Bongo's appearance other dogs would bristle and prepare for battle. There were so many fights, in which Bongo always came off victor, that in the end Jake had to keep the strictest watch on his dog. It was not entirely the wolf-dog's fault. He shied away from the company of other dogs as consistently as he did from that of humans. More often than not the fights were forced upon him.

That was Jake's defence, when his father told him, in his grave, judicial way, that the neighbours were complaining. His father's mouth tightened ominously.

“Soon it will be people, not dogs, that hound will savage. You know what sort of animal it is — a wolf. If you find yourself on a charge of manslaughter, I’m not the man to get up and tell the judge you didn’t know its nature. You’ve never known me put truth second to anything, and I shan’t begin for that dog’s sake. Or yours.”

Jake never, in his heart, blamed the dog; there was something in its loneliness that drew him closer to it. That alien quality they both had in common. Anyway, he didn’t believe it would ever attack a man unprovoked. When he looked into its eyes, suddenly become still and trustful in the aloneness they shared up and away beyond the habitations of men, it was still the small, brittle-boned pup he had lifted up from the gunny-sacks in old Tom Fletcher’s lean-to, shivering with cold and that nameless fear of unprotected things. When he scratched behind the hard, stiff ears it would turn its head and the rough tongue would curl for a brief moment round his fingers.

“It’s all right, Bongo, you can trust me, you know.”

You’ve saddled yourself with an outcaste all right, though, he told himself with grim humour; he’ll end by making an outcaste of you too. That’s if you don’t do it yourself first. “Pal,” he said, “me and you’ll have to take to the road one day. If you get much bigger this man’s town won’t hold you. Misanthropic cuss!” He punched the dog affectionately on its broad chest and it reared up, its face on a level with his as he sat on the step. It was the only time he’d ever

known a dog that looked straight and long into your face without turning its head, and it only did it to him. It placed them on a different footing, somehow, a kind of equality.

Since the day he had brought it home it had slept in Jake's room. When Jake himself wasn't around it spent most of the time in his room, stretched under the bed. If anyone came in, even Jake's brother, it would come out from its retreat and growl savagely. If they attempted to touch anything belonging to Jake its lips would curl back in a snarl. Once Jake's brother, wanting to borrow a tie, had opened a drawer, ignoring the dog's warning fangs. He only just got out and slammed the door in time. The dog never forgave him. After that incident it growled every time he came near.

Then one night a curious thing happened. Jake was lying asleep, and wakened to an uneasy consciousness that something was wrong. Something different had entered the room, an alien presence. He swam up into consciousness through vague mists of drowsiness. More and more the feeling of danger oppressed him as awareness returned. The room was barred by silver moonlight that fell across the worn carpet by his bed. Outside, he knew, the world was flooded with the radiance of a full moon.

Then his groping attention was held by two spots of yellow fires that gleamed at him out of the shadow. Rearing up on his elbow he saw the dog standing by his bed, its eyes glaring at him, all its coat bristling as though with released electricity. Its white fangs were bared in the pallid

moonlight, and his movement brought a low growl from its throat.

For a moment he stared, frozen to immobility, fixed by those fiery eyes, in which a kind of madness looked out at him. Then the dog lifted its gaunt head and the silence of the room was split by a wild inhuman cry. There was torment and menace in that awful howl, and for a second Jake's spine went cold and his stomach contracted. Cold and lonely and despairing, the sound filled the night with a dread that belonged to a world unknown to men. It was the voice of deep remote forests, of deserts and haunted prairie.

Jake said, "Bongo!" and held out his hand towards the dog. The head lowered and the sound died away in impalpable moon-filled wastes of night. The murderous fire died out of the eyes and the fangs were sheathed. "Bongo!" he repeated. "What's the matter, Pal?" He touched the dog's head, fingering the stiff ears, the way he knew it liked. But though the dog was calmed, its body trembled and a low whimper came from it. Jake continued to fondle it until it quietened down and pushed its head against him. Presently he got up and going to the window drew the curtains right across, darkening the room. Before he did so he caught a glimpse of the night, flooded with a cold, inhuman radiance from the moon at its full. Trees and hills stood out sharply in a light that etched them on his retina. He continued to see them a long time after he had returned to bed. The dog lay quiet in the darkened room.

Next day the dog seemed the same as usual, except that it showed no appetite for food. At breakfast his father said, "What was that noise in the night? It seemed to come from your room. Was it the dog?" Jake noticed the peculiar inflection his father always put into the word when he called Bongo a dog.

Jake looked steadily down at his plate. He made his voice sound casual as he said, "Yeah, it was Bongo. He got kinda scared at something. Guess he saw a ghost." He thought, sure, it was a ghost — a ghost out of his ancestral past. Perhaps wolves aren't the only ones who have them, either. Perhaps humans see them sometimes.

His father made no comment, but his mouth took on the hard, straight line Jake knew so well. The line that came when speech was over and finished.

Bongo continued to sleep in his room, but whenever there was moonlight Jake fastened the curtains securely across the windows. He even hung a blanket across to keep out every ray of light. The dog grew bigger; it never seemed to stop growing but it still kept the gaunt look it had always had, despite the thick flesh and heavy muscles that good feeding had given it since the starved days of his puppyhood. Now more than ever, the rest of the household regarded it with distrust, and while Jake was away from the house made him keep the dog locked in his room. His mother complained of the nuisance of having a room that could not be entered for cleaning — or any other purpose. When Jake came in he had

to call out the dog's name before he turned the handle and opened the door. Then Bongo would bound out, delighted, and cover him with excited welcoming caresses, just like any other dog. Jake did not mind its roughness, the heavy paws thrust on his chest and that formidable jaw close to his face. But the moment anyone else appeared the old wild fear would come into its eyes, and it would slink away to the shelter of the room.

Outside the house, when they went for long walks, its reaction to humans was not so bad. The dog simply ignored them, only keeping a watchful eye on any of Jake's friends who came up to speak to him. Away from the encompassing walls it shed its distrust, and with distrust its savage resentment. In the same way, in Jake's bedroom it felt itself in its own territory; the small room with its shelter of darkness under the bed, was its lair, its own place, where it belonged. That was the only part of the house where it seemed at home.

Alone, Jake talked to the dog reassuringly, sure of its response, confident in the intimate bond that united them. "Sure, Pal, you're O.K. with me. You can trust me, can't you, Bongo?" And the dog would gaze into his face with that peculiar steady un-doglike stare.

One day, while Jake was working at the garage in town where he had taken a job, a telephone call came for him. It was his brother. The dog had gone mad, he told Jake. It had started howling and battering itself against the door, and

when Pop had half opened it the dog had thrust its muzzle round and almost torn his arm. He had only managed to close again the door with difficulty, thrusting the dog back with his stick. Now Pop said the dog had to be killed, and Jake would have to do it.

Jake hung up the receiver with a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach. So it had come at last. Some part of his mind had always known it would, had feared this day, trying to thrust it away. When he reached home his father met him at the gate. All he said was, "Get your gun, Jake. And don't miss that first shot." Jake muttered, "I must see Bongo first, see what's happened to him."

Inside his room, all was quiet. Jake turned the handle of the door, tentatively. The familiar low growl answered him. Then there was the crash of a heavy body against the woodwork and the dog's harsh, savage bark.

Jake clenched his teeth together. Mustn't feel fear, he told himself. It's not enough to pretend; dogs — animals — can always tell. They smell the change in your blood. Then they go mad. Probably that's what has happened, he thought. Somebody has been around here, worrying the dog, then got frightened. That wouldn't be Pop, though.

"Bongo!" he called, softly. He repeated the dog's name several times, coaxingly, caressingly, but keeping his voice firm. The dog barked again, but this time the sound was different. Jake opened the door slowly.

The dog was sitting crouched in the far corner quivering,

the wild light not yet gone from its eyes. When it saw Jake it started up and stood watching him warily. He went forward and held out his hand. The dog was starting to come towards him when a sound behind him made Jake half turn. His father had come up, carrying his stout stick, that was almost a cudgel. Next moment the dog threw itself forward, jaws gaping and saliva dripping from its mouth. Just in time, Jake whipped round and blocked the doorway, stopping the dog's headlong rush. Its impetus carried it against his legs, and he felt the strong teeth meet in a grip that tore open the leg of his thick denim trousers. At the same time his father, from behind, brought his heavy stick down with a crash on the dog's shoulder. Jake grabbed the stick. "Keep out of this, Pop," he said. "Give me the stick."

When he had the stick in his hand he dealt the dog another blow. It drew back, and he pulled the door to behind him. Then Jake and the dog faced one another in the small room. Now it was all wolf; pain and rage had obliterated everything else. Its hair stood up in a stiff crest on its quivering back, its fangs were bared in a snarl. It made another leap at Jake, and this time he brought the stick down full on its muzzle. In the moment of doing so he felt himself turn sick; the pain seemed to cut into his own skull. But when the dog came at him again he beat it once more. Now it was man against wolf; no place for compunction, for pity. He beat the dog again and again, on head, shoulders, back, avoiding its teeth with rapid movements that carried him round and round the small space between door and

bed. The dog's teeth gashed his arm — would have torn it but for the blow that deflected its head at the critical moment, but he scarcely felt anything.

Presently the dog's attacks weakened, and all at once it was over. The dog lay exhausted at his feet, with dripping jaws and ears laid back, its eyes white and glazed. Slowly, wearily, it crawled away, into the far corner of the room. Jake remained standing, never taking his eyes from the dog, feeling his own exhaustion coming over him in thick, nauseating waves. A constriction in his chest made breathing laboured and painful. Still keeping his eyes on the dog, he lowered himself onto the bed and sat there, the blood drumming in his ears, watching the dog.

Presently he said "Bongo!" and was surprised to find that he could not get his voice steady. "Bongo," he said. "Come here, Pal. Come here." The stick was still in his hand; he had forgotten it. He dropped it on the floor. Then he started talking to the dog. At the sound of his voice it quivered all over, and after a time it started crawling towards him. It crawled on its stomach, and for a hideous moment Jake thought he had injured it badly. Then came realisation. The dog's spirit was broken, its pride was humbled to this abject form creeping snakelike along the floor towards his feet. Hell, that hurt; Jake felt as though he had crushed something fine. Perhaps something finer than he, or any of them, knew. He slipped off the bed onto his knees on the floor and took the dog's blood-streaked head in his hands.

It seemed a long time after that he heard his mother's voice outside. "Jake! Are you all right? What happened?"

Jake got up and went to the door, leaving the dog lying where it was. He went out to meet his mother's anxious eyes. When she saw his torn clothes and the blood on his arm, her hand went to her mouth. She started to say something, but Jake brushed pass her roughly. Then remorse flooded him. "It's all right, Mom, just a few tears," he said thickly. "I'll go fix it." He just didn't want to talk to anyone.

When he came out of the bathroom he found his father in the kitchen. Jake told him what had happened. When he had finished, his father said, "Well, this is the end. That wolf has to go. I just won't have it in the house another night."

Jake didn't answer, but his rebellion rose against the inflexible barrier of that will. Hell, the dog meant something he couldn't put into words. It was friendship and savage strength; and at the same time dependence, the shivering pup on the gunny-sacks. He wanted to turn to his father and say, "No, Pop, you're wrong — there's no need for anyone to be afraid of Bongo. Let him alone, and he'll be all right. Give him another chance!" But the memory of wolf eyes blazing with cold madness in the moonlight, the hound's white fangs bared when anyone approached, stopped him. To Jake, Bongo was a dog, but to others —? He could not get past the insurmountable barrier of that dual nature, the conflict of it. If he hadn't wakened that

night, if some instinct had not laid chilly fingers on his consciousness, would the wolf have triumphed? If he had not been there to recall it, what then? There was his mother, his brother and sisters.

Feeling deadly sick, but with a cold numbness about him, Jake crossed the kitchen, avoiding his father's eyes, which he knew were following him. He reached down his gun from the shelf and slowly loaded it.

There was no longer any sensation in him as he stood once more outside the bedroom door. Thought had drained out of him. He called the dog's name as usual before entering the room, but his voice was toneless, and sounded strange in his own ears. A whimper answered him. Jake turned the handle and slowly entered. The dog had again retreated under the bed. He called it, and after a time it came out, but it seemed to sense something changed in his manner. Something seemed to warn it, and it advanced slowly, hesitantly. Jake tried to raise the gun, and succeeded to bring it into position, but at that point his resolution failed him. He stepped back to the door and opened it slightly, the hound's eyes following him. "Pop!" he called. "Come here. You gotta help me!"

His father's step sounded in the passage, and at the same instant the hound leapt for the half-open door, terror in its eyes. Jake swung the gun and struck it, slamming the door again in the same moment. With a sound that was half a growl of rage and half a howl of pain the dog slung back

and crouched in the far corner. Jake raised the gun to his shoulder and fired. The report filled the small room, but the dog had moved a split second earlier. It sprang from the corner and across the room. There was the crash of glass as the great body hurled itself through the closed window.

Jake stood for a moment dazed with the suddenness of its leap. Then he threw the door open and rushed out, following the dog. In the yard he caught sight of it streaking for the gate, but the gate was closed. It turned, baffled, and in that moment he fired again. The dog half reared into the air, gnashing at nothing with foam-flecked jaws. It uttered no sound, only a stifled whimper, then it turned towards Jake and started painfully limping towards him. He fired again, straight at the great chest, and this time the dog sank to the ground.

When he reached it, the limbs were twitching in final agony. Jake looked down and a feeling of utter despair gripped him; a sick loathing of himself. He touched the dog's rough head, seeing only the blood that trickled in a slow, thin stream from its chest and shoulder. He tried to say something, as if he was asking the dog to forgive him this last, unforgivable betrayal, but the words he wanted to say would not come. Other words echoed in his memory, filling his brain with the pain of returning thought. "Bongo, you know you can trust me, don't you? Even if me and you have to take the road together, Pal." They followed him as he slowly got to his feet and turned back to the house, and something told him that he would never wash them from

his memory. Half way across the yard he saw his father coming out of the house. He turned on his heel and let himself out of the yard gate, his unseeing gaze fixed on the distant hills.

(1950)

MISCELLANEOUS PROSE WRITINGS

Sea-Dream

A Fragment

The inscrutable face of the ocean!

For all its protean changes between storm and calm, for all the range of expression it borrows from drifting clouds and the sparkle of reflected light from sun and moon, for all its turbulence of heaving waves and its explosions of foam, white against black rocks, basically it is always the same — a vast mysterious expanse masking unknown depths. Depths of huge mountain ranges, dark, chill valleys where in the gloom solid shadows move through ponderous silence, lighted only here and there by eerie phosphorescent sparks, and where, instead of the trees and flowering shrubs of earth, great masses of spongy vegetation spawn and proliferate namelessly and slowly wave their ragged arms in the liquid draughts that blow through their density.

A bizarre world, ruled by squamous lords as predatory as

medieval barons, where from cavernous recesses coiling arms stretch out and weave questingly and great blank eyes watch for the approaching prey; where squalid multiple-legged creatures with skins of bone scrabble in the silt of centuries and where, halted on the threshold between plant and animal, ambiguous forms subsist on the debris of a myriad deaths. Tubular, globular, stelliform, amorphous, with retractible eyes, lidless eyes or no eyes at all, with every variety and density of epidermis from the cellophane integument that exhibits the intestines as though in a specimen bottle to an impenetrable carapace of blackish green or an organic outcropping of stone; with every variety of three-dimensional locomotion from the nervous scuttle of brittle legs to the slow doom-like drift of aquatic flight, the zeppelin progression of toothed monsters; with serpentine writhings or with the languid motion of diaphanous fins, or fixed in the immobility of roots wherever the undersea drift has deposited them, they populate and pullulate each in its kind throughout the immeasurable expanse, fathom upon fathom, mile after mile. This nightmare is nature's laboratory, experimental plant and the matrix of the world.

Life and death meet more intimately here than in the upper air. For this is also a graveyard. On nameless mountain-sides unknown to any map, or sunk in ravines between towering cliffs in salty, palpable night, huge skeletons of rotting wood and metal lie; gaunt, bare ribs curving upwards from vertebrae bedded in the slime, their long bony arms, from which every vestige of the canvas that once

bore them onward joyfully through the shout of the wind has long since decayed, stretched upward as though appealing to the heaven that betrayed them. Great carved poops, festooned and galleried, drip with weed like the hanging gardens of Babylon; bulkheads are encrusted with generations of mollusces and out of the square portholes (toothless gaps in the inane smile of death) small operational flights of fishes make their purposeful way, unclassified creatures crawl or slither and, parodying the Bharatanatyam of the giant squids, threadlike tentacles of weed weave and waver and become entangled one with another like thin whiskers round a lipless mouth. Lost forever in the crushing weight of water and the silence they lie, these proud adventurous ships — great merchantmen, galleons, men-of-war, besides the splintered wrecks of frail Polynesian outriggers caught in some unrecorded storm between two islands.

Here are the painted ships of Carthage that traded with Egypt and the glittering East; here are the junks of China, solid in Burmese teak, that knew every port between Shanghai and Alexandria; here are three-deckers that once were loaded with the slaves and legionaries of Rome, and long lean Greek ships that drank too deep of the wine-coloured Aegean, long boats of Viking marauders that bristled with horned helmets like the back of a porcupine, and set forth to ravage by fire and sword ……

Random Thoughts

Judging by the chaos in the world it would seem that God really has died and heaven become a democracy.

Social progress, if it comes at all, comes slowly. It has to ripen in the minds of the people first, and manifest in their social attitudes by degrees. But it is a tender fruit, which can be destroyed by any adverse wind. No matter how placid the surface of the lake, the mud of lust, hatred and delusion is always lying at the bottom, ready to be stirred up.

Revolution is a way of getting rid of old tyrants, in order to start again with new ones.

The stupidity of men is only a reflexion of the inane universe they live in. The wise do not really feel at home in it.

The highest achievement of philosophy is found in Nāgārjuna, who refuted everything, including his own grounds of refutation.

Very few statements are so true that they do not need, some time or another, to be contradicted.

What we are pleased to call sanity is nothing more than the lunacy of the majority.

What is so specially praiseworthy about the so-called 'life-affirming' philosophies? One says 'Yes, yes, yes!' to Life,

and Life answers right back, 'No, no, no!'

Religion teaches us to bear the sufferings of others with resignation.

Religion has an exoskeleton which makes it invulnerable from without; it can be destroyed only from within. The exoskeleton is the egoism of the faithful.

One of the advantages of being truthful is that when one does have to tell a lie it stands a better chance of being believed.

Philosophy is born of detachment. Art is born of involvement.

We commend meekness in others because of the advantage it gives us over them.

Everybody praises humility, and everybody tramples on the humble.

A man should not mind being without friends, so long as he has a door to close against his enemies.

Self-praise has one feature to commend it: it is always sincere.

One should never miss a chance of doing a good action. But one should take care never to learn its result, for it will seldom be encouraging.

To return good for evil is obviously the best way to encourage evil. It is a good thing that Christians never took the advice seriously. If I reward a man for cheating me, I

shall be to blame when he cheats somebody else.

Philosophically, it is much easier to determine what one should not do than what one should. Philosophy tends to inaction.

The more clearly one recognises ultimate moral values the more difficult it becomes to decide between relative ones. They lose their value, and appear as mere points of view.

Of Free Will it might be said, as Dr. Johnson said of the belief in ghosts, that all reason is against it, while all experience is for it.

To construct an original philosophy it is necessary to be the victim of one unchanging mood. When we scrutinize the lives of the philosophers — Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Kant, etc. — we find this is invariably so. The ordinary man at times thinks with Nietzsche, at times with Bentham and at other times with nobody in particular, and for that reason he cannot be a constructive philosopher. But his situation is better than that of the philosopher, who clings to a partial truth in the fond belief that it is the whole truth, and magnifies it into a mania.

One should sacrifice oneself for the world — but in moderation.

A dictator is only a man who believes in anarchism — for himself.

The greatest blasphemy is the piety of hypocrites.

The most illogical people are always the most vociferous.

Tragedy is inherent in the human situation. If it isn't one damn thing, it's another.

I have always found moral problems fascinating, simply because they are so difficult, and unlike the problems of chess, there is a real value in trying to find their solution.

"Lead us not into temptation" the Christians pray — just as though they didn't love being led into temptation!

To talk of unnatural vices is an absurdity: all vices are only too natural.

The reason why religion extols poverty is because only the rich can afford to be wicked.

It is only the beauty of nature, art and science that makes the world at all attractive; for the rest is a raging madhouse, a sordid brothel a leprosarium and a knocker's yard. And despite all the ugliness and squalor, the beauty of physical bodies is on the whole greater than that of minds. There are plenty of good-looking people, but how few whose minds are not completely negligible! Foul as the animal body is, most people's minds are still fouler. Stupidity, the father and mother of all evil, possesses them.

Death is nothing more than a periodical truce with life.

I am not sure whether life is a tragedy at which one sometimes has to laugh, or a comedy at which one often has to weep.

For one's own liberation — Buddhism.

For art — Taoism.

For the State — Confucianism.

I owe to my upbringing the most valuable lesson of my life: how to enjoy boredom.

There are two types of moralists: those who punish others for their own sins and those who punish themselves for the sins of others.

A man can call himself a pacifist only when he disclaims all responsibility for the fate of others.

I have not the sustained aggressiveness necessary to be a pacifist.

People never forgive one who destroys their illusions, save in very exceptional circumstances. The Truth of Dukkha (Suffering) came to be accepted only because He who taught it was free from it.

There are some men for whom the sex act is a form of aggression; others for whom it is a type of suicide. One seeks to dominate; the other to be annihilated. There are few to whom it is purely and solely a sensual need.

Whitman's verse is the surge and bellow of a mighty tide; images, wave upon wave, piling up and collapsing in an ecstasy of foam; the cumulative power that beats urgently in the man's blood bursting all bonds, in magnificent all-embracing creativeness. If there is a music of the spheres, it

is this.

For most people, to die and be reborn is the only way to get rid of the accumulated prejudices of a lifetime.

The reason why so many men die soon after retirement is because they would have died much earlier if only they had had time for it.

I do not care what people say of me, unless it happens to be true.

The Doctrine of Political Compulsion

My own concept

To survive in a world of division and competition, every country has to be nationalistic. From this spring manifold evils: race-hatreds, cold wars, policies of international bluffing and reciprocal cheating. Politicians are compelled to protect the interests of their own country by whatever means appear to them feasible in a particular situation. They are often compelled to rouse dormant antagonisms or even create them artificially when a spirit of chauvinism is required to meet some specific threat. To pretend non-nationalism is hypocrisy.

When Mme. Roland said: “Liberty! What crimes are committed in thy name!” she was only experiencing a truth that is applicable to all abstract ideas, such as Justice, Progress, Democracy, etc. Not the least of these crimes are those perpetuated in the name of Mercy. These may be defined as Crimes of the Abstract Noun.

REFLECTIONS

From Letters and Notes

The Map

When we look at a map we see something that is a representation of a real country. Every major feature of that country is marked on the plain surface before us, and it offers us a guide to what we should actually find in that part of the earth's surface, if we were to visit it.

But we do not suppose because every mountain, river and forest, every town and village is shown there, that the map is a duplicate of the countryside. We know that it is only a representation, very greatly reduced and very schematized, to bring its salient features within the compass of a total view, of an enormous complex of physical phenomena.

So it is with the world as presented to us through our senses. The picture we receive of it stands in relation to the totality just as the map, say of England, does to England itself. It is only a meagre and reduced representation of the whole reality.

Consciousness

The consciousness of an animal is limited to one level; it functions in one key. Human consciousness, on the other hand, is capable of activating on many different levels alternately. We see this in the way in which a man, when he leaves his office leaves behind him all the mental environment made up of his business preoccupations and enters into another world, that of his domestic and personal life. That, too, may have several sub-divisions: the world of his sports, recreations and hobbies, of his family cares, and the larger world of his imagination, either independently creative or stimulated by an artistic or cultural environment. In each of these worlds he has to some extent a different personality. At his club he may exhibit quite different characteristics from those he bears at home or in the office.

The same applies to an even greater extent, to his world of inner experience, which is never completely identical with that of any other person.

Time

Time is the space between events; space is the time between objects.

Time as a property of phenomena or existing as a product of phenomena. Without observing (sensorily) any events outside myself I have a perception of the passage of time, or of my own consciousness projected through time, by the physiological processes: breathing, heart-beats etc. Without these, there could be no consciousness of time. But this

consciousness of time, or rather duration, does not cause me to infer a real time; what I interpret as time is a series of obstructions imposed upon my consciousness.

God

Activity implies desire; and desire, incompleteness. The creation or emanation of the world could not have come from a source that is self-sufficient (*svabhāva*) and had in it no latent activity. God, as an anthropomorphic being, is considered to have willed his creation, and with a specific object such as all volitional activity must have; to wit, that he should be praised eternally by his creation, man. He wishes to be an object in the consciousness of another being, and until that end was gained, he must have been suffering from the sense of his incompleteness; his self-sufficiency, far from being a state of perfection, lacked the conditions by which every living being feels itself to have effective existence; that is, in its relation to an external world and in particular, to other sentient beings, whose awareness of it as an object defines its mode of individuality.

Consciousness without an object is unconsciousness. Wherever consciousness exists it must do so in dependence upon and in relation to something other than itself, something external. There is consciousness of things seen, heard, smelt, tasted and touched. When we come to the sixth sense, mental apperception, we find that it is furnished solely from the memories of things seen, heard, smelled,

tasted and touched, and more or less abstract ideas which, however, are ultimately derived from those memory impressions. All imaginary concepts are built up in this way; for example, remembering the head of a woman, the body of a lion and the wings of an eagle, we create imaginatively a sphynx. Joining the torso of a man to the body of a horse, we have a centaur. When primitive man combined the related ideas of father, chief of the tribe and maker of tools, he conceived the idea of the Creator-god. In none of these concepts — sphynx, centaur, Creator-god — is there any element that did not have a prior existence in the world of consciousness; there is nothing that is purely the creation of the human mind. One of the weakest arguments of theology is that if God did not exist, man could not think about him. Man is all the time thinking of things that do not exist, but the parts which compose them are in existence already: he is putting them together in novel combinations.

Partial ideas

The 'obsession with partial ideas' has always been a feature of human thinking. Naturally, because no idea can be entertained in its completeness by the finite mind: it depends upon and is conditioned by too many other ideas. It cannot be isolated from the general pattern of experience. And besides, every idea has at least two constituents, the intellectual and the emotional, which, although an intelligent person may be capable of separating them, he

still may not be able to keep them apart when the idea has to be translated into action. For if an idea is solely intellectual, it lacks life. The driving force to make it operative is drawn from its emotional components. So it seems that since ideas are bound to be partial, the only thing to do is to prevent them from becoming obsessional. That is the great difficulty today. The diffusion and pressure to accept these partial ideas is now so effectively carried out by massive cultural exchanges and the media of communication — or should one say of infection? Formerly the facts of geography and linguistics prevented them from becoming worldwide. They remained phenomena more or less encapsulated by natural laws, like the Children's Crusade of the Middle Ages. The mania for hunting witches, for example, spread all over the continent and to America, but never penetrated to Asia; it went just so far as the spread of obsessive ideas was allowed to go by the limited communications of the time. But now any badly thought-out and misleading idea can gain worldwide hearing if it once captures the press, radio and cinema, and so finds a recognised place in international folklore.

Man in this World

It is incredible to me that people can fail to see that the world is a brutal place — essentially and as an integral part of its construction. That is where the fault lies, and it makes the choice inescapable — either to accept the world, with all

its appetites, its demands arising from them, its enforced brutalities, or to reject it utterly. But to give meaning to the second choice, something better must be offered, and to most people that something better simply does not exist. That is the real tragedy of the human situation. People will not give up what they have, or seem to have, for the nebulous and uncertain experiences they know nothing of except through the communications of mystics — today a much-discredited class of people. So they go struggling on in a nightmare. A nightmare of increasing horror as man himself adds more and more filth dredged out of his animal nature and dumped into it. The essential condition of life is conflict. From this alone we might deduce that when we say 'life' we are speaking of something that is false in itself, something corrupt and defective. Something not worth the pain that it involves. But how many are prepared to make this deduction? The most they will admit is that life as it is now is unsatisfactory; but they rescue it as an article of belief — 'faith in life' — by saying that it need not be like this; that by virtue of some miraculous social or political transformation, or just by the progress of science(!) it will one day become perfect. So the delusion persists, the nightmare goes on. And out of the nasty mess they diligently seek out and clutch at their petty little enjoyments — so pathetically frail, so doomed from their very inception! — and justify life to themselves, to keep the treasured delusion alive, wrapping themselves in it more and more tightly, as one makes a cocoon for oneself of the bedclothes

when the night turns cold.

But when the night of arctic cold descends upon the earth — the bitter, comfortless night in which millions of people are now living, in which millions have always lived — when it descends for them, individually, when its icy fingers tear away the wrappings, then they realise that they have been deceiving themselves, they mourn that life has cheated them.

No, life has not cheated them. They have cheated themselves. There is no deception about life, really; its true nature is there, clear for everyone to see, if he will but look at it straight. It is the whole of life that must be looked at, not one's own artificially-separated portion of it, or a portion of that portion.

POEMS

This is my country

This is my country,
this earth, this people,
the black, the brown, the white
and yellow-skinned,
Arctic to tropics, living as they must,
sordidly, splendidly in
them I trust.

Gods pass away, but that of God in man
no tyranny can quench,
no terror kill.
The evil and the meanness turn to dust,
the good lives still.

You that are dead ...

You that are dead
have you yet found the catalyst
that shall make all things conformable?
You sought for that of God
in every man. Sometimes you found it.
But not in every man.

Striving to see beyond
anger, could you ignore
greed, indifference, self-seeking
and above all
the matrix of man's failure, stupidity?

It was not easy
to be on the side of man,
to live in mankind involves some paradox.
When each departure means
a new death,
something denied, that lives its death
a subterranean worm
riddling convictions, needs,
the personal
constellations of your world.

Did you see
like Jacob Boehm, the evil
that is in God'?

This death is but a new forgetting,
the cancellation of
the old partial amnesias.

Niraya

Summer is a trance.
The grass is drenched
in vivid light. Rays exorbitant
cascade unquenched
        from a maniac sky.

The air quivers
in an electric dance.
Nothing else moves
but the taut nerves.

        A glance
is a sword-thrust
                a sweep of fire.
        Golden, fiercely burning,
the slow, ardent rivers
voluptuously embrace the earth.

        Within my body
a small animal shivers —
        is it with ecstasy or pain …?

        O Earth, ceaselessly bearing
this intemperate load! Yearning
I wait to see your soul
mount into purple clouds,
your voice raised in the thunder …

I embrace the trees
trees in their silence uncaring,
nourished by tears
of the long seasons,
sharing
the long seasons of your endless life.

And I am wandering
wandering, lost in these
dreams.

A metallic country;
the sword-leafed forest;
world without ease —
this is my home.

Landscape with Megaliths

On the dry bed of day
        time-struck stone-stoic
these remnants crouch, and pausing
beneath a violet drum-taut sky
hands grasp, eyes deflower
        their imbecile majesty
        and all the transactions of their love
vain in the torrid hour.

In dark of these tremendous bones
        spin worlds invisible
        waiting on other dawns whose knell
as ours their nightlong moans
reiterate. Why must I hear
        those unheard cadences — why sleep
        lay not your finger on the quaking vast
my solitary truth must dare?
        Sad peace, that harbours still
the red and murmurous past.
I breathe the mad holiness of kings
        locked in your frozen will.

Satiate with sight
        — immensities too long displayed
        where no green heart of forgiving leaves
but twisted snakes and grey
        horned ghosts of drought

trill their high swooning song
all between vulture dawn and night

— still the old agonies live on
to an uncouth wilderness of day
and a death-bearing sun.

Winter Solstice

Is this the end of seeking? This
hour of midnight
the bated silence and mute empty faces
eyes turned within and the cold kiss
of frost on hills where the restless moon paces
the hour between dark and light?

Upon the door a sign, and over
the still heart a spell
the winds have left in their swift coursing
after the heels of a dead lover,
And the soft feet pacing and pausing
by the tall gates of hell.

Here led the way, and there was
no backward-turning.
Summer is past, this is another season
and the chill hand that wrote its laws
has locked in iron earth the heart's last treason
with its first learning.

Say it had never been. Say
the red leaf that knew
the bitter sap unwithered. Life is a brittle
thin integument linking day to day
while stiff clock-hands irreverently whittle
time out of view.

But
To be indifferent is to be
two-thirds a stranger, to whom the waiting
is no more than a sharpening between
self and reality. For then the world
eternally committed to loving and hating
(and cosmic authority of the office-file)
scatters the path with reproachful faces
painting humility and resignation after the style
of Doré, the dark satanic virtues for far
degenerate races.

The mystic is stranger to irony; and yet
himself its public manifestation,
wedded unknowing from birth to that
wild incompatible combination
of human necessities and the elusive factor
that makes nonsense of coming and going
retreat and advance.
He is an actor
upon two stages, playing two parts and knowing
neither completely. Though he may be thinking
the thoughts of God, his eating and drinking
is done with the dogs
the corrective largeness of his gesture
immediately obliterated
by self-generated
ineluctible fogs.

* * *

From the unknown into the obscure and back
into the unknown. A brief gesticulation
is all the history of man's mind.
The knack
of imperturbability — a trifling something
of ineffective moral castigation —
but the impenetrable and inaccessible
are still impenetrable, inaccessible,
stillness being only an inhibition
to freeze the normal generosity of action,
mocking with closed doors the suddenness
of death—
the penultimate act
of willed anticipation
(it might be called)

* * *

So once again the door is closed, the house
empty. Yet there is no finality
in its reversion to the rat and mouse.
To leave is but to return; to espouse
another vision of inanity
in this unsettled dust, till finally ……
there is no finally.

Nocturno

The night
is ridiculous like the blind birth of mules.
It crouches under the negroid trees
in crepuscular grasses where
lie the day's forgotten ornaments
and it stifles.
There is no air.

When shall I be able to forget,
to remember anew?
Only the moment is sure
when in a crescendo of minute artillery
crickets juggle out of their wings
vain evocations of woodwind and strings
mixed with the toneless trumpeting
of frogs.
The orchestration is very poor.

The inane night holds me
like unloved arms, while the sick breath
of frangipani drops in lumps solid as dough
from an invisible tree.
And the presiding genius of all this futility
rides complacently remote.
O moon, I dislike your shining vacuous face.

Shadows ought to be silent

but here
they chatter and clatter, busy as maniacs
or old women who mumble and fuss
among objets d'art and cooking-pots.

And somewhere a fanatical bird
with a shriek like a knife
keeps shouting something that might be
a political slogan.

Perhaps it is, after all,
nothing but the night's
satanic comment on human life.

And so it seems ...

And so it seems
you have forgotten everything. For these were dreams
like flowers held too long in your hand
impatient of living but yet
reluctant to die.

I understand
and having understood, cannot forget
but also having known too much
can let the days go by unresisting,
only the accustomed “ironical touch”
persisting
when everything else is gone
and each is himself alone.

Shadows moving along a dusty road
that leave no trace. Take up your load
again, as I do mine.
It is simpler so,
since by our nature we must define
limitations, employ expedients, and cannot know
the path another takes to his journey’s end.
Time destroys and the winds scatter
lover from lover, friend from friend.

Life and death are a very personal matter.

(By the destruction of a single thought

this world shall become naught)

Dreams cannot help us here.
Bound to the daily needs, eating and drinking
we challenge eternity, our fear
wrapped in meticulous thinking
carefully spun out in words, significations
to the appropriate mood, but never
the looked-for relevations.
We shall continue to be clever
until the skull
becomes as hollow as the eaten-out heart
and worms pursue their dull
entangled amours in each rotting part.
What do we expect to share?

"Nouse rentrons du cimetière".

So, after all
I shall be silent. Only recall
moments that when they lived were as real as this
with darkness creeping into a quiet room.
Time will dismiss
everything else. All things consume
all other things eternally, and live
only in the process.

You
that were so ardent to give —
was it only because you cherished
but one possession? But that you had lost, and knew.

Fifty years after ...

Fifty years after the event I consider
in a different world and with different eyes
the informalities of cause. Logic has more than one
accountancy; there was, as I saw at first,
after putting aside the evasions and lies,
a responsibility that was not my own
in their coming together, their making out of their lust
another destiny. It was not the worst
thing they had done. But that it should be mine
was in a separate order of intention, alien to them.
In that they had no part.

Now I unfold
an anterior life that predicted this
laid it upon me; it was something they could not sweat out
with their bodies in the dreary bedroom.
Something, it seems,
was there with them, burning for a fresh start.

But for what?
Only once more to savour
the mould of stagnation creeping from the bowels?
To draw in the breath of dusty walls,

It might, one would think,
have chosen another punishment.

Lest there should be ...

Lest there should be
no willing of untried ways,
no hazard thought dragged from glimmering depths
accusingly to stand, challenging the day's
completeness — a blotched summer wall,
ascending ladders into a kingdom of stars,
figuring each its own truth; — lest we should doubt
soever briefly never, nor never recall
fish, reptile, bird,
that built and contrived this our ultimate sense,
we cling to which is but a word
of acceptance, a word only to prevent
each moment coming to life again
with the old fret and accustomed pain.

How blunt the sense …

How blunt the sense
that does not see the tremour in the earth,
that does not hear
in splash of fountains, birdsong at morning,
the long slow moan of the world's desire,
smell a corpse-stench in the breath of the rose,
taste in its festival wine
sourness of unwilling sacraments,
or feel death's hand where smoothly goes
the seeking hand of love;
how close knit to this design
are all the concomitants of life.

Icarus

Man, would you know what the gods have hidden?
Seeking's decreed; the search forbidden.

So it is perhaps superfluous to soar
after an impossible perfection
thrusting beyond earth's bruised diameter,
its riches frozen in the heart.

These are the sour 'gleanings of time'
met in the void uninterrupted day,
measured by pulse-beats, ebb and flow of tides
washing the bone escarpments bare, a silent
thunder of oceans in a crimson fog.

Hair of the head, hair of the body,
nails, teeth, skin — behold the man
with twenty-seven other parts straight off
the biological assembly-line,
a masterpiece of science, though an old design.
And this and this add to the catalogue:
sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch — identity.

Cogito ergo sum, if you agree with Descartes,
or if you prefer the thoughts of Buddhaghosa,
a drop of blood in the heart.

And from that
Beethoven, Michelangelo,

Shakespeare, Socrates,
Einstein, Baudelaire,
Augustine of Hippo,
Rasputin, Hitler,
the latest sex murderer and
the boys with medieval hair
whose animal howls
have made them more
popular than Jesus Christ
and a good deal richer.

It would appear
there is some unknown secret in the formula
a chemical conspiracy on the nuclear level
to make a man an angel or a devil.

But this will not do; man would be a great deal
better standardized like an automobile.
Understanding cell-tissues is not enough;
we ought, as Marx said, to alter the wretched stuff.
Away with the genius and the imbecile!
Hail to the human automobile!

Range them in neat and orderly rows,
the bottles of human embryos
and let each mother (so by courtesy styled)
under expert guidance choose her child,
and watch it with motherly elation
grow up as per specification.

Words

Ah! Words measured out in sustained and resonant cadence
Born in the depth of a poet's tumultuous heart
Your music the heave of vast tides where the ocean, receding,
Tumbles the horizon's bed and threatens the stars
Echoes and thunders from peaks of invisible mountains
And calls, and still calls through the surge and torrent of time.

Even though the langour of a perpetual night is about me
Through the half-waking, ha3lf-sleep I hear it
Shouting forgotten names and incredible histories
And asking, forever asking, the same unendurable questions.
Here in the mansions of torment,
Here in the mansions of doubt and the dreams that possess me.

Rice

Between the burning sun and cool wet earth
The slender blades of emerald take birth
And miles of rice and verdant green proclaim
The toil of patient hands unknown to fame.

Reincarnation

Augustus Caesar, two thousand years dead
with a nest of rats above his head
lies in the curdled earth
and dreams another birth,
scorning the cemetery drones
counting their lifeless bones.

He said, 'Forever Life and I are wed;
this tomb shall be my natal bed.'

The rats gnawed at his fleshless head.

Now wintry overtures of light
in city offices, the flight
of sparrows in Threadneedle Street
are daily decor where we meet.
Augustus Caesar's bones are rotten.
'Londinium — have you forgotten …?'

The conscientious clerk
Walking one Sunday in the park
Sees a yellow fanfare
like a golden man there
where daffodils
ring their soundless bells …
and feels in his brain a sudden strife,
remembering that he wanted Life.
But the musty,

dusty,
day-to-day
is his only Appian Way.
And Augustus Caesar, two thousand years dead,
still lives with the rats above his head.

The Great Mother

Assured in her love's vast protectiveness,
Her special world against the world of God,
she the creatrix will be nothing less
than all between heaven and hostile sod,
with patient courage turning fear to vice,
the sacrificer and the sacrifice.

Her hands a hunger that she cannot share
behind locked doors where the protesting heart
rejects the stranger's footfall on the stair,
to keep forever fatally apart
the fragments drifting in expanding years
unanchored on the sea-drift of her tears.

Oblivious in worship of her pain
and sterile ministry, day's rituals cover
the inadequate incest of the brain
that dwells alone with an imagined lover,
and the fond contrivances of her will
kept inviolate by a juggler's skill,
deny without knowledge and hold at bay
the contrary seasons.

Shiva Dancing

This gesture is primordial chaos, this
The fluid locomotion of the stars
And winding nebulae that reach across
Dark vistas of eternity. A wave
In luminous void becomes Himalaya
Sparkling, crystal-crowned, robed in its thunder
Whose torrents pour into the expectant plain
Their glacial coldness. The swift lightning thrusts,
Cleaving the night in two, the purple night
Of passion's dreaming slumber — it is dawn.

The spirit creeps into the lowly cell
Of matter. Hark! the bells that wake the world
Are ringing, ringing in the dawn of Time;
The sacrificial fire is lit and now
Floods the resplendent chariot of the sun
With golden rays all heaven's reflecting arc.
Now the still depths of ocean faintly stir
With formless life, and groping fingers feel
From dark to light; its caverns are the womb
Of all that later men shall think and know
Between the heaven they seek, the hell they make.

But now is neither good nor evil, only
blind cell joined to cell persistently
Seeking it knows not what, through growth and
endless

division and transformation; the amoeba
Becomes the slug, the slug the fish, and things
Crawling on jointed legs. And so at last
The first freedom of sun and light. A pause
In dazzling whiteness and a lifted arm —
And all the cosmic orchestra resounds
Chord upon thunderous chord while the young god
Poised on creation's rim, smiles at the world.
(*unfinished*)

The Crystal Well

Look for it, and it is invisible;
Grasp it, and it is insubstantial;
Name it, and the tongue is speechless.

Why the eternal division and subdivision?
It is devoid of parts
As a flame: it is instantaneous
And timeless …

Far down in the crystal well
A slender bough
Waves green fingers to the sky:
A drifting cloud
Like a frail ship floats by.

There is no cloud, no branch,
Only a play of shifting light —
And only a floor of sand
When the well runs dry …

(1948)

Pastiche Japonais

The south wind blows under the lake,
stirring the green coral groves.
Where should one go to find the fruit
of a deed that has not been performed?

*

Beneath the stars I heard the voice of a flute.
Thin and high it weaved among the stars
And then fell mute.

*

Harsh wind
Sky cold as sleet
And an old old man
Singing in the street.

*

Under the lamp
Two lovers kiss and part …
Why meet again?
Why spoil
A work of art?

*

On their way to school
The children run gaily out of sight.
I sit at my window pondering
In the grey light.

*

In the Temple of Kwan Yin
There is a beautiful image.
Every day I took flowers
and worshipped it.
But the priests gave it life
And now for me it is no longer a god.
I do not go there anymore.

*

I met a sage sitting by the roadside.
"Tell me, Master, what are your thoughts?"
He said, "The cactus grows in dry places
And the lotus in water.
If I were to tell you what I meditate
How would either of us be any wiser?"

*

It is morning.
Through the shrill bird song
I hear the deep note
of a temple gong.

*

My books are dusty
Lying on the shelf …
We are silent,
Books and myself.

*

I dreamed yellow chrysanthemums

Were blooming again.
But I walk to darkness
And the sound of rain.

*

Twenty brush-strokes
Nineteen too many.
Nineteen laws
Eighteen unnecessary.
A thousand words
tell nothing
Not known already.

Matins

At early dawn
the mountain tops
are islands
rising from the mist.

Across the valley
I hear the single note
of a temple bell.
It is far away,
like my heart …
beyond the mountains,
the hollows and the slow drifting sea.

Spring in Sczu Chow

The snow has gone from the valley,
The lake sparkles
Like a maiden's eyes on waking.
Whose kiss but the sun's
Could have caused this transformation?

Timidly the little shoots grope
Like green fingers out of the sullen earth
Seeking the light;
And the distant hills
Come closer, and the trees
Stretch themselves. Are they trying
To caress the scurrying clouds?
Or to brush them like phantoms of sleep
From their still-drowsy eyes?

I sang an April love ...

I sang an April love to a green hill
And did not know how hill and song would borrow
Life of my life, nor how love could fulfil
All April's vows and womb a winter's sorrow.

I called an echo from a sleeping stone
And did not know how echo's voice would follow
Down the long years and answering my own,
Sound cold in a friend's word and turn it hollow.

In the dark silence

In the dark silence of the night
Waking from dreams of antique lands
Where, under brilliant skies, gay bands
Of Bacchants, drunk with wine and light

Passed silently before my sight,
Who beckoned me with ardent hands
Stained by the grape, to gleaming strands
Washed by the ocean's outward flight.

I thought perhaps again I might,
In some strange world where time expands
Into the timeless, tread those sands
And feel those waves, so coldly bright

Laving my feet. For who can say
The past exists no more; that we,
Slaves to a clock that moves one way

And one way only, can never be
Reborn on an Aegean day
To find again that fabled sea?

Utopia

"If only everybody could agree, there would be agreement between everybody."
—Politician's Great Thought

Old Plato was the first to set the fashion
of writing books about the Ideal State:
He did away with poetry and passion
And gave the world to Philistines and Fate.

Then English writers took up the tradition,
Setting the world to rights most zealously;
But though convinced each had a godlike mission,
On details they could none of them agree.

Some wanted Parliaments and legislation,
While others called for total anarchy;
They each had new ideas on education,
And all of them as different as could be.

On marriage, property and social custom
Their theories were many and diverse,
But so conflicting nobody could trust 'em
Except to make the situation worse.

Family life, said some, should be abolished,
And others thought that money should be banned;
Some voted for a life urbane and polished,
Others were all for working on the land.

Sir Thomas More had many imitators,
Old melancholy Burton with the rest;
Butler and Wells, and several lesser praters,
But nobody could say who was the best.

One fact alone out of their cogitations
Appears with disconcerting clarity;
It is that in the other's situations
Each would find cause for personal misery.

For each man's private dream is only valid
Within the scope of his particular view:
And that is why Utopia has dallied
Three thousand years, and never yet come true.

The Visitor

I sat down to write
but a moth,
small, pearl-white,
fluttered and settled
cotton-wool light
on the smooth blank sheet,

and spread its neat
veined wings.
So still and discreet,
like a tiny ghost
it sat on the white
unspotted sheet.

And I, its host,
had a poem there —
a thing more rare
than I might make
out of fragile thoughts
a moth can break.

(1957)

Some Thoughts on Poetry

It is sad to think how much poetry, even good poetry, is sheer silliness. There is, for example, the poem of Dylan Thomas ("Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night") in which he desires his father to rave, scream and curse on his deathbed. The idea that an old man should be so rebellious towards death is all the more remarkable when one considers that Dylan Thomas consigned himself to an early grave as surely as if he had thrown himself into the Thames.

Even if, as Dylan Thomas evidently believed, death ends all, the situation is not improved by abandoning all dignity and screaming like a madman. Atheists and agnostics have praised a calm, tranquil death, and wished it for themselves, as you would think anybody would, no matter what his ideas about survival or extinction were.

The words of Walter Savage Landor, doubter and epicurean, are better:

"I warmed both hands at the fire of life:

It dies and I am ready to depart."

So I have re-written Dylan Thomas' poem. My version may not be better poetry; it may not even be as good. But it does make better sense.

A Bardo Thödöl Version of a poem by Dylan Thomas

Do not go angered into that brief night

Do not go angered into that brief night,
Old age should turn serene at close of day;
Smile, smile to greet the coming of the light.

Wise men who at their end turn dark to bright,
Because their words, their deeds became their stay,
Do not go angered into that brief night.

Good men, the last wave by, finding how slight
A thing as thought outlives the mortal clay,
Smile, smile to greet the coming of the light.

Strong men who loved and hymned the sun in flight
And matched the morning splendour of its ray,
Do not go angered into that brief night.

Grave men, near death, who see with inner sight
Clear eyes can strip illusion's veil away,
Smile, smile to greet the coming of the light.

And you, my father, there on the lone height,
Turn, bless me now with your last thought, I pray.
Do not go angered into that brief night.
Smile, smile to greet the coming of the light.

And now, for epilogue, an original poem.

Thought Before Dying

When the time comes that makes an end of time
the moment of transition to another place
another order of progression
another clime
when there is no more
fictitious grace
of unremembering but instead
the inward-turning to assimilation
then may I know myself
one of the dead
that I may not be a stranger in that dream
to those forgotten ways I trod before
but rather
like a swimmer against the stream
in full awareness
strike for the further shore.

The Skeleton Labourer

by Charles Baudelaire

Rendered into English verse
by Francis Story

I

On the shelves of anatomy
That range along these dusty quays
Where sleep decaying books at ease,
Like mummies of antiquity,
Drawings to which the grave concern
And skill of some old artist had
(Although the theme itself is sad)
Given a beauty rude and stern
One sees; and to make more complete
The gruesome mysteries one infers,
Digging like sturdy labourers
Flayed men and skeletons we meet.

II

In this terrain you excavate,
Grim clowns, mute and funereal,
With all the effort you can call
From spines and nerves excoriate,
Say, what strange harvest do you sow,
Convicts wrenched from the charnel-ground,
And for what farmer are you bound

To toil till his barns overflow?
Would you (O symbol clear and dread
Of a too-unrelenting doom!)
Show us that even in the tomb
The promised sleep evades the dead;
That by extinction we're betrayed;
That all, even Death, hands us a lie,
And that throughout eternity
Perhaps, alas, we shall be made
In some far-off, unknown retreat
To flay a harsh and barren soil,
Driving the heavy spade of toil
Down with our bare and bleeding feet?

Notes on the poem by Baudelaire

This poem, *Le Squelette Laboureur*, which I have here rendered into English verse, is from Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and it expresses, I think, better than any other the poet's attitude towards death and immortality.

It was written some time before 1857, and a word of explanation may be needed to clarify its opening lines. The banks of the Seine in the vicinity of the Quai St. Bernard are to Parisians what the Charing Cross Road is to the Londoner, a paradise for booklovers. There, along the parapets and under the open sky, are ranged the stalls of the second-hand booksellers, offering to the bibliophile an inexhaustible variety of books, from the ephemeral rubbish of yesterday to the old and rare volumes that excite the greed of the collector and enrapture the lover of art. Every subject is represented there; one may find an early edition of Villon rubbing bindings with an outdated treatise on nuclear physics published two years ago, the one already valueless, the other of eternal worth. For the medical student (or rather for the connoisseur of the antique and strange) there are the books of anatomy with their vivid and sanguinary plates, and it must have been among the oldest of these that Baudelaire was browsing when the poem took shape in his mind. For there, to illustrate the traction of muscles and tendons, the skeletal articulations and stresses, the human body is shown in action, with its structure laid

bare. The anatomical man is depicted in various positions of everyday life, walking, lifting, pulling or digging.

To the eye of the poet, sensitive to all manifestations of the macabre, the disgusted mystic of the senses, of whom it could be justly said that he had one skin too few, the fastidious dreamer to whom all contacts, even the most voluptuous, were excoriations, these pictures, sharp and meticulous in their detail as surrealist drawings, must have had a peculiar and disturbing impact. For him, death was the promise of oblivion; but here was a ghastly living death. Those flayed and skeletal beings, drudges in a dim half-world between life and death, labouring eternally at senseless tasks, must have seemed to him a grim parody of mankind, and their fate a remorseless prolongation of life's unmeaning agonies. Doomed inhabitants of a limbo that might have originated in the fevered dreams of Edgar Allan Poe, they rose before him as messengers from beyond the grave, threatening a hateful immortality.

Spiritually, Baudelaire was the disinherited, stateless man with whom we are familiar to-day; like Rimbaud, if he had roots at all they were not in his generation, but had reached out and engaged themselves with a future that was to produce Kafka, Sartre and the surrealists, and they were already spread, if anywhere, in that unknown land of subliminal experience where all the normal orders of being are reversed, and where the flesh, no less than the spirit, struggles with invisible and hostile powers. Enervated by the excesses of an imagination that took fire from every

drifting spark, alternating, as he wrote in *Les Deux Bonnes Soeurs*, between the bier and the alcove, the tomb and the bawdy-house, and bringing to both a Catholic conscience that gave him comfort in neither, he looked to his real death as a release from the fantasies of death that hovered about his passions. All that he asked of it was the sleep and the forgetting; the Lethe of his dreams had no further shore.

Yet the poet is not as other men; his interior life is full of intimations he cannot ignore, and one of the many voices to which his ear is attuned is that which speaks to him of immortality. But for what kind of immortality is man qualified? For that, Baudelaire had no answer, because he had no aspiration. When, at the age of twenty, he was shipped to India he disembarked at Mauritius and returned home without ever reaching the Far East, for unlike Rimbaud he seems to have been devoid of wanderlust, his life-symbols did not include the *bateau ivre*. Would he have found a meaning for his life, a more tolerable solution to his problem of immortality, among the fecund speculations of Oriental thought? We can never know. In the bosom of the Catholic Church he remained to the end of his days, in spirit an agnostic, by nature an existentialist.

The questions Baudelaire puts to the living dead in his poem are the eternal cries of bewildered humanity. If life is meaningless, could it not be that death is the same? For what inexorable master do we toil, and what strange harvest may we expect to reap? Amid the clamour of the schools and the systems, where may we find assurance,

even of oblivion?

It is here that Baudelaire is one in spirit with the Existentialists. Existentialism seeks to correlate and realise in subjectivity the values that seem, but only seem, to operate within the framework of individual experience; and it finds there no more than the assurance that man's being is expressed in recurring problems to which no final answer can be given. The Existentialist attitude (because it evades the commitments of a philosophy) is the last despairing struggle of the Christian spirit; it is the naked man thrown on his own resources in an irremediable exile from the Eden of his innocence. The Existentialist may be a Catholic, Protestant or an atheist, but whatever he may be, he is essentially a being without roots in the world of values, one who is compelled to meet every situation as if it were unprecedented. He is the solitary traveller in an uncharted universe. If he has provisions of immortality he cannot relate them to his experience of the tangible world, so that they remain but one more enigma added to the desperate perplexities of his moral situation, the source of his anguish. Like a man in a hall of mirrors, he is confronted at every turn by his own image, and nothing beyond.

The theme of pain which haunts the Existentialist mind like an obsession is the common ground on which Existentialism meets Buddhism. Both are supremely aware of the reality of suffering. But whereas for the Existentialist suffering is the end of the road, the cul-de-sac he encounters at every turn, the inescapable fact which sums up all human experiences

and girdles it around with a glacial silence, for the Buddhist it is only the beginning. The Four Noble Truths of the Buddha start with the Truth of Suffering, the Suffering that is inherent in all conditioned existence. For the Buddhist, the knowledge of pain is the beginning of wisdom, for through pain man can bring himself to realise his own nature and seek to control the blind forces of his destiny. Buddhism, too, recognises that man's life, inconclusive and futile as it is, would be utterly meaningless if it were to cease with the dissolution of the body. It is only against a background of infinite possibilities, of decisions branching from every conceivable situation, that life can take on any purpose or qualify us for any ultimate assurance. The Buddha, then, answers the problem of personal survival with the doctrine of rebirth, and immortality becomes transmuted into the flux of being. It is not necessary to speak of rewards and punishments, though these are implicit in a law that brooks no interference; we are concerned here with meanings, the existentialist question of whether life has meaning or not. The Buddhist answer is that it is for man to put meaning into his life, and this can be done only if existence is viewed as a continuum of experience extending backwards and forward in time beyond the limits of birth and death.

But the vision of immortality that horrified Baudelaire was that of a situation fixed in eternity. The skeletons of his poem labour, but there is no progress in their toil, and they will never come any nearer to knowing the powers that

move them. The frozen hell of Tartarus is not more shocking in its immobility.

Technically, the poem is superb; its structure has the precise articulation of the skeleton forms that inspired it. Integrally embedded in it are the images out of which Baudelaire's extraordinary thought had emerged; the flayed men flay a harsh earth, and the description of the men in the third verse is echoed in the eighth; their exposed muscles strain and their spines are racked by effort; they are resigned — that is to say, mute — in the face of an inexplicable doom; as convicts drawn from the grave to work unceasingly their plight suggests the Voodoo superstition of the spell by which gangs of corpses can be made to work as slaves on the plantations of the West Indies, so that one wonders whether Baudelaire could have heard this legend during his brief contact with Mauritius; and by their very silence they speak of some strange harvest to be sown and gathered; but when, and for whom? The animated corpses know nothing, and only the voice of the poet is raised against the atrocious mystery of their being.

The text from which I translated is that of the *Editions Barnard* (1946), published under the direction of M. Andre Labarthe, where the poem is found in the group entitled Tableaux Parisiens. I have followed the rhythm and rhyme arrangements faithfully, and the poet's choice of words as closely as the exigencies of metre would allow. The greatest challenge to the translator is the involved syntax of the first three quatrains, which is not easy to preserve in English

verse. Nevertheless, I hope that at least some of the sombre beauty of the original has been reproduced, and that the reader unacquainted with the poem can still feel something of its mood.

About the Author

(Notes from the original dust jacket)

Francis Story was born on 3rd August 1910 in Croyden, Surrey, England, and educated at Manor House School, Clapham, and at London University. He commenced his University education as a medical student, but later gave it up for the Study of optics. He became a Buddhist by self-conviction at the age of sixteen. He married in 1933, but lost his wife, while, during World War II, he served in India in the Ophthalmological Unit of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

At the end of the war, he decided to devote himself entirely to the study of Buddhism and its literary presentation in the context of Western culture. He spent 22 years in India, Burma and (most of them) in Sri Lanka. During all these years he was engaged in lecturing and literary work in the field of Buddhism; but his creative mind produced also writings such as those collected in this volume. In Sri Lanka he was closely associated with the Buddhist Publication Society, assisting it in various ways, in addition to his literary contributions.

On 26th April 1971, he passed away in London where he had sought treatment or the ailment (cancer of the bone) to which he succumbed.

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