

W. H. AUDEN

MEMORIAL FOR THE CITY

'In the self-same point that our soul is made sensual, in the self-same point is the City of God ordained to him from without beginning.'

Juliana of Norwich.

I

The eyes of the crow and the eye of the camera open
On to Homer's world, not ours. First and last
They magnify earth, the abiding
Mother of gods and men; if they notice either
It is only in passing: gods behave, men die,
Both feel in their own small way, but She
Does nothing and does not care,
She alone is seriously there.

The crow on the crematorium chimney
And the camera roving the battle
Record a space where time has no place.
On the right a village is burning, in a market-town to the left
The soldiers fire, the mayor bursts into tears,
The captives are led away, while far in the distance
A tanker sinks into a dedolant sea.
That is the way things happen; for ever and ever
Plum-blossom falls on the dead, the roar of the waterfall covers
The cries of the whipped and the sighs of the lovers
And the hard bright light composes
A meaningless moment into an eternal fact
Which a whistling messenger disappears with into a defile:
One enjoys glory, one endures shame;
He may, she must. There is no one to blame.

The steady eyes of the crow and the camera's candid eye
See as honestly as they know how, but they lie.
The crime of life is not time. Even now, in this night
Among the ruins of the Postvergilian City
Where our past is a chaos of graves and the barbed wire stretches
 ahead
Into our future till it is lost to sight,

Our grief is not Greek: As we bury our dead
We know without knowing there is reason for what we bear,
That our hurt is not a desertion, that we are to pity
Neither ourselves nor our city;
Whoever the searchlights catch, whatever the loudspeakers blare,
We are not to despair.

II

Alone in a room Pope Gregory whispered his name
While the Emperor shone on a centreless world
From wherever he happened to be: the City rose
Upon their opposition, the yes and no
Of a rival allegiance; the sword, the local lord
Were not all; there was home and Rome;
Fear of the stranger was lost on the way to the shrine.

The facts and acts of the City bore a double meaning:
Limbs became hymns; embraces expressed in jest
A more permanent tie; infidel faces replaced
The family foe in the choleric's nightmare;
The children of water parodied in their postures
The infinite patience of heaven;
Those born under Saturn felt the gloom of the day of doom.

Scribes and innkeepers prospered; suspicious tribes combined
To rescue Jerusalem from a dull god,
And disciplined logicians fought to recover thought
From the eccentricities of the private brain
For the Sane City; framed in her windows, orchards, ports,
Wild beasts, deep rivers and dry rocks
Lay nursed on the smile of a merciful Madonna.

In a sandy province Luther denounced as obscene
The machine that so smoothly forgave and saved
If paid; he announced to the Sinful City a grinning gap
No rite could cross; he abased her before the Grace:
Henceforth division was also to be her condition;
Her conclusions were to include doubt,
Her loves to bear with fear; insecure, she endured.

Saints tamed, poets acclaimed the raging herod of the will;
The groundling wept as on a secular stage
The grand and the bad went to ruin in thundering verse;
Sundered by reason and treason the City
Found invisible ground for concord in measured sound,
While wood and stone learned the shameless
Games of man, to flatter, to show off, be pompous, to romp.

Nature was put to the question in the Prince's name;
She confessed, what he wished to hear, that she had no soul;
Between his scaffold and her coldness the restrained style,
The ironic smile became the ironic and devout,
Civility a city grown rich: in his own snob way
The unarmed gentleman did his job
As a judge to her children, as a father to her forests.

In a national capitol Mirabeau and his set
Attacked mystery; the packed galleries roared
And history marched to the drums of a clear idea,
The aim of the Rational City, quick to admire,
Quick to tire: she used up Napoleon and threw him away;
Her pallid affected heroes
Began their hectic quest for the prelapsarian man.

The deserts were dangerous, the waters rough, their clothes
Absurd but, changing their Beatrices often,
Sleeping little, they pushed on, raised the flag of the word
Upon lawless spots denied or forgotten
By the fear or the pride of the Glittering City;
Led by hated parental shades,
They invaded and harrowed the hell of her natural self.

Chimeras mauled them, they wasted away with the spleen,
Suicides picked them off; sunk off Cape Consumption,
Lost on the Tossplot Seas, wrecked on the Gibbering Isles
Or trapped in the ice of despair at the Soul's Pole,
They died, unfinished, alone; but now the forbidden,
The hidden, the wild outside were known:
Faithful without faith, they died for the Conscious City.

III

Across the square,
Between the burnt-out Law Courts and Police Headquarters,
Past the Cathedral far too damaged to repair,
Around the Grand Hotel patched up to hold reporters,
Near huts of some Emergency Committee,
The barbed wire runs through the abolished City.

Across the plains,
Between two hills, two villages, two trees, two friends,
The barbed wire runs which neither argues nor explains
But where it likes a place, a path, a railroad ends,
The humour, the cuisine, the rites, the taste,
The pattern of the City, are erased.

Across our sleep
The barbed wire also runs: It trips us so we fall
And white ships sail without us though the others weep,
It makes our sorry fig-leaf at the Sneerers Ball,
It ties the smiler to the double bed,
It keeps on growing from the witch's head.

Behind the wire
Which is behind the mirror, our image is the same
Awake or dreaming: it has no image to admire,
No age, no sex, no memory, no creed, no name,
It can be counted, multiplied, employed
In any place, at any time destroyed.

Is it our friend?
No, that is our hope; that we weep and it does not grieve,
That for it the wire and the ruins are not the end:
There is the flesh we are but never would believe,
The flesh we die but it is death to pity;
There is Adam, waiting for his City.

IV

LET HIS WEAKNESS SPEAK

Without me Adam would have fallen with Lucifer; he would never have been given the chance to cry *O felix culpa!*

It was I who suggested his theft to Prometheus; my indecision cost Adonis his life.

I heard Orpheus sing; I was not quite as moved as they say.

I was not taken in by the sheeps-eyes of Narcissus nor by whining Echo; I was angry with Psyche when she struck a light.

I was in Hector's confidence; so far as it went.

Had he listened to me, Oedipus would never have left Corinth; I cast no vote at the trial of Orestes.

I fell asleep when Diotima spoke of love; I was not responsible for the monsters which tempted St. Anthony.

To me the Saviour permitted His fifth word from the cross; to be a stumbling-block to the stoics.

I was the unwelcome third at the meetings of Tristan with Isolde; they tried to poison me.

I rode with Galahad on his quest for the San Grail; without understanding I kept his vow.

I was the just impediment to the marriage of Faustus and Helen; I know a ghost when I see one.

Hamlet I had no patience with; but I forgave Don Quixote all for his admission in the cart.

I was the missing item in Don Juan's list; for which he could never account.

I assisted Figaro the Barber in every intrigue; when Prince Tamino arrived at wisdom, I too obtained my reward.

I was innocent of the sin of the Ancient Mariner; time after time I warned Captain Ahab to accept happiness.

As for Metropolis, that once-great city; her delusions are not mine.

Her speeches impress me little, her statistics less; to all who dwell on the fashionable side of her mirrors, resentments and no peace.

At the place of my passion her photographers are gathered together; but I shall rise again to hear her judged.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

NOVELIST-PHILOSOPHERS

XV—MONTHERLANT¹

MONTHERLANT occupies a place in the long masculine tradition of those who suit the boastful Manicheism of Pythagoras to their own advantage. Like Nietzsche, he believes that only periods of historical impotence have exalted the eternal feminine, and that the hero should rise up against the doctrine of Magna Mater. As a specialist in heroism, he has undertaken to overthrow her. For him, woman is night, chaos, immanence. 'These convulsive depths are nothing more than woman in her pure state,' he wrote about Tolstoy's wife. According to him, it is the baseness and stupidity of contemporary man which have given women's deficiencies positive shape. We speak of women's instinct, their intuition and their powers of prophecy where we should denounce their lack of logic, their obstinate ignorance and their incapacity to appreciate reality; they have, in fact, neither powers of observation, nor of psychological penetration: able neither to face facts nor understand other people: their mystery is a trap, their fathomless treasures have the profundity of a void: unable to give anything to man, they can only drag him down. To Montherlant the great enemy is the mother. In a youthful play *Exile*, he wrote a scene where a mother was shown preventing her son from leading his own life: in *Olympique*, the youth who wanted to become an athlete is prevented by the frightened egotism of his mother; in *Les Celibataires* and *Les Jeunes Filles*, the mother is odious, her crime is to wish to keep her son for ever guarded in the darkness of her womb: she mutilates him to monopolize him and so fill up her own sterile emptiness; the worst of all possible teachers, she clips her child's wings, holds him back from the heights to which he aspires, makes him stupid and feeble. These accusations are not without foundation, but through the explicit reproaches which Montherlant addresses to woman as mother, it is clear that what he most hates in her is his own birth. He believes himself a god, he wants to be a god because he is a man, because he is a superior man, because, in fact, he is Montherlant. But a god is not conceived: his body, if he has one, is pure will poured into hard and

¹ An extract from Simone de Beauvoir's new book *Le Deuxième Sexe*.