

At a Boundary

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THE GANGRENED PEOPLE

WE, the Gangrened People,
swollen up with fabricated virtue,
virus of hypocrisy,
call ourselves the champions of Justice
and Liberty and O Democracy.
Our justice fattens on excessive rents
got from sub-standard houses;
our liberty suppresses discontents
love's heart espouses;
and, our democracy asleep, a slut
bedazzles us with bold striptease and strut.

Observe the countenance of Commercialism,
the unchecked daughter of invalid honest Commerce,
begat by clever and not honest men.
I will outstare this harlot face of facts,
expose and not condone the inhuman clash
of absolute contradictions: lying lips
glib with the words of comfort, limpid eyes
scheming for gain, all features glamorous
through creamed and siren lovelessness of hands
skilled in commercial art. O how that face
softens to light impersonate of love
and leaps to fire impersonate of passion,
drawing upon the pockets of desire;
O how that face will harden undisguised—
or show a politic archness to beguile—
with pleasure at soulless silver counted out.

O she is plausible, and she controls
the men of power, conceding sub-dominion,
granting their selfish pleasure on condition
that they suppress and chain the generous soul
that ventures for higher stakes, for intercourse
with beauty unrobed on mountains and in cities.

I knew an idealist once;
somebody warned him to forget his soul
where skyscrapers scrape the skies for money;

somebody told him that his soul was stuck
kicking on skyscraper like a fly on flypaper.
He's in an asylum now because he had
no cynicism, swore his dreams of beauty
would win society to truth and love.
"Wait. Watch." he said. His eyes were full of tears.
"Wait. Watch. My wings of spirit will shed sheer
skyscrapers of Commercialism and wheel
with stars and sun. Before I turn to dust
I will get beyond the skyscrapers till they look
mere ant-hills on earth's smiling surface. Then
I shall have a time of such clear singing
that men will break from their captivity
on the inspiration of my song, and the very vaults
will yearn to heaven for benediction;
street traffic will extol the sound of thunder;
sheering walls will be stress upon sunlight;
even the tinkle of coins will mean for men
deserts for the deserving and the joy
of gentle rains of mercy blessing all."
They say he's happy, that he smiles all day
and sings at night of sunlight and of children . . .

I do not forsake
tall dead trees that splinter in the sun,
or ochre hills, or the breath
of billabongs in summer;
but, through my concern
that spontaneous affection
in all men is starved,
love has found her mate
in hate.

Those who would have poets delight,
in the present age,
are not devotees of beauty:
they fear the true page,
encourage fools to sing
for a poor pittance
lest they should sting
for nothing.

I desire no praise
for loving beauty
from those
who do not love beauty:
the patronising inclination of the head
while the hand files credit
convinces me
beauty requires
murder.

Much hope I see in battering of facades
of masonry and glass, which long have masqued
sickness of soul, lived lies. Inevitable,
this excess human agony of war
is no high price for soul's integrity
if it emerge at last but here and there
only as guttering heart and gasping throat
ache to earth's vivid agony again.

Sun and rock, relay me power . . .
nebulae, instruct my seeing . . .
bird and beast and tree and flower,
grant me your brotherhood of being . . .
I am to you ambassador
to keep the faith of vanished men.

The Stone Age man in us has watched his fire
die as the cruel heaven of desire.
Yes, we have watched our soul's fire
turn cold amid its own offal in the night
of barbarous selfishness. O now we rage;
we leap to arms. Some justice in our cause
makes us consider all the virtues ours:
our foes alone know our hypocrisy
and thrust it in our throats. We spew it back,
blind in our sickness to what truth they flaunt.
These differences distinguish us from them:
that they impart swift, bloody death, black ruin,
while we prefer a slow death in the soul;

that they, fanatic revellers of hate,
relentlessly unleash vindictiveness,
while we lift up unholy hands to heaven
and cry, "Preserve us," in selfrighteousness.

We who are called Australians have no country;
no country holds us native heart and soul:
our boast that Federation made a nation;
our boast that Anzac proved it with our blood
are tragic fictions. Our standards are fictitious:
we dwell in the limbo of a harsh deception,
a criminal betrayal, guaranteeing
the selfish satisfaction of the cunning,
exploiting us for money, money, money,
spreading the itch to purchase every day,
filling our hearts with fatal loyalties
to notions not our own, nor suited to us.

Australia is a land that has no people,
for those that were hers we have torn away,
we who are not hers nor can be till love
shall make us so and fill our hearts with her.
Australia waits a people who will woo her
and win her for heart and mind, not money only.
Can we awaken, leave our evil limbo,
look on Australia's face and clear our hearts
of self with one another and the world?
Or shall we deservedly give place to others—
failing to right ourselves, let others love her?
Australia waits a race whose active bone
will mutter the white light of her limestone rocks,
whose blood will riot with the unreserved
rage of the red light of her sandstone ridges,
whose minds will know the cleansing strong communion
of midday hush, of tree-entangled stars,
of raucous cries on dimming lakes at evening
and all her timeless mystery of dreams.
These endure forever: every gust,
whispering from silence on her stern horizons,
paeons her dreams to us whose ears are deaf,
whose hearts are twisted and whose souls are drab
and sick with self-obsession, foul with self.

We are so sunk in criminality
that human fairness takes the name of crime.
If any cry "Reform," we shriek "Redragger."
Extend our budget for education, teach
our children to judge of us? O no, indeed:
some should go bankrupt in more ways than one.
Encourage artists to show the people beauty
at their own backdoors? O no, indeed, for that
would close their minds to syndicated matter.
Encourage the people to logic in their thoughts,
by using it in the papers, scrapping all
cooked propaganda, wishful propositions,
not tagging lies as truth and truth as lies?
No, that would mean the end of money's rule,
end to abuse of freedom's institutions:
a conscious nationhood is not for pawn.

Some moment flashes towards us as a people,
fraught with our destiny, and we must dare it.
This year may bring an almond-eyed aggression:
will it? or won't it? Womb of the War, bring forth
no vile abortion of the same again,
burlesque-democracy, the hunting ground
for those who, versed in cheap psychology
of advertising, keep the people stupid;
Womb of the War, bear not the same again—
nor yet what we deserve, obliteration;
O bring a breaking and a tearing down
of our effete complacency that, with strength,
we may live fully in our generation,
essay a marvellous entry where we've lounged,
in asinine inertia, at a boundary.