

As GWENDOLINE FOSTER

L a z a r u s

Lazarus!

He does not hear,
And bound so fast he could not stir.
Among the darkness, without sound,
The crooked worm shall find a place,
Assault and violate his peace.
Among the darkness he shall find
The sounds that once escaped his ear:
The soundless voices of the field
That Chiron, the wise healer, heard
Who taught Patroclus, and he held
The knowledge of the healing root
Until the jealous god defiled
The brightness of the envied shield
Which Hera's limping, ugly son
For silver-footed Thetis wrought.

The slender might of springing grass
Shall leave the dead in bitterness
To hear the lilies being born,
Until the sad unbidden guest
Departing leaves his bones to learn
The knowledge that all men must have,
The metaphysics of the grave.

Among the darkness, Lazarus
Forgot the grave-clothes' hindering,
Went clumsily to find the voice,
And felt the cold thin air of spring
Although the napkin bound his face.

1943 [unpublished]

The Rite of Spring¹

The Jew Stravinsky bidden to the feast
turns host, invites the virgins with bassoons.
The triple hammers pleading for the wise
shatter our flutes, the foolish Sibyl cries:
Lanterns in spring are silly poets' lies.

They said: the cuckoo singing in the leaves
is a false cuckoo, all the birds are come
to Lycia. Above the twisted spears
singing they flew to follow sleep and death
who bore the body of Sarpedon home.

Europa's husband walking to the bank
heard the false cuckoo, and its hollow song
recalled his mistress, though the vanished night
could offer him no trusted antidote
nor drain the cunning poison from delight.

The music done, in silence time recalls
and shapes the moment, lending him relief.
The unassuming river of his blood
flows without torment, passing through the streets
of troubled cities broken by its flood.

1944

As GWENDOLINE HARWOOD

The Dead Gums

Gigantic pillars bear the arching weight;
They are the gums, dead, but their mighty roots
Hold still the silver branching weight aloft,
Cold hearts from which no resurrection shoots.

They sound like trumpets' lightning through the soft
Chiming of moonlight in the vaulted sky.
To me, awake or drowned in secret sleep,
Though all the night is deaf beyond, they cry:

Know that the sickle-cutting sun will sweep
And your leaves die like ours. A frosty sea
Will search your roots and wash away desire.
Then death will seal the season's change, and we

Who light your heart now with our silver fire
Will crack in the great storms, and be no more
Than a child's garden fenced with twigs, a frost
Of shells crushed and bleaching on the shore.

1949

The Fire-scarred Hillside

Rocks are held in the air
torn up with the twisting never-relaxing roots,
carried by ram's horn buckle and fast held coil
from where the thin grass shoots
to mark with an eyelash fringe the hollow gouge in the soil.

Fields pierced by the plough
marked out with hedges, furrowed and filled with seed,
need men to mark them, care for, keep them straight;
but here never was need:
here bending roots find cracks in rocks of a millstone's weight.

Creatures here are small:
rock-coloured spiders, lizards in restless sleep
hide in the stones — oh, but the birds are bright —
see in a flickering sweep
the airboned finches, the dear flamebreasted robin aflight.

All here is tense:
the dry grass clings to a shallow infecund crust;
what trees still stand hold deep in the fissured rock
bare, but their boughs thrust
new leaves (fantastic spears) to the rain or the wind's shock.

These dark inflexible trees
echo the blackened hillside, harsh and drear.
Yet in a crooked frame their branches hold
the landscape, bellnote clear,
serene, light-washed, clean-pencilled, lovely in line and fold.

1949

W a t e r - M u s i c

Gently on the slipping stones
 moves the swift unfolding flood.
Ribbed with dusk, the stream intones
 requiem for restless blood.

All the overtones of day
 vanish in the sounding tide.
History dissolves away,
 I return to Adam's side.

Sleeping in a twisted root
 lies the subtle enemy,
still the bright and bitter fruit
 hangs untasted on the tree.

Empty, perfect swells the dream
 in its bubble-skin of sleep:
gathering upon the stream
 are the tears mankind will weep

when I bite the world apart,
 show the sweet corrosive core
and the sorrows at its heart
 salt their bread for evermore.

1949