

Howard Rodger MacLean

Poems

LE MILIEU

HOWARD RODGER MACLEAN ESQ.

Howard Rodger MacLean, one of those last products of British colonialism, after having survived sixteen schools in Scotland, South Africa and England before amazingly being accepted into Sussex University, he considers himself self-taught although also eternally grateful to a number of English teachers who received their own education - and good English - before World War II. In Italy since 1971, he is a professional translator of the Fine Arts.

THE DREAM OF GORDIUS

I ask no dispensation now
to falsifie a tear, or sigh, or vow
in this crazy starlight
moon-obscured:

seated in high contemplation of things
(some say, perhaps, more precious than my soul);
mottled,
my hands contained by
foldings of rich stuff
mere idle gold turned human;

touch-to-touch they lie together now
enpalmed,
deadly cold,
these of which my fortune
and my faults
had part.

AGUILLANNEUF

there was a young tiger of Surat	1
whose nails always grew out in a fringe	2
who in stalking at midnight	3
notwithstanding the bad light	4
manage to catch and eat someone coming home	5
from a new year's eve binge	6

by Howard Rodger MacLean Esq.

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I STRONGLY OBJECT: I mean, what sort of poetic nonsense are we talking about here? Tigers haven't lived in Surat since the Germans were thrown out by the English, so what are the French doing here anyway?

Major-General Douglas Cameron-Smyth of that ilk (Retired)
address given

I would also like objecting. The French are not afraid of tigers, only Germans.

Colonel Pierre Debauch Vichy (Retiring)

I do highly consider this poetic nonsense to be on the fences. The Germans have not yet ever occupied tigers.

Marie Caroline Olga Louise Astrid Ingeborg Bettenberg-Hesse

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SOMETHING I READ ON A GRAVESTONE

I whispered "wait!" to the portals
and it seemed they laughed.
I, whose cleare body was so pure and thinne and
twine-twinne like the lover's knot that soldiers pledge
as they weigh themselves, then stay then freeze in bloods.
I said: "If puppets could sing I'd make them hate"
and, though joking, and joking still, they elected me
to hound them.
"I'm born!", I cried
and like sloths all took to bustling by.
"I'm dead!" (shrewd words I thought)
but was found, days later, bristled in comfort.

I'm not up to this.
Such pander.
I stay seated and slouched. I pondering why the door is open:
like a slave tomorrow, with his poor kindreds,
thinks he's free to go to die like pigs
stuck on a Calendar spit
(unthought or mere concocted date?).

Something keeps me back from all this.
'Though not fright.
And yet I've also played the game.
Well... yes, I have.
I paid in dust, the falcon a vexillum in change.
I then tried to pay in gold—
well, yes... just to see—
but they commuted me with a dancing bear
a hare now broods.

But none of this has sense.
All is weak comparison:
a spun top without a string.
What thoughts I have have dreams:
refracted tatters only...
of perennial of perambulatory of permanence
in doubt whether to authenticate the Door.

I smile to myself and say:
"What sense is there in all of this..."

Now that the Doors are not mountain but grave.

(Hurstpierpoint, Sussex - dated 1915)

lady lay burning
hill down combed
girdled rasp,
hoary thatch and melted mottle while there,
nearby away,
with horn stuck red, eyes turned ice, distant,
death lay dying in a unicorn gouged

lady lay burning auburn torn, disarrayed,
in a rip bodice lay a tress
a muddied dressguild
spattered fingers in splayed,
sad-sought
and peter-breath rangling

Unicorn
crumpling, crumbled, struck the earth
drybrown-redreddingred,
dulledbrown-burningboast did she lie,
legs lay spreaded out
to the winds flew her tazzles and trags away;
the burn washed
a felled sword mashed the swish the green the ferned and root.
And the neighbours' wife, her fifteen childs at skirt,
at the market bought for their future Spring,
their guzzle, that quilted hunger at lowed cost,
blackrunblackpudding
while he laboured, fished, merely fished
the haggles-gossip, the struck-slash, the hack-bite,
the straddle-glap and the puss-tap-mess shoved, glued,
sprung out of depthsings
of down of greenery. coveringed-hazèd mists
in rolls of unlight flowers in mass on dark heath on hills

we once (we did once?) did stroll-stroll
as if all were heather and all heathens
we,
the origins of the land,
plague and plagiary,
the dynamics of an event culled–
brackenbornfromambush–
stealthily and dour;
silk pores discovered by healthy hues we,
who on the slim-slimming pole spie on the imper,
imperceptible quiv of the slimy,

of the lime-slime-grey, green-grey sliminess
of the motionless waters.

Thus we were
Before events
Before told by the broker to sell

lady lay
stuck dawn red rich blood sod
rich fertile whore's purse;
white prik-like blunt in the sod
lay a body's last heavings;
a breast lay torned out from out its bodices
of mangled, its splattered lace, rent,
five starred clutch splayed
hung suspended
shoulder from...
next to a green-leaf brook, croaking,
torbid gloating morbid and dark,
lay her body's last
while those stylite gulls
spy on the imperceptible quiver
of the slimy of the grey of the motionless waters
no more
Death is now gone

In the morning we were told
For breakfast a carcass flambé
At eleven they arrived
At one we, who had no other, met with the fire
At two-thirty we condoned
At four we waked
At seven we had nothing but ashes to gnaw, to try
Tut-bits before bed

We had arrived natant, we would be the last to leave:
it hadn't really mattered, had it? With the last scone
gonedowntoofast with cream and tea and - why yes! - double cream
and strawberries and...
and Sir Kay who crouched, crunched-dog in a corner,
crying

From the living room window I saw the rain come down
Grey blanket falling, a downpour, like when I was six and
from under the table the din increased,
and the pane would fuzz,
like Sir Kay's eyes over the table
as of one who had met with the fire

the red stuck sharp aim
of blunt stick breath wrought
leased white balm of rotten movement,
gaining momentum;
of green pitch rank stench of clutched-fingered garment
torn,
the blood-spat struck hand
hanging in raspings and heavings and clawings
of a body of bodies brought to the brunt of breaking
Sunk red stick,
gloat glut of poured sweat of pain high throat loosed
(by Christ!)

throughout eevenings
discorsed
in pleasing cumpanys

so the flail rot taut flush gutcunt press out in total,
in and all,
world of no moment,
dimidiate paradise of agony and forgot stank,
hollow wearinesses repeat, and repeat, and repeat and
repeated until the place filled be the place void
once more again

"We're out of beer, jam and custard powder!"
(And of the lost hard-blood marrow, blooded-sod,
sod-dripped into forgetfulness
because of heresies we have forgotten to commit,
permit,
to disdain,
to pamper and perish to the end?)

And while a Glasgow-London "Intercity" trundled by
the burning white majestic
burnt-white flushed oracle,
that single blood-spet sharp-work blunt-done toll-took
and death-reached horn
into smoke dissolves into mystery

post mortem:

the rain ceased on a saturday
the week hesitated in the chill
the guests edged or gravelgrit away
the house closed its eyes once more
only the eternal bedroom lay unstrewn

where hidden silks now locked now lay
like hunted fowl
hid in dark and funny-smelling odours
the rain began again on sunday
from beneath my table we saw the world
which came and went
as on a dreary-dull wet-cold morning
a car drew up
to take me back
and suddenly we were gone
once more again

non omnis moriar