

SOME POEMS BY

PAUL

KLEI

Translated by Anselm Hollo

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Artaud : ‘ A PAINTER OF THE MIND ’

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ANSELM HOLLO:

‘LOOK AT HIS FACE’

A Note

Paul Klee's poems were never published anywhere in his lifetime, 1879-1940, and were in fact only found after his death: part of them in a blue notebook, others dispersed among the jottings in his now-famous ‘Diary’.

They are very much of a piece with his art, often humorous or cryptically ironic, sometimes mystical; formally they are well-knit ‘vers libre’ (or, whatever, &c.), which I have tried to reproduce in my versions by using recurrent rhythmical patterns, often ‘sprung’, but generally simple, as are the originals. It could be argued that some of them remain at a stage sometimes defined as ‘*materia poetica*’: of which, however, Wallace Stevens said that it is identical with poetry. . . .

Apart from the interest these texts have as commentaries and sidelights on Klee's painting, they have had considerable influence on post-war German poetry; Rainer M. Gerhardt, a very fine poet and critic of the post-45 generation, wrote of them in 1951: ‘I do not know what German poet has written comparable lines during the last fifteen years.’

For an English or American reader, the most fascinating literary aspect of these poems is their foresight and modernity—Imagism before Pound & Co., in 1906: Brecht before Brecht (‘A & B’, 1905), and even the ‘illiteralism’ of a Beat Saint Peter Orlovsky, in ‘Bimbo's Pome’ (1932). . . . They should also be corrective to an accusation sometimes levelled at Klee's paintings by casual viewers or champions of the more doctrinaire Surrealists: that of ‘Prettiness’. As in Mozart, a mastery of ‘line’, a

love for the modes of dance and play, combine in Klee — both poet and painter — with a sombre, sceptical, sometimes even bitter vision of life, and intense care for achieving a truthful and effective fusion of these elements.

Before allowing Antonin Artaud, a great contemporary of Klee's, to have his illuminating say on the nature of that vision, I would like to end this note by quoting two word images by young poets, one American, the other Klee's countryman :

‘ Paul Klee scratched for seven years
on smoked glass to develop
his line, Lavigne says : Look
at his face ! he who has spent
all night drawing mine.’
— *John Wieners*, ‘ A Poem for Painters ’

‘ Paul Klee sits weeping
behind the windowpane

he watches the people go by
and they all become lines
and he sees only the lines

and the lines go by
in front of the windowpane ’
— *Peter Haertling*, ‘ Paul Klee ’

London, 25th January, 1962

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A PAINTER OF THE MIND

In the embryonic field
PAUL KLEE from Germany
has produced interesting visions.
I love some of his nightmares
his mental syntheses
 conceived like works of architecture
 (or, his architectural works of a mental character),
and certain cosmic syntheses
 where all the secret objectivity of things
has been rendered apparent,
 more apparent than in the realizations of Georges Grosz
 (a fellow-countryman).
If you compare these two, you will see
 the profound difference in inspiration.
Grosz sifts the world,
 reconstructs it to his vision.
In PAUL KLEE
 the objects of the world
 fall into order, —
 and it seems as if he was only
 writing down their dictation.
An ordering of visions
 of forms
 a fixation and stabilization of thoughts
 inductions, deductions of images
 with the conclusions to be drawn from these,
also an ordering of images
 a search for the hidden sense
 an illumination of visions in the mind —
such is, to me, his art.
The dryness, the tidiness of Grosz

crumbles, if seen against Klee
and his ordered visions,
for they have retained their true visionary aspect
their character of things in the mind.

Antonin Artaud
(from ' Bilboquet ')

THE HAPPY ONE

The happy one, who is almost
an idiot, everything
blossoms, bears fruit
for him. He stands
on his little acre,
one hand holding
a watering-pot,
the other pointing
at himself,
at the navel of
this world.

Verdure
and blossom,
boughs heavy
with fruit
bend down, above him.

1901

IRRATIONAL SPEECH

1

A good catch is great consolation.

2

Even this year, infamy
stalks me!

3

I must be saved.
By succeeding?

4

Has inspiration
eyes, or does she
walk in her sleep?

5

At times, my hands
do fold;
but right there, beneath them,
my belly
goes on digesting, my kidneys
filtering their clear juices. . . .

6

To love music
more than anything, that
is unhappiness.

7

Twelve fishes,
twelve murders.

1901

THE TWO MOUNTAINS

A reign of light
clarity on two mountains:

the mountain of animals
the mountain of gods.

But between them the dusky
valley of men.

When
sometimes, one of them
looks up
he is gripped
by foreboding
by unquenchable longings, he
who knows
he knows not, longing
for them who know not
they know not
and for them who know that they know.

1903

INDIVIDUALITY

Individuality?

is not of the substance of elements.

It is an organism, indivisibly
occupied

by elementary objects of a divergent character :
if you

were to attempt division, these parts
would die.

Myself,

for instance : an entire dramatic company.

Enter an ancestor, prophetic ;

enter a hero, brutal

a rake, alcoholic, to argue
with a learned professor.

A lyrical beauty, rolling her eyes
heavenward, a case

of chronic infatuation —

enter a heavy father,

to take care of that,

enter a liberal uncle — to arbitrate. . . .

Aunt Chatterbox gossiping in a corner.

Chambermaid Lewdie, giggling.

And I, watching it all,

astonishment in my eyes.

Poised, in my left hand

a sharpened pencil.

A pregnant woman!, a mother
is planning
her
entrance —
Shushhh! you
don't belong here
you
are divisible!
She fades.

1905

A & B

**A & B have been arguing long, over a bottle
of wine, about their diametrically opposed
points of view. But as they approach
that stage where drink moves the heart**

**Each one is moved to such fiery speech
that B suddenly finds himself drawn
to point A, and A, to point B. Faces a-glow
they reach out, their hands meet in a bewildered
clasp.**

1905

THE RESCUE

Bound for
destruction?
Perhaps,
but then, I have
this knack
of saving myself,
in the nick
of time, time
and again.

I don't want to
be overgrown
by anything.
Though I would like
to have the experience.

I just don't want to.
Surely,
I must be saved.

1905

DREAM

I was flying
home, where
the beginning is.
It started with brooding,
chewing of knuckles
then, a smell
or a taste,
my tension
resolved, completely,
dissolved,
like a lump
of sugar in water —

My heart came into it
too, it had always
been much too large, now
it was swelling, distended,
huge. Not a trace
of anxiety;
it was carried away
to a region where lust
is lost,
forever.

If now a
delegation
would come,
festively
bowing down
in front of the artist
— hailing his works
in gratitude —
it would hardly
surprise me, for I
have been where
the beginning is
I have seen
my goddess Madame
Proto-Cell
and that
means as much as:
to be
fertile!

1906

DREAM

To visit a sorcerer
in his garden . . . there is a bench
of crimson rose petals

Take a seat, he
says, pray
be seated, and I

pretend to be so
he himself
sits down without batting

an eyelid,
my pseudo-posture — downright
embarrassing. . . .
Opposite, by a window
stands the sorcerer's
daughter

I give her
a smile, apologetic, but she
slams the window!,

outraged,
nevertheless
still watching me

and with less inhibition
now,
behind her curtain.

In dreams
moments return
that stunned us for moments,

as often as not
negligible
happenings;

the great
events
that called for

determination,
do not
return.

POEM

Water
Waves on the water
A boat on the waves
On the boat-deck, a woman
On the woman, a man.

1906

POEM

Woe is me
Weighed down
By the hour
Returning

Alone
In the centre
The worm
Prowling

Down in the deep

1913

POEM

I stand in full armour
I am not here
I stand in the depths
I stand far . . .
I stand very far . . .
I glow with the dead

1914

POEM

The big animals: despondent
at table: unsated.

But the small cunning flies
scrambling up slopes of bread
inherit Buttertown.

.

There is
only one
true thing:

in the self
a weight,
a small
stone.

.

An eye
that sees.
Another eye
that feels.

.

Man-Animal:
Clock of Blood.

.

The moon
in the railway station : one of the many
lights in the forest ; a drop
in the mountain's beard :
that it doesn't trickle !
that it is not pierced by the cactus thorn !
that you
do not sneeze, and
burst
this bladder !

1914

DREAM

I find
my house: empty
Gone
all the wine

The river
diverted
Stolen
my naked joy

Eradicated
the epitaph.
White
in white.

1914

A FRIEND

Notes
from afar,
a friend,
soon in the morning, behind the mountain.
Sound of horns.
Emeralds.

I am summoned
by cerebral
message, a promise, an abstract
embrace of minds, surmising
each other.

We were joined
by a star, by an eye
that found us out.
Two I's,
a content,
it is more than the vessel.

Yesterday's holy
stones, shorn of their riddle.
Today
there is meaning :

'A friend, soon in the morning, behind the mountain.'

1914

MY STAR

My star
Rose deep
Below
My feet

Where does my fox
Go in the winter?
Where does my serpent
Sleep?

1915

THE WOLF SPEAKS

The wolf speaks, while masticating
a man, addressing himself
to the dogs:

Tell me, where, then, is —
tell me, where?
then, is their god?
Where is their god? after this. . . .

Here you can see him
in the dust at your feet, the god
of the dogs

To see and to know
is one, is
that who has been torn by me
is no god!

Where, then, is
their god?

CAUGHT

Caught in a room.
Great peril.
No exit.

But there : a window : open : launch
Yourself — I am flying
Free

But it is raining
A drizzle
It is raining, a drizzle
It is raining
raining
raining . . .
raining . . .

1926

BIMBO'S POME

— *In the manner of Klee's favourite cat, named Bimbo* —

The Master noes what he wonts.
he noes whow.

But has one vice : not smokeing.
But skratches with wip of hoarsehair on the vielin,
that herts Bimbo so mutch in his ear.

1932

THE CAT

— part of the cat :
her ear, feeding
on spoonfuls

of sound, her foot
taking a run, the
run,

her eye, burning in-
wards, burning
through the thick

and the thin.
Her face
that forbids all return :

beautiful
and a flower
but bristling with weapons,

and nothing
to do with us, in
the end.

(undated)

LAST THINGS LAST

In the heart's centre
the only prayers
are steps
receding