

The Fall of Babylon

Dedicated to the two Japanese artists
who painted the Hiroshima panels

By the waters of Babylon
We sat down and wept
When we remembered the mountain vision
The agony of hope and the rigid faith kept
Locked away in hearts too easily
Plundered. By the waters of Babylon,
Where Babylon lay
Skinned like the moon
A cold and cruel
Ash in the unbreathing air.
The runnels of water
Wriggled like tears
Down an old woman's face
Weakly distorting
The fallen features.
Rain into flat mud.
Tears only lay
The dust of ruin.
Mud effaces
Babylon the fallen
Forever and ever. Amen.

And after the thunderclap
And the yawning furnace
When the Dresden dancer
Melted into poisoned dust
Came the water
The grey flood of weeping
Where the mother held up her baby
Like the last useless rose
Which the wind will consume.
There came also
The thronging ghosts
Thirsty to drink
The lethal water
With strengthless hands
Dropping forward
Flowers that had died of thirst

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And the flesh fell from them
Dry flakes like leaves
From the bones of autumn trees,
Throng upon throng,
Falling sheaves,
A rotted harvest.

And only oblivion moved,
A shark in the water.

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And the Bishop had said: "There is too much happiness.
How shall they learn to turn to God
Except through agony of soul ?
Come ye" said the Bishop, "to the waters of life
And they shall be radio-active. Suffer
The little children to suffer
From generation to generation.
For the Lord of Hosts is with us
Equipped with all the latest weapons
Of nuclear fission.
And He shall redeem his people
With a single bombing mission.
For death is swallowed up in nonentity
And all the ills of the flesh
Absolved in vaporisation."

Babylon built on mud
And shifting waters
Above and below:
The changing waters
That cover the earth

From pole to pole
And carry anywhere
Both salt and sickness
Wrapping all our remotest actions up
In a cloud of inescapable
Consequence:

Brain without heart,
Stem without root.
Flying temples, hanging
With no foundation.

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Babylon like the brain of a man beheaded.
Empty singing of electronic waves
All without purpose, without foundation,
The body already rotted under it,
The bowels ulcered,
The heart stifled with fat.
And the earth beneath it
Shifting, foundering.

Why weep for Babylon ?
Weeping is not for pity.
Weeping washes the hurt clean.
Weeping is for oblivion
The slime of the shark
The acquiescent pearl
That reconciles to pain
And in its milky mirror
Glosses the; hidden horror
Being itself miasma
Of an ingrown disease.

Forgotten is Babylon
Because of our weeping
The children are spavined
Because of our terror
Because the sun of our life
Was so weak that the wind put it out
And the sinews of the heart so soft
That the fire could melt it.

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A machine is a bit of man's brain,
With pulsing electrons, power for blood
Infusing the cells.

We cannot create.
We can only project
Parts of our nature
Dividing, combining.
Binding ourselves ever closer
Together —

Or separating.

The heart from the brain,
The reins from the loins,
Saying to the heart — "Beat!"

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And the world is flooded
With loosened blood:
Or to the marrows — "Make!"
And the wild abortions
Crawl on the floor.

Man his own nature makes
But must make it whole
Or tear it to bits.
The vision he assumes
Commands him while; he sleeps
And when he wakes,
Without his knowing, sits
At the controls.

Watch then what vision palely
Climbs the steep despair
Of masquerading night
Within¹ the mind, and shines
As the moon does, secretly
On you alone.
For the moon grows and dies
And all who live by the moon
Fumble for the first golden ball
That slipped through infant fingers
Before the sight
Was strong enough to face
The rasping light.
Do you
Still infantile pursue
The imitative toy
Through all the sifting emptinesses
That are
Between wind and star ?

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Babylon the waning moon
Hung in the stratosphere
Beyond the pull of weight or tide
Babylon built in the power of pride
Conduits of calculation
Hypothetical arches
Statistical towers
The electronic brain
Producing nothing,
Drinking the light —

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All fallen, fallen now upon the air
In poisoned dust
That turns the flesh against the sun
The heart against hope
And sows death in the water
For the parched ghosts.

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Love demands no less
Than all. And love impelled
To gaze and probe until
All measurement was shredded
All coil of cause unwound
Down to the heart — the heart ! —
The unforgiving instant
The silence in the sound.

That diamond smashed my sight.
The heart of light, the darkness
Immeasurable, and at
The heart of fire
The irreducible ice.

Who shall re-assemble
Kaleidoscopic stars
Of glass, the fractured seconds
Of Time destroyed ?

We cannot

Create, but only reproduce
That which imagination
Garners from apprehension.

But who shall recreate
The vision that destroyed
His vision ? Or regain
Season and surface, such as
Measured sight and will
Can still command ? Except
The shattered will recasts
Its own disaster ?

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Winter. Earth's contraction.
The weary womb expelling
Its problematic birth.
Night. When love is **naked**

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And the blind life springs.
Honesty in the dark.
The greatest daring
Men can yet commit.

Ask the shaggy ass
Or the slow cow
Why in barest winter
We look for a new birth
We listen for that message
Which light would not allow
And the widening year disproves.

Suppose we have conquered day,
Harnessed the years of light —
Still the protestant heart
Drums in its own night.
Earth speaks through the ass of the brain,
The cow of the milky senses:
The shepherds of imagination
Gather their puny lambs
Of childish understanding.
Babylon's wise men
Offer their several answers
As ransom for their pride.
But only see their own gifts.
In the night around them
And the naked winter
The ass who knows he's an ass
And the slow genitive cow
And the unregarded shepherds
Alone dare gaze, unflinching.
At the tiny interrogative
— Why ? — in the dirty straw.

RANDALL SWINGLER

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