

to my fellow artists

Today, it came to me. How you
My friends who write, who draw
And carve, friends who make pictures,
Plays, finger delicate instruments,
Compose, or fake, or criticize—how
In the oncoming megaton bombardments,
All you stand for will be gone,
Like an arrow into hell.

It is strange, yet
If I tell you how sunlight glitters off
Intricate visions etched into breastplates
By Trojan silversmiths—you believe me,
You sanction my desires.

And if I say:
Around my bedposts birds have built their
nests
That sing: No. No—you share my anxiety,
My loss becomes your evidence.

And if I write:
When I flog salt, it rains; when I sell flour,
It blows—you feel my hopelessness.
What's more, you understand my words.

But if I speak straight out and say:

Infatuated by cheap immortality . . .
Distinguished each from each by pains
You measure against pains . . . you stand
To lose the world, and look alike
As if you spat each other out, you say:

Logue grinds his axe again. He's red.
Or cashing in. And you are right.
I have an axe to grind. Compared to you,
I'm red and short of cash. So what?
I think, am weak, need help, have lived,
And will with your permission, live.
Why should I seek to puzzle you with words
When your beds are near sopping with
blood?

And yet I puzzle you with words.

If—as many of you do—you base
All of your hope, all of that hope
Necessary to make a work of art,
On unborn generations, start
Hunting up a place to hide those works
You will create in privation.

Consider, my fellows, how all
The dead lovelies inside our museums,
Stones, books, things we have stolen,
Think how they will crumple up
One dusk between six and six-ten.
Spend your shilling. Sleep alone.

Especially you, Amis and Osborne,
Past masters at flogging your own
Contemptibility, will you not work
With your thoughts that were never

Contemptible? And you, John Wain,
You write letters defending your poetry.
Will you not write a word against
Your certain destruction?

It is true.
They will say you are fools
Who know nothing of politics.
Women and artists must keep out of politics.

They will suggest—
Politely, politely—your hair
Is too long for sanity.
Even though you are bald with worry.

They will,
With their reason,
Prove your unreasonableness.
Though you are dying from rationality.

They will do all in their power,
And their power is great,
To shut you up, until

Recommending your wife's sexual niceties,
Or lamenting her
Loose in the hilts

You thrive like milestones,
For whom the Queen's green pounds
Were contagious.

Listen, I beg you. Lately,
In a publication called 'Sunday Times'
They spilled their fetid gifts of mind.

Saying:
You are confused about destruction, yes?

But,
Recommending the death of the country
In the name of the country, we shall bomb
If we must bomb. Bomb like King Billy,
For the English have something to die for.

They do not speak about something to live
for.

Saying:
In the names of loyalty, faith, integrity,
How vile are those who wish to live here
Minus the current notions of democracy.

Not speaking of those who wish to die here.

The death before dishonour, boys.
The death before gestapo, boys.
The death before a tyrant, boys.
The death before the 'Sunday Times.'

But where is the dishonour, gestapo,
Or tyrant? And who wants to dishonour
Or govern a cinder? My friends,
How difficult it is for those who speak
Out of anger to answer those who speak
Out of prejudice and complacency. 'Yet:

Imagine a horror
And commit a horror because of it,
Is called mad.

Think desolation,
And create desolation because of it,
Is called mad.

Thus the Ripper and Christie
Thought of whores.
Thus they think of our country.

So do you agree with them,
Spender, and Barker, and Auden?
And you, my newly married master, Eliot.
Will you adopt their lie by silence?
And having sold our flesh to war
Bequeath our bones to God? Or,
Are there two sides to this question?

But I fear we are easily beaten.
So where shall we hide them, our treasures?
Uncertain the disused chalk-pit.
Uncertain the bank's steel vault.
And the holds of ships are uncertain.

We must beg permission
To hang our paintings underground.
Store books and stones in mines—
For the first time miners will see them.
But the rents will be high, underground.
And I doubt if we can afford them.

Perhaps they will let
A few of us into the deep bomb-lockers,
Where the pilots and aimers sleep tight?
We must not be afraid to ask.
The work of Angries
Will not scare the devoted experts.

But let us remember to leave behind
Permanent signs. Signs that are
Easily read. Signs that say: So deep . . .
Under this many foot of stone . . .
Is the Film Institute, the Royal Court,
Better Books, and the ICA.

Then can our six-handed grandsons,
Your unborn consolation,
Discover that we too, had art.
And those who dare look
Over the crater's jagged rim,
May, in the evening, climb

Down into the mauve bowl of London
And dig with their hands.
While their guards watch out
For tyrants, and food, and sun.

Think, men of no future,
But with a name to come.

Christopher Logue