

SOME POEMS BY

PAUL

KLEI

Translated by Anselm Hollo

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scorpion press

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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.

*1906*

## 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