

THE CLOSE CHAPLET

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION
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THE QUIDS

The little quids, the million quids,
The everywhere, everything, always quids,
The atoms of the Monoton,
Each turned three essences where it stood,
And ground a gisty dust from its neighbors' edges,
Until a powdery thoughtfall stormed in and out,
The cerebration of a slippery quid enterprise.
Each quid stirred.
The united quids
Waved through a sinuous decision.

The quids, that had never done anything before
But be, be, be, be, be,
The quids resolved to predicate
And dissipate in a little grammar.

Oh, the Monoton didn't care,
For whatever they did—
The Monoton's contributing quids—
The Monoton would always remain the same.

A quid here and there gyrated in place-position,
While many essential quids turned inside-out
For the fun of it
And a few refused to be anything but
Simple, unpredicated copulatives.
Little by little, this commotion of quids,
By threes, by tens, by casual millions,
Squirming within the state of things,
The metaphysical acrobats,
The naked, immaterial quids
Turned inside on themselves
And came out all dressed,
Each similar quid of the inward same,
Each similar quid dressed in a different way—
The quids' idea of a holiday.

The quids could never tell what was happening.
But the Monoton felt itself differently the same
In its different parts.
The silly quids upon their rambling exercise
Never knew, could never tell
What their pleasure was about,
What their carnival was like,
Being in, being in, being always in
Where they never could get out
Of the everywhere, everything, always in,
To derive themselves from the Monoton.

But I know, with a quid inside of me.
But I know what a quid's disguise is like,
Being one myself,
The gymnastic device
That a quid puts on for exercise.

And so should the trees,
And so should the worms,
And so should you,
And all the other predicates
And all the other accessories
Of the quids' masquerade.

MORTAL

There is a man of me that tills.
There is a woman of me that reaps.
One is true
And one is fair.
Scarce I know where either are.

But I am seed the man should give,
And I am child the woman should bear,
And I am love
That cannot find them anywhere.

Father and Mother and God and my shadowy ancestry—
I think there's no way of making anything more than a
mortal of me.

ONE

One sleep, one stirring,
Were one life enough
Were they enough one life.

One is so many, so many,
Innumerably, more and more wearily,
Never quite, never quite.

Will beauty, can beauty,
Allay the deficiency,
The gap that is death?

Beauty is life like life,
Coincidentally never quite.

The lagging, the dying,
The more and more of the many,
The less of the one,
The increasing become the detracting,
Until the diverse dwindling one
Is none:
After the death,

What can go on?

Still the lagging
Of life now less than nothing,
And death's approaching
More successfully
A sum.

A PROPHECY OR A PLEA

THE MOST MOVING and at once distressing event in the life of a human being is his discovery that he is alive. From that moment to his death the fact of life is a constant white glare over him, an unsetting and shadowless sun. For darkness, for repose, for a quiet examination of the conditions of existence, for the experience of appreciation and pleasure, it is found necessary to close the eyes, to create an interior where life is a dim infiltration through the heavy curtains of the flesh into this dark room of the soul and where, so seen, through eyes reopened in a more endurable light, it appears lovely, describable. Art has become an evocation of the shadows.

What has happened? We have been blinded by life, so we turn our senses inward, against it; and the utterance of relief is made in pride, the cry of cowardice becomes the authentic act of art. The tradition of art, of poetry especially, as a catharsis has so thoroughly legitimized this process that it is almost impossible to attack it. It is not a question of proving another method more legitimate. There is no other method. For if the matter be examined more closely it will be seen that the quarrel must be made not with the way we write but with the way we live. For art is the way we live, while aesthetics, in divorcing art from life, sets the seal of approval upon the philosophy of escape. We live life by avoiding it. Art then as the strategy of this philosophy is no more than

an inversion, and, as an inversion, is barren. It is not, as it should be, the conduct of life itself, but merely an abnormality of conduct.

Life, then, may be an experience in which we are the passive objects of a force to which our nature offers no resistance, but transmits the shock of impact to the functions of poetry. In this definition man is but a stream of passage between the source that is life and the outlet that is poetry. The climate of this stream, its slight waves and winds and temporary havens constitute the notion of beauty. The artist of this mood sees it not as an inexhaustible infinity of the source whose entirety he is able to reconstruct from his partial vision of it or as the ultimate mold of the mysterious vessel into which life flows. The quality of beauty is rather an accidental, a peculiar flavor of the poet's own soul, an isolated phenomenon, the taste of a wine rather than the very pulse of running blood. The taste may be whatever pleases the whim of the moment. There is no eternal form, no ideal. Something vague as a flood pours in upon the being, something in excess of it that becomes unbearable until poetry or another muse, like an old phlebotomist, performs the operation that lets the magic or the accursed fluid out. It is this attitude toward life that has inspired almost every poet who has suffered or rejoiced in living and cried out in art. To the poet of classical tradition art is the measure of self-control against the violence of existence. To the old romanticist (I mean to speak of another) it is the flourish of escape from one impossible world into another. Does the modern realist

do better? The test of his art is the quantity of life compressed in his work. The expressionist lives in a realm that is neither art nor life but a limbo that borrows from both and belongs to neither. The impressionist achieves an unhappy blur of art and life in which he himself is obscured. But the differences between all these lie in no fundamental quarrel of values but in personal eccentricities of method. For all the role of art is medicinal. For the poets of the classical mood it is a strong cathartic that keeps them free of malaise and dyspepsia and wraps them in an urbane Horatian peace; for the Elizabethans, a pretty pastoral constitutional; for all the romanticists, a drug—a stimulant for Byron, a delicious dose of laudanum for Shelley (even such as Baudelaire bought their cocaine at the same shop); a soothing syrup for the Victorians; a tonic for the realists; a heady wine for the impressionists; a profound emetic for the expressionists. In this strange company—the earnest Theocritus, the author of the unhappy and magical *Pervigilium Veneris*, the divine Dante, the seraphic Keats, the slobbering Swinburne, even the modern female lyricists who squeal with dainty passion under the fine pin-pricks of life—the poetic tradition accomplishes the vitiation of life in art. The pressure of life is unbearable and the poet in this hazard does not hurl himself against it but finds a safety-valve in song; and existence, that art should have spiritualized, becomes despiritualized in art.

Now I am insisting that the pressure is a challenge not to a retreat into the penumbra of introspection but to the birth of a new poetic bravery that shall exchange insight