

In Memory of Sigmund Freud

(d. September 1939)

When there are so many we shall have to mourn,
When grief has been made so public, and exposed
 To the critique of a whole epoch
 The frailty of our conscience and anguish,

Of whom shall we speak? For every day they die
Among us, those who were doing us some good,
 And knew it was never enough but
 Hoped to improve a little by living.

Such was this doctor: still at eighty he wished
To think of our life, from whose unruliness
 So many plausible young futures
 With threats or flattery ask obedience.

But his wish was denied him; he closed his eyes
Upon that last picture common to us all,
 Of problems like relatives standing
 Puzzled and jealous about our dying.

For about him at the very end were still
Those he had studied, the nervous and the nights,
 And shades that still waited to enter
 The bright circle of his recognition

Turned elsewhere with their disappointment as he
Was taken away from his old interest
 To go back to the earth in London,
 An important Jew who died in exile.

Only Hate was happy, hoping to augment
His practice now, and his shabby clientele
 Who think they can be cured by killing
 And covering the gardens with ashes.

They are still alive but in a world he changed
Simply by looking back with no false regrets;
 All that he did was to remember
 Like the old and be honest like children.

He wasn't clever at all: he merely told
The unhappy Present to recite the Past
 Like a poetry lesson till sooner
 Or later it faltered at the line where

Long ago the accusations had begun,
And suddenly knew by whom it had been judged,
 How rich life had been and how silly,
 And was life-forgiven and more humble,

Able to approach the Future as a friend
Without a wardrobe of excuses, without
 A set mask of rectitude or an
 Embarrassing over-familiar gesture.

No wonder the ancient cultures of conceit
In his technique of unsettlement foresaw
The fall of princes, the collapse of
Their lucrative patterns of frustration.

If he succeeded, why, the Generalised Life
Would become impossible, the monolith
Of State be broken and prevented
The co-operation of avengers.

Of course they called on God: but he went his way,
Down among the Lost People like Dante, down
To the stinking fosse where the injured
Lead the ugly life of the rejected.

And showed us what evil is: not as we thought
Deeds that must be punished, but our lack of faith,
Our dishonest mood of denial,
The concupiscence of the oppressor.

And if something of the autocratic pose,
The paternal strictness he distrusted, still
Clung to his utterance and features,
It was a protective imitation

For one who lived among enemies so long:
If often he was wrong and at times absurd,
To us he is no more a person
Now but a whole climate of opinion

Under whom we conduct our differing lives:
Like weather he can only hinder or help,
The proud can still be proud but find it
A little harder, and the tyrant tries

To make him do but doesn't care for him much.
He quietly surrounds all our habits of growth;
He extends, till the tired in even
The remotest most miserable duchy

Have felt the change in their bones and are cheered,
And the child unlucky in his little State,
Some hearth where freedom is excluded,
A hive whose honey is fear and worry,

Feels calmer now and somehow assured of escape;
While as they lie in the grass of our neglect,
So many long-forgotten objects
Revealed by his undiscouraged shining

Are returned to us and made precious again;
Games we had thought we must drop as we grew up,
Little noises we dared not laugh at,
Faces we made when no one was looking.

But he wishes us more than this: to be free
Is often to be lonely; he would unite
The unequal moieties fractured
By our own well-meaning sense of justice,

Would restore to the larger the wit and will
The smaller possesses but can only use
For arid disputes, would give back to
The son the mother's richness of feeling.

But he would have us remember most of all
To be enthusiastic over the night
Not only for the sense of wonder
It alone has to offer, but also

Because it needs our love: for with sad eyes
Its delectable creatures look up and beg
Us dumbly to ask them to follow;
They are exiles who long for the future

That lies in our power. They too would rejoice
If allowed to serve enlightenment like him,
Even to bear our cry of "Judas,"
As he did and all must bear who serve it.

One rational voice is dumb: over a grave
The household of Impulse mourns one dearly loved.
Sad is Eros, builder of cities,
And weeping anarchic Aphrodite.

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