

FIVE POEMS BY G. A. L. BURGEON

The Russet

I dreamed I saw the wicked wingèd Child,
 Accoutred like an old, bent pedlar,
Offering my love a pewter platter, piled
 With codlin, crab and medlar.

Jonathan, Ribston, Pearmain, Golden Drop,
 Nonsuches, Nonpareils – “O dip in
“Your dainty hands, my duck,” he cried, “Ah stop
 “And stoop, and pick your pippin!”

Next, lip to ear, I heard dan Cupid say,
 As, torn twixt Reds and Greens, she lingered
And, pursing wary lips in wise assay,
 Those happy apples fingered: –

“The great green cooker’s shiny-smooth to touch –
 “That Bramley’s crisp –“ (she prodded)
“But this dry-looker tastes the sweetest – much!”
 She laughed . . . she bit . . . *she nodded!*

Semantics

Strange men with straight noses,

Dead many years ago,

Made music –

And why strange?

Oh, not merely minstrels, no!

They *made* music!

Made music?

Made “music”; saw and heard

Divine ladies, nine ladies

Sent dancing in a word

Down centuries thrice ten . . .

And still –

Well?

the printless fall

Of their dancing breaks, glancing

From “Muse” . . . “music” . . . “musical” . . .

Tradition in Poetry

“Why choose so much this Attic mould,
 “These quick staccato rhymes?
 “It takes more plastic forms to hold
 “The content of our times.

“A modern poet roams at ease;
 “He neither rhymes nor rages –
 “All your sonorous cadences
 “Are echoes of past ages!”

You sapient ass, of course they are!
 My fathers they’ve been haunting
 Since Latin grew vernacular
 For troubadours to chant in.

From cell, court, coffee-house they
 crowd,
 At Albion’s Rout to mingle:
I wandered lonely as a cloud –,
 Hymn, Ballad, Nursery Jingle.

The bursting heart that’s choked with
 grief
 Or too too much rejoices
 Turns, like a child, for swift relief
 To deep ancestral voices.

Let sober men bring forth, with pains
 Of labour, in the study
 Echo-emancipated strains
 More subtle, and more muddy:

But I – when this exciting art
 My brain with blood suffuses,
 As evening steals around my heart
 And Betty, and the Muses –

I – when the hour is waxing late
 And dangerous wings enfold me –
 The steady throb of Six and Eight
 Is mighty to uphold me;

When Fancy tugs and sways – in fine,
 ‘Tis true my hand’s unsteady
 And, by the Dog, I need old wine
 Because I’m drunk already!

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Cosmetics

Only the artist can divine,
 Beneath her accidents, pure Nature,
 Crystal in rock, or gold in mine,
 Behind the mask the living feature.

The truth once caught, he bids it stay
 And how he scrapes and how he bothers
 Until, the dross all purged away,
 It's extant for himself and others!

So, in those days before I won
 Some slight concessions with a sonnet,
 When (our acquaintance scarce begun)
 Your face had still more paint upon it,

Let it be blushed through North and South
 That I'm the man (I take much credit)
 Who, past that gash you called your mouth,
 Still "saw" your lips, your face, and read it.

Could my poor songs avail but this –
 To teach your heart how ill they merit
 Insult by over-emphasis,
 Your dear dear beauty and high spirit!

What if between you and your glass
 They crept one day – oh, not to upbraid! – I
 Would have you whisper: "What I pass
 "Must not demean so praised a lady!"

You taunt me with "old-fashioned," "quaint";
 No, not a whit! I'm not so petty.
 My dear, it's *charming* to see paint –
 But much more charming to see Betty!

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The Doppelganger

A strange dichotomy I find
Of mental disputation,
Each time the Betty in my mind
Meets Betty on the station.

At first, while we say how d'you do
And talk about the weather,
I see them side by side, those two
And match them both together.

"Look there and here!" says eye to heart,
"And *there* – your fancy hid that!
"Admit your memory took her part!
"You rather overdid that!"

Like snow the first one fades away
And melts into the second:
I lose my head and hear it say:
"She's sweeter than you reckoned!"