

## POEMS

By J. AQUILINA

### OBITUARY

No more shoe-banging scenes. Krushev is dead;  
Left the U.S.S.R. and his hospital bed  
To join a new world, after having shed  
The insignia that made him a prominent Red.  
It did him good to look up God instead,  
Beyond where astronauts and missiles sped.

12.ix.71 – Balzan

### A WIDOW'S SORROW

A sorrowing widow kissed for the last time  
Krushev's pale forehead, folded arms at rest.  
How many sorrowing widows kissed the foreheads  
Of their dead husbands killed in Budapest?

25.ix.71 – Balzan

### WESTWARD HO!

As the time for packing up gets near,  
The time for going back home,  
I pray the Captain of the boat  
To steer us clear of doubt and fear,  
The fear of the hazards of the trip  
That has sunk many a ship.

Oh, Captain, Steerman of the Boat,  
As you call us all aboard  
And count us one by one,  
We pray you steer the Shadow Ship  
Westward ho!  
Towards the rising sun.

1.xi.72

## LEPTIS MAGNA

Ruins of Sabratha

The thud of the centuries by the Blue Glass Sea  
 Fill me with admiration  
 Awed by the dread of the Vulture,  
 Man-chasing cormorant,  
 For the architects that designed the city,  
 The Forum and the Temple,  
 The *hamamat* by the blue  
 Warm sea – ever the same  
 Warm blue sea.

(Hello, ghostland! Who goes there?)

The dead city, the shadow city,  
 Fills me with tearful pity  
 For what the unearthed city  
 Was once and is now  
 No more – the Dead City, the Shadow City.  
 Hawks overhead –  
 Solitude and pity  
 Time, the grave-Digger, dangling his feet  
 On the broken colonnades.

15.xii.72 – Tripoli

## TIME'S CLOWN

I have long been gliding,  
 Gliding down, gliding down,  
 Turning somersaults like a clown  
 In Time's circus (Time's Clown)  
 Sliding down, always down  
 The slippery back of a Bear,  
 Bear Black, Bear Brown, Bear White,  
 Bear of the North Pole.  
 Gliding down every moment of my life  
 I have now reached the bottom of its spine  
 Right at the beginning of its tail

From the beginning to the end of the story –  
 Tip end of the spine  
 (How it hurts!)  
 A laugh, a whimper, a whine.  
 Pray you be ready to collect me  
 On your arms, on your lap,  
 When I slide off the last vertebra  
 Of the Spine of Time.  
 Collect me kindly on my way back  
 Lest I break my neck on the Rock of Time;  
 Collect me as the midwife  
 Collected me on her arms  
 Before I was put astride  
 The slippery back of the Big, Big Bear –  
 Wandering Bear  
 That is Time –  
 This World its Den.

16.xii.72 – Tripoli

#### ATHENS

This is Athena's City, proud, unique,  
 Belovèd of the gods that made her great,  
 From where Olympus ruled her warriors' fate,  
 Launching the Ulyssean Odyssey of the Greek.  
 'Tis here that Mind and Vision touched the peak,  
 And Phidias' luminous statues re-create  
 The epic of the Body, bards narrate  
 Battles at sea and shipwrecks in the creek.

From where the Parthenon guards its ancient glory,  
 Poseidon's temple dominates on high  
 Like an eagle's eerie, I espy the City  
 With its *stora* and *agora* near by,  
 Haunted by myths that people Homer's story:  
 These broken columns wrench my heart with pity.

Athens – 27.iii.73

## FAME

What would not a man do to attain immortality!  
 I think he would not mind a little vulgarity.  
 Lord Byron, for instance, did not scruple to scratch his name  
 On a column of Poseidon's temple to win a double fame.  
 Now with Poseidon he shares the limelight and the glory,  
 Not less the banter of American tourists amused by the story.

Athens - 28.iii.73

## THE STORM

God, help me weather the storm  
 Before my boat reaches  
 The far-off harbour  
 With tattered sails and broken masts.  
 The oars are not broken yet;  
 But the arms are tired.

20.iv.73

## SHIPWRECK

Will it not be very cruel  
 If the ship, with all its cargo,  
 Sinks in the harbour  
 Swallowed up by the deep shark sea,  
 As if nothing ever really mattered  
 Good and bad all pushed  
 Down the throat of the shark  
 Blue sea?

20.iv.73

## DEDICATION

Mary, Dawn of Joy,  
 I instal you Queen  
 Of my Heart and Mind.  
 Govern me by the regality of your love,  
 Mother most kind.

20.iv.73

## QUESTIONS

How long must I stretch my arm  
 To catch and remove the dark cloud  
 That conceals you from my immediate sight,  
 God invisible, yet unmistakable?  
 How long and how often must I push back  
 The attacks of the Bear  
 That claws me from behind?  
 How long, O God, will you remain invisible  
 To my inward searching  
 Behind the dark cloud?  
 How long and how tortuous is the road back  
 Through the Dark Tunnel?

6.v.73

## ACADEMIC BOREDOM

The lecture was scholarly, the lecturer precise  
 and deep,  
 The Chairman, after having sung his praises, fell  
 asleep  
 Enjoying the snooze till the end of the learned  
 communication  
 When he joined the clapping of hands to express  
 his approbation.

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 Paris – July 1973

J. AQUILINA

## THE PEOPLE'S FESTIVAL OF FUN AND MIRTH\*

Make room for King Carnival! Blow the trumpets loud!  
 Cry his subjects today that swell the motley crowd.  
 We greet His Majesty with cheers for three Days' Fun,  
 Salute him our Monarch and crown him with our Sun!  
 Come, stand up and salute! King Carnival passes by –  
 Take your place on his chariot for tomorrow you die!

\*Originally published in the Carnival programme of 1958.