

# CONTEMPORARY POETRY AND PROSE

*Poems by*

Wallace Stevens

Dylan Thomas

E. E. Cummings

Gavin Ewart

Kerker Quinn

Ruthven Todd

Kenneth Allott

Roger Roughton

*Short Story by*

Isaac Babel

A Labrador Ballad - An Appalachian Ballad  
A Greenland Folk-Legend

**3** July 1936. Monthly. Sixpence



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# Poem *by* E. E. Cummings

little joe gould has lost his teeth and doesn't know where  
to find them (and found a secondhand set which click) little  
gould used to amputate his appetite with bad brittle  
candy but just (nude eel) now little joe lives on air

Harvard Brevis Est for Handkerchief read Papernapkin no laundry  
bills likes People preferring Negroes Indians Youse  
n.b. ye twang of little joe (yankee) gould irketh sundry  
who are trying to find their minds (but never had any to lose)

and a myth is as good as a smile but little joe gould's quote oral  
history unquote might (publishers note) be entitled a wraith's  
progress or mainly awash while chiefly submerged or an amoral  
morality sort-of-aliveing by innumerable kind-of-deaths

(Amerique Je T'Aime and it may be fun to be fooled  
but it's more fun to be more to be fun to be little joe gould)

## Three Poems *by* Kenneth Allott

### Decor

The shunting of course goes on all day and night  
the coupling, the buffers, the points, the hammering  
the ever-open door of all-night kitchen  
(Everything here is fresh every day your lordship.)  
and the great arc lights splutter every night  
and the trains are very tiresome with their blue flashes  
the small hours, all night and every night.

The slippers shuffling along in the sunken garden  
the truth being as ugly as a skin disease  
and the fruit so tired of coming at the same season  
little miss riding boots who has been in service  
the smoking roofs we never see inside  
the laughing children running between the lamp-posts.

Please dry the sponge and observe the highway code  
please park your car in a high place among sheep  
sobbing in the next bedroom in a strange hotel  
the night-wind across the mountain tarn  
the fourth phase of the moon and maybe a crisis.

## Poem

Better late than never is a lie  
better in the mud of the river  
better the closed eye, better the stranger  
better the last thing said but one  
because the last is always the only one  
and now is always forever.

Better to sink your teeth than cross your heart  
and better crossing yourself than a sinking heart  
and better not to play a Roman part  
and better and better and ever and ever stranger  
still to come running out of and into danger.

Just so is worse because just so is never  
just so will make the running in a fever  
perhaps is neater and perhaps is true  
perhaps will be a maid-of-all-work for you  
perhaps is a promise still-born on the lips  
perhaps is tired with running up the steps.

Never is better, perhaps will save your breath  
and never a better way of saying death.

## Abacadabra

Please throw lumps of sugar at the cheval mirror  
set clockwork mice to worry the aspidistra  
dust only the ceiling of the spare bedroom  
where the Dutch doll is sprawling in the firegrate  
which rains soot with the wind in a certain quarter  
and whenever a spinster says mortification  
or a hurdler breaks the record for the four forty  
and the buses are left for hours, fogbound in the streets.

It is wise to say the least to send your daughter  
to an expensive school where they teach the pianoforte  
at a moderate charge and the cuisine is excellent  
where the bootboys are dismissed every twenty-four hours.  
Games are an excellent training for the after-life  
but I suggest Havelock Ellis on wet afternoons  
and trips to the sea at least every other fortnight  
because as you know the sea is our birthright  
and these are the things which count.

Please pick them all up and take them to Mrs. Hubbard  
who keeps the pharmacy just round the corner  
who is an authority on the Crusades and forced strawberries

whom the Archbishop himself admits is quite orthodox.  
Little Mr. Hubbard he wears his horns with a difference.  
You would like him I think because he is so quiet.  
He knows that afternoon tea holds the Empire together.

Don't shiver so, you silly, when you say forever.

## Farewell to Florida

by Wallace Stevens

### I

Go on, high ship, since now upon the shore,  
The snake has left its skin upon the floor.  
Key West sank downward under massive clouds  
And silvers and greens spread over the sea. The moon  
Is at the mast-head and the past is dead.  
Her mind will never speak to me again.  
I am free. High above the mast the moon  
Rides clear of her mind and the waves make a refrain  
Of this: that the snake has shed its skin upon  
The floor. Go on through the darkness. The waves fly back.

### II

Her mind had bound me round. The palms were hot  
As if I lived in ashen ground, as if  
The leaves in which the wind kept up its sound  
From my North of cold whistled in a sepulchral South,  
Her South of pine and coral and coraline sea,  
Her home, not mine, in the ever-freshened Keys,  
Her days, her oceanic nights, calling  
For music, for whisperings from the reefs.  
How content I shall be in the North to which I sail  
And to feel sure and to forget the bleaching sand. . . .

### III

I hated the weathery yawl from which the pools  
Disclosed the sea floor and the wilderness  
Of waving weeds. I hated the vivid blooms  
Curled over the shadowless hut, the rust and bones,  
The trees like bones and the leaves half sand, half sun.  
To stand here on the deck in the dark and say  
Farewell and to know that that land is forever gone  
And that she will not follow in any word  
Or look, nor ever again in thought, except  
That I loved her once. . . . Farewell. Go on, high ship.

#### IV

My North is leafless and lies in a wintry slime  
Both of men and clouds, a slime of men in crowds.  
The men are moving as the water moves,  
This darkened water cloven by sullen swells  
Against your sides, then shoving and slithering,  
The darkness shattered, turbulent with foam.  
To be free again, to return to the violent mind  
That is their mind, these men, and that will bind  
Me round, carry me, misty deck, carry me  
To the cold, go on, high ship, go on, plunge on.

## Two Poems Towards a Poem

by Dylan Thomas

#### I

From the oracular archives and the parchment,  
Prophets and fibre kings in oil and letter,  
The lamped calligrapher, the queen in splints,  
Buckle to lint and cloth their natron footsteps,  
Draw on the glove of prints, dead Cairo's henna  
Pour like a halo on the caps and serpents.  
This was the resurrection in the desert,  
Death from a bandage, rants the mask of scholars  
Gold on such features, and the linen spirit  
Weds my long gentleman to dusts and furies;  
With priest and pharaoh bed my gentle wound,  
World in the sand, on the triangle landscape,  
With stones of odyssey for ash and garland  
And rivers of the dead around my neck.

#### II

Let the tale's sailor from a Christian voyage  
Atlaswise hold halfway off the dummy bay  
Time's ship-racked gospel on the globe I balance:  
So shall winged harbours through the rock-birds' eyes  
Spot the blown word, and on the seas I image  
December's thorn screwed in a brow of holly.  
Let the first Peter from a rainbow's quayrail  
Ask the tall fish swept from the bible east,  
What rhubarb man peeled in her foam-blue channel  
Has sown a flying garden round that sea ghost?  
Green as beginning, let the garden diving  
Soar, with its two bark towers, to that Day  
When the worm builds with the gold straws of venom  
My nest of mercies in the rude, red tree.

# Dollfuss Day, 1935

by Gavin Ewart

The young heads that I find attractive  
Turn towards a political sermon  
That promises and does not give,  
Like postcard of a mountain village  
That vouches for the truth of beauty  
It can at best allege.

The priest assures the Chancellor's smiling  
Moored to the land, balloon being Heaven.  
The negligent, glancing girl who might be willing  
Stares at the strangers, details of their clothing,  
And inattentive to death's propaganda  
Remembers loving.

But costumed boys who have not heard of love  
Believe the story of a brutal death,  
The priest with clasping hands, the Face above,  
Less distant than the town across the sea,  
While in the dark the Chancellor's photo  
Gleams like a Christmas tree.

## Worm Interviewed

by Ruthven Todd

It said it was the resurrection's worm,  
Coiling its long whip in the empty vein;  
Again, it said, I am the carnal worm  
Sprung sweetly from the tissue of the head;  
I, and I only, know the marrows of the brain,  
The mysterious issue of the infertile egg.

I caused the mind-storm in the summer,  
Throwing my long spear in the blood;  
I caused the cracking of the missing rib,  
My teeth the chisel and my eye the hammer.  
Being the maggot in the newly dead  
I heard the last pulse come bitterly.

I stole the tendon from the fractured foot  
As scaffolding to bolster up my hollow nest;  
I stole the nerve that held the eye to socket,  
Now dropped aimlessly upon the cheek.  
I was the asp about the virgin's breast  
That made the milk to run at Christmas time.



I was the first thing and am last;  
I made the bone that cowered in the womb,  
My nest about it made the firm hard limb.  
I am the Maker who does not count the cost  
Of the long shelter of the shallow tomb.  
I am the Priest who battens on the dead.

## Soluble Noughts and Crosses; *or*, California, Here I Come

(to E.A.)

by Roger Roughton

In a small theodolite of paper  
I could see the eyelash of a girl,  
The most beautiful young girl of all,  
Who was only dressed in cellophane,  
Who was speaking from a stone  
And saying this to me :  
" Look out for the red and written triangle,  
And enclose a penny-halfpenny stamp;  
For I must go at ten to one,  
Ten to one it's guineas time,  
Ten to one will be too many,  
Ten to one you'll come in last.  
Yes, did you hear :  
My fingers hang like pictures,  
And my breasts are pointing to the North? "

So I made an expedition to the Pole,  
While thin birds flew off sideways with a sob;  
There I heard a ringing at the door,  
Where some gongs were waiting in a queue;  
I played them all in turn  
And presently she stepped out from a handbag,  
Saying this to me :  
" The happy compass is decided,  
I must come at ten to one,  
Ten to one's beginner's time,  
Ten to one won't be enough,  
Ten to one we'll get there first.  
Please take this down,  
Yes take this down, for purple trees will sing the answer,  
For rhyming trains are meeting at a foxtrot,  
For string is floating on the water,  
For we are opening a parcel meant for both;  
Yes please take this down, for living words are played together,  
For love has grown up like a hair."

# Morality Play *by* Kerker Quinn

Morality skulks in a café corner booth  
Cursing the sand in his spinach  
And the enforced celibacy of old age;  
He presses his right heel on his left toes  
To send pain-volts up either lank leg;  
He turns his face away from the tangoing couples,  
He turns his face toward the nakedly lolling woman  
Frescoed over the bar;  
He tombstone-smiles at her several superfluous lumps,  
Hoping his money will last until, time-smoked,  
She is replaced by a comelier nude  
Frescoed on the café wall, over the bar.

## Making Feet and Hands

*by* Benjamin Péret

Eye standing up eye lying down eye sitting

Why wander about between two hedges made of stair-rails  
while the ladders become soft  
as new-born babes  
as zouaves who lose their homeland with their shoes  
Why raise one's arms towards the sky  
since the sky has drowned itself  
without rhyme or reason  
to pass the time and make its moustaches grow  
Why does my eye sit down before going to bed  
because saddles are making donkeys sore  
and pencils break in the most unpredictable fashion  
the whole time  
except on stormy days  
when they break into zigzags  
and snowy days  
when they tear their sweaters to pieces  
But the spectacles the old tarnished spectacles

sing songs while gathering grass for cats  
The cats follow the procession  
carrying flags  
flags and ensigns  
The fish's tail crossing a beating heart  
the throat regularly rising and falling to imitate the sea surrounding it  
and the fish revolving about a ventilator  
There are also hands  
long white hands with nails of fresh greenery  
and finger-joints of dew  
swaying eyelashes looking at butterflies  
saddened because the day made a mistake on the stairs  
There are also sexes fresh as running water  
which leap up and down in the valley  
because they are touched by the sun  
They have no beards but they have clear eyes  
and they chase dragonflies  
without caring what people will say

## The Proud Lamkin

(Traditional; St. Anthony, Labrador)  
Oh, a better man than the Lamkin  
He never built with stone.  
He built Dundreary's framehouse  
But of payment got none.

“Ho, give to me, Dundreary,  
So give to me my hire,  
Come give to me, Dundreary,  
Or I'll burn your house with fire.”

Said Dundreary to his lady  
They was walking on the quay  
“Look out for bold Lamkin  
“When he comes up this way.”

“Why should I beware Lamkin?  
Why need I look out for him  
When my doors are fast bolted  
And my windows pinned in?”

Dundreary hadn't gone an hour  
When proud Lamkin come nigh,  
He knocked at the front door  
And the nurse let him by.

"Where's the men of the house?"  
Spake up the bold Lamkin.  
"They're in the barn threshing,  
And they'll not come in."

"Where's the women of the house?"  
Spake up the bold Lamkin.  
"They're at the well washing,  
And they'll not come in."

"O, where is your master,  
Is he not without?"  
"He's gone to Conception."  
The false nurse cried out.

"O where is your mistress,  
Is she not within?"  
"She's in her room sewing  
With her windows barred in."

"What'll we do" says Lamkin,  
"To make her come in?"  
"Pierce the babe in the cradle,"  
Says the false nurse to him.

So the Lamkin he pierced it,  
And the false nurse she sung  
Till the blood out the cradle  
And from each bar it run.

"O mistress, dear mistress,  
How can you sleep so fast?  
Can't you hear your young Sir Johnson  
Acrying his last?"

"O please my child, Orange,  
O please him with the key."  
"He won't be pleased, lady  
For all my nurse's fee."

"O please my child, Orange,  
Please him with the wand."  
"He won't be pleased, my lady,  
For all his father's land."

“ O still my child, Orange,  
O still him with the bell.”  
“ He won’t be stilled, madam,  
Till you come down yourself.

For I can’t pacify him  
On the nurse milk nor pap,  
So I pray you come down, ma’am,  
And quiet him on your lap.”

“ How can I come downstairs  
On such a cold winter’s night,  
With no spark of fire burning,  
Nor no candle alight? ”

“ You’ve got two holland sheets up there  
As white as the snow.  
I pray you come down, ma’am  
By the light of them so.”

The first step she took,  
She trod on a stone  
The next step she took  
It was on the Lamkin.

“ O mercy, you Lamkin,  
O mercy have on me.  
Though you have killed my Johnson  
You shall have all your fee.

O spare my life Lamkin,  
For one, two o’clock,  
And I’ll give all the money  
You can take on your back.”

“ If you’d give me the money  
Like the sand of the sea,  
I’d not keep my bright knife  
From your white skin so free.”

“ You’ll get Orange, my nurse  
And her bright yellow hair  
And a peck of red gold,  
Although she’s my flower.”

“ O where is that nurse Orange?  
Go send her to me.  
She can hold the silver basin  
While your heart’s blood runs free.”

“ Now, shall I kill her, Orange?  
Or shall I let her be? ”  
“ Oh kill her, kill her, Lamkin,  
For she’s been no good to me.”

“ Go scour the silver basin,  
Go scour it nice and clean,  
To hold the lady’s heartblood  
For she comes of noble kin.”

“ There needs no basin, Lamkin,  
Let the blood run through the floor.  
What better is the heartblood  
Of the rich than of the poor? ”

“ Did you ever want for meat, Orange?  
Did you ever want for gold?  
Or ever want for anything  
A lady fine could hold? ”

“ I never wanted meat, ma’am,  
Nor have I wanted gold,  
But often I wanted many things  
A lady fine could hold.”

So with that the bold Lamkin  
He stuck his knife keen,  
And the rich lady’s heartblood  
It dropped on the stone.

Dundreary in a month or more  
Come sailing on the foam  
And sad and bitter was his heart  
As he drew in his home.

There was blood in the nursery  
There was blood in the hall,  
And blood on the stairs,  
And her heartblood on all.

“ Come here, come here, Lamkin,  
And I’ll pay you your fee.”  
And the fee that he paid him  
He hung on the tree.

“ Come here, come here, Orange,  
And I’ll pay off your hire.”  
And the hire that he paid her  
He burnt her in the fire.

# The Ballad of Miss Colman

(traditional)

“It was a proper tall young man,  
And William was his name,  
Who come from over the Regency.  
He come acourting me.

He follered me up, he follered me down,  
He follered me in my room.  
I had no wings to fly away,  
No tongue to say him nay.

He took half of my father’s gold,  
Part of my mother’s fee,  
And two of the very best stable steeds  
Where there stood thirty-three.”

Miss Colman rode the milk-white horse.  
The gentleman rode the grey.  
So they rode till they come to the salt water sea  
At the end of a long summer day.

“Get down, get down, my pretty little miss,  
Get down, these words I say.  
For here I’ve drowned nine king’s daughters  
And you the tenth shall be.

Pull off, pull off them silky clothes  
And hang them on the tree,  
For they’re too fine and they cost too much  
To rot in the salt water sea.”

“Turn your face around and about  
To the green leaves on the tree.  
For I don’t think as fine a gentleman as you  
A naked lady should see.

Go get them sickles for to cut the nettles  
What grow so close to the brim,  
For I fear they’ll catch my unbound hair  
And stain my lilywhite skin.”

So he got them sickles for to cut the nettles  
Agrowing so close to the brim,  
And she picked him up with a pitiful smile  
And threw the false knight in.

And up then spoke the little parrot bird  
Exceeding on his tree,  
“What’s become of the knight with the pretty painted cloak  
You rode with down to the sea?”

“Hush up your beak, you little parrot bird,  
Tell none of your tales on me  
And your cage shall be of fine red gold  
With its spokes of ivory.”

And up then spoke that good old man  
In the room wherever he be.  
“What is it ails my little parrot bird,  
He’s speaking so long before day?”

“There come three cats unto my door,  
My life expecting to betray.  
I was jist calling up my little golden bee  
For to drive them cats away!”

Collected at Flag Pond, Tennessee.

## Nukarpiartekak (traditional)

It is of an old bachelor, no longer taking care of his kayak, which had become green. Higher up the fjord lived a man with a most beautiful daughter.

And one morning the old bachelor arose, while the others in the igloo were yet asleep. Washed his head, washed his sex, scratched the green plants off his kayak, and here he is, on his way to the home of the man with the beautiful daughter.

As he came near, the people cried Leave your boat! and then Enter! . . . The girl was sitting at one end of the igloo. So lovely he turned hot and almost died of want.

When Nukarpiartekak took off his fur coat, to hang it up, he saw the beautiful girl smile at him: and quickly he fainted. And coming to himself and looking at her again, when he saw that she was smiling still, then once more he felt such desire that he lost his senses.

And each time that he came to himself after losing his senses, see how he came ever a little nearer to the beautiful girl! And when the others lay down, Nukarpiartekak saw that she was making ready a couch at once for him and for herself: and, seeing that, he fainted once again and his head fell loudly on the platform of the sleeping-place.

When his senses returned, he felt again this violent desire: he came towards the platform of the sleeping-place, but as soon as he touched it, he fell face forward.



Then they stretched out, the one close to the other. And she was so beautiful that he felt he would die. Then Nukarpiartekek took her. And then he began to come inside her. At first it was as if he thrust himself in her up to the knees; then up to the arms, then to the armpits, and his right arm was thrust within her, and then the man, up to the chin, was thrust inside her. And at last he gave a great shout and vanished in her completely. The others awoke. Asked what it was. But none replied. When in the morning they lit their lamps, Nukarpiartekek had disappeared, his kayak was still on the river.

The beautiful girl came out of the igloo to make water, and with her, the skeleton of Nukarpiartekek came out.

Collected in Greenland by Holm in 1884.  
Translated by A. L. Lloyd.

## “In The Basement”

by ISAAC BABEL

As a small boy I had but a vague idea of truth. This was the result of too much reading and an over-excitabile imagination. I was always poring over books: stealthily in class, during the breaks between lessons, on the way home, and in the evenings, squatting surreptitiously in the shadow of our dining-room table. For books I sacrificed all the most popular amusements, such as the secret excursions to the port during school-time, the billiard-parties in the Greek Street coffee-houses, and the swimming on the Langeron. I had no friends: for who would care to consort with such a bookworm?

One day at school I caught sight of a book about Spinoza in the hands of Marc Borgman, our head boy. He had just finished reading it and was unable to resist the temptation to tell the other boys about the Spanish Inquisition. What he said had an erudite flavour, but sounded very dull. There was no poetry in his words. And I simply had to break in. I edified my audience with tales of old Amsterdam, of its gloomy ghetto, of the philosophers and the diamond-cutters. My account, based on a knowledge gleaned from books, was greatly embroidered by my own invention. But that was only to be expected. My imagination intensified the dramatic scenes, found mysterious and complicated motives and surprising conclusions. Spinoza's death, that free and lonely death, loomed in my imagination like a battle. Sinedrion was urging him to repentance, but the dying man was adamant. And then I introduced Rubens, whom I saw standing by Spinoza's bed taking a mask of the dead man's face.

My audience listened open-mouthed to this fantastic and animated recital. And, in the next break, Borgman came up to me and, taking my arm familiarly, led me off for a stroll. Before long we had become the best of friends. Borgman was not a bad type of head-boy. His powerful brain had already out-distanced our school-boyish wisdom, and he seemed

bent upon the discovery of greater truths. Even we, thoughtless twelve-year-old boys, could realise that a career of unusual distinction lay in store for him. And now this brilliant and reserved youth grew attached to me because of my peculiar knack of spinning the most fantastic tales on the least provocation.

That year we had moved up into the third form. One day towards the beginning of summer Borgman invited me to spend a day at their country house. Borgman's father was manager of the Russian Foreign Trade Bank, and was one of that generation of men who were transforming provincial Odessa into a Marseilles or Naples, but he had still in him the leaven of the old Odessa merchants. Fond of the society of sceptical and affable men of the world, he avoided when possible talking in Russian, preferring to express himself in an English that smacked of the rough and abrupt jargon of Liverpool sea-captains. When the Italian Opera had come to the town in April, the Borgman's gave a dinner in honour of the company. And the self-indulgent banker, the last of the old Odessa merchants, had then proceeded to carry on a vigorous intrigue with the generously-bosomed prima donna, who after two months departed, taking away with her only some memories which did not weigh too heavily on her conscience, and a necklace, chosen with taste, but of negligible value.

Borgman's father was also Consul for the Argentine and Chairman of the Stock Exchange Committee; his business abilities were generally recognised. I had been invited to his house, and my Aunt Bobka was not slow to make the most of this, and soon the news spread far and wide. On the great day, my aunt dressed me up with the greatest possible style, and I caught the local train for Bolshaya Fontanka.

The Borgman's house stood on a low red cliff over-looking the sea. In its grounds, sloping gently to the edge of the cliff, a garden had been laid out, planted with fuchsias and mulberry trees trimmed into sphere-like shapes. Coming as I did from an indigent and disorderly household, this tastefully appointed residence sent me into raptures. Wicker-work chairs gleamed whitely in the foliage-shaded alleys; the lunch-table was elegantly laid and adorned with flowers; the window-frames were picked out in green; and a low and spacious wooden colonnade stretched in front of the house.

The bank-manager himself arrived in the evening. After dinner, setting a wicker armchair near the edge of the cliff overlooking the restless plain of the sea, he lit a cigar and engrossed himself in the *Manchester Guardian*. The guests, Odessa ladies for the most part, sat on the verandah, playing poker. A slender samovar with narrow ivory handles stood steaming on a table. Gamblers, profligates in secret, these dainty Odessa women in their negligently fashionable dresses fanned themselves languidly as they staked gold pieces. The sun reached them filtered through a hedge of wild vine. Its fiery disc appeared enormous and its reflection glowed like bronze on the women's dark hair. Sparks of sunset glittered in their diamonds—jewels that sparkled everywhere, in the hollow of their breasts, on their delicately tinted ears, and on their plump white fingers.

It grew dusk. A bat flittered by. The darkening sea rolled down

upon the red cliff. My twelve-year-old heart was bursting with the joy and happiness of other people's good fortune. Borgman and I strolled down the furthest alley hand in hand. He told me of his intention to become an aviation engineer. There was a rumour too that his father would soon be appointed representative of the Russian Foreign Trade Bank in London and that Marc would thus be able to finish his education in England.

At home, at Aunt Bobka's, nobody ever talked of such things. I had nothing with which to repay these moments of endless delight. But I told Borgman that though my home life was very different yet my grandfather Levvi-Isthok and my uncle Simon Woolf had travelled all round the world and had gone through thousands of adventures. These I recounted in order; and my sense of the probable forsaking me, I conducted Simon Woolf through the Russo-Turkish campaign and then to Alexandria and Egypt. . . .

Night settled itself darkly on the rigid poplars, stars began to stud their heavy branches. I talked on and on, gesticulating. The hand of the future aviation engineer quivered in mine. With difficulty breaking the spell, he promised to return the visit on the following Sunday. And cherishing this promise, I caught the local train back home, to Bobka's.

Throughout the week I imagined myself a banker. I made million-rouble deals with Singapore and Port Said, and had a private yacht in which I sailed on business. But on Saturday it was time to awake, for Borgman's visit was due the very next day.

There was, of course, not an ounce of truth in the tales I had told him. The facts were in a way far stranger, but then I had not yet learned to respect the truth of this world. My grandfather Levvi-Isthok, the rabbi, who had been dismissed from his post for forgery, was looked upon as a madman by our neighbours and the boys of the district. My uncle Simon Woolf was unbearable because of his rowdy eccentricity, his bullying manner and fiery but meaningless abuse.

Aunt Bobka alone was presentable. And she was proud too that I should have made friends with a bank manager's son. She looked upon this friendship as the first step in my career, and she baked a jam "strudel" and a poppy-seed cake in honour of the occasion.

But our great problem was how to get grandfather, with his battered top-hat and ragged bandages swathing his swollen feet, out of the way; we finally entrusted him to the care of our neighbours, the Apelhots, and I implored him not to show himself until the guest had departed. We disposed of Simon Woolf as well. All my efforts went to packing him off for the rest of the day, and I even gave him three roubles I had painfully saved up. He went off at last with his fellow-jobbers to drink tea at the Bear Tavern. Three roubles were not so easy to spend, and vodka being obtainable on the premises, we felt sure that Simon Woolf would not put in an appearance till late in the evening. Borgman would thus never suspect that the stories of my uncle's prowess were false.

That morning Bobka had donned a brown cloth dress, tightly clasping her kindly voluminous bosom. She also put on a neckerchief with black printed flowers, the one she usually wore to the Synagogue on

Judgment Day and Rosh Hashonah. Then she set out the cakes, jam and pretzels on the table and settled down to wait.

We lived in a basement. Borgman raised his eyebrows as he walked over the uneven floor of the passage and saw the butt of drinking water standing in the hall. As soon as he entered our living room I did my best to distract him with all sorts of curiosities. I showed him the alarm clock which my grandfather had made with his own hands down to the very last screw. A lamp was attached to it, which lit up whenever the hour or half-hour struck. I also showed him a little barrel of bootpolish, an original recipe of grandfather's who jealously guarded the secret. We then read through a few pages of Levvi-Isthok's manuscript, written in Hebrew on square sheets of yellow paper as large as wall-maps and entitled "The Headless Man." In it were described all of Levvi-Isthok's neighbours during the past seventy years of his life. Undertakers, singers, Jewish drunkards, cooks come specially for the circumcision festivals and rabbis come to perform the ritual operation, such were Levvi-Isthok's heroes. They were all fantastic, stuttering, with crooked backs and bulbous noses covered with pimples.

We drank two glasses of tea each and helped ourselves to the "*strudel*," and then Bobka left the room, bowing and walking backwards. With joyful abandon I struck an attitude and began to declaim the lines I valued above everything else in the world.

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears:  
I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him . . ."

Thus Antony, bending over Cæsar's corpse, begins his harangue to the Roman mob. Panting, I clutched my breast:

"He was my friend, faithful and just to me:  
But Brutus says he was ambitious;  
And Brutus is an honourable man.  
He hath brought many captives back to Rome,  
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:  
Did this in Cæsar seem ambitious?  
When that the poor have cried, Cæsar hath wept:  
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:  
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious—  
And Brutus is an honourable man.  
You all did see that on the Lupercal  
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,  
Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?  
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,  
And sure he is an honourable man. . . ."

Brutus' face loomed through the smoke of eternity before my eyes. It had grown whiter than chalk. The Roman populace bore down upon me with a thunderous roar. I raised my arm—Borgman followed it obediently with his eyes; I shook my clenched fist, my outstretched arm

pointed through the window, and I saw—my uncle Simon Woolf coming across the courtyard accompanied by the jobber Leykhach. They were carrying between them a clothes-hanger shaped like a pair of antlers and a red trunk with lion-headed spring locks. Bobka had evidently seen them too, for, oblivious of the guest, she came rushing into the room and clutched me with trembling hands.

“My pet, they’ve been buying furniture again!”

Borgman stood up in his prim little uniform and bowed in perplexity to Bobka. The outer door was flung open with a crash. There was a thundering of boots in the corridor and the noise of the trunk being dragged in. The voices of Simon Woolf and the ginger-headed Leykhach were raised in a deafening roar. They were in high spirits.

“Bobka!” bellowed Simon Woolf, “guess how much I paid for these antlers. . . .”

Though he blared like a trumpet, a note of uncertainty could be detected in his voice. Although drunk, Simon Woolf no doubt remembered how much we detested Leykhach, who encouraged our uncle in his senseless extravagances, which only lumbered the house with useless and inconvenient pieces of furniture.

Bobka did not say a word. Leykhach squealed out something to Simon Woolf. Then to drown his snake-like hissing, to drown the alarmed beating of my heart, I cried out in the words of Antony:

“But yesterday the word of Cæsar might  
Have stood against the world: now lies he there.  
And none so poor to do him reverence.  
O masters, if I were disposed to stir  
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,  
I should do Brutus wrong and Cassius wrong,  
Who you all know are honourable men. . . .”

At this point there was a thud. It was Bobka falling, knocked down by a blow from her husband. She must have made some bitter comment about the antlers. And now the familiar, almost everyday scene repeated itself. Simon Woolf’s voice stopped up all the crannies of eternity. He shouted as always on such occasions:

“You’re tearing the heart out of me,” he complained thunderously. “You’re tearing the heart out of me to stuff your own rapacious mouths with it. . . . Work’s been my perdition. . . . And who has hung this millstone round my neck? It’s you. . . . you accursed harpies, who have fastened it there. . . .”

Heaping Bobka and myself with Jewish curses, he gave us an assurance that our eyes would ooze out, that we should not have time to bury each other and that finally we should all be dragged together by the roots of our hair to a common grave.

Borgman had risen. He was pale, and kept looking uneasily round. Though uninitiated into the subtleties of Jewish blasphemy, he was familiar enough with the Russian variety of curses. Nor were these disdained by Simon Woolf. The bank manager’s son stood twisting his cap. His figure grew blurred in my eyes as I attempted to shout down

the immense evil of the world. My own mortal despair and Cæsar's already accomplished death were blended into one. I was already dead but I went on ranting. Hoarse moans welled up from the very depths of my being:

“If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.  
You all do know this mantle; I remember  
The first time ever Cæsar put it on;  
T'was on a summer's evening in his tent,  
That day he overcame the Nervii:  
Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through:  
See what a rent the envious Casca made:  
Through this the well beloved Brutus stabbed;  
And, as he plucked the cursed steel away,  
Mark how the blood of Cæsar followed it. . . .”

But nothing could drown Simon Woolf. Bobka was still lying on the floor, blubbing and sniffing. The imperturbable Leykhach was moving the trunk behind the partition. Then my crazy grandfather decided it was the moment to create a diversion. Having eluded the vigilance of the Apelhots, he crept up to our window and began sawing on his fiddle, in the hope very probably of preventing the passers-by from overhearing Simon Woolf. Borgman glanced out of the basement window and stepped back aghast at the sight of my grandfather grimacing there with his blue twisted lips. He had on his battered top hat, a black wadded mantle with bone buttons, and ragged bandages on his elephantine feet. His straggling tobacco-stained beard tossed to and fro. Borgman took to his heels.

“Excuse me,” he muttered, breaking away, “I hope you don't mind . . . I must go. . . .”

His little uniform and cap flitted across the courtyard.

With his departure my agitation subsided. In its place came decision and peace of mind.

I waited for evening. As soon as my grandfather had finished scrawling his hooked Hebrew characters upon the square sheets of paper—that evening he was portraying the Apelhots, with whom he had spent the day, on my account—and had stretched himself out in his bunk to sleep, I stole into the corridor. Barefoot, in a long patched nightshirt, I groped my way in the dark along the cold earthen floor. From the streets, through chinks in the wooden walls, came a sharp steely flicker of moonlit cobbles. The water-butt stood in its usual place in the corner. I got up and let myself down into it. The icy water cut me in two, and I leapt out, spluttering. A cat on a shelf above was looking down at me drowsily. The second time I held out longer: the water gurgled as my gasping breath bored through it like a screw.

Opening my eyes I saw the fold of a shirt and a pair of small feet hugging each other at the bottom of the butt. My resolution deserted me once more and I got out. Grandfather was standing by the butt in a jersey. His single tooth was chattering to itself.

“My grandson,”—he uttered the words clearly and contemptuously—  
“I am going to take a dose of castor-oil to have something to lay on  
your grave. . . .”

Beside myself I screamed and plunged headlong into the water. Grandfather’s feeble arm dragged me out. Then, for the first time that day, I burst out weeping; and the world of tears was so vast and beautiful that all else vanished from my eyes.

I came to myself in bed, wrapped warmly in a quilt. Grandfather was striding up and down the room, whistling. Aunt Bobka was warming my hands at her breast. I let her keep them there.

“How he trembles, our little fool, our child,” said Bobka. “Where does he find the strength to tremble so?”

Grandfather tugged at his beard, whistled, and took up his pacing again. Simon Woolf was snoring painfully in the next room. He always had his fill of battles by day, and never woke in the night.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

E. E. Cummings, Benjamin Péret, Kenneth Allott, Dylan Thomas and Gavin Ewart have already been mentioned here.

Wallace Stevens: a well-known American poet; contributed to *The Dial*; has published several books of poems.

Isaac Babel: born in Odessa in 1894; served in Boudyony’s Red Cavalry; modelled himself on Flaubert and Maupassant, was discovered by Maxim Gorki. One of the best Soviet short story writers, though of late he has published very little. His ‘Red Cavalry’ was published in England by Knopf.

Kerker Quinn: formerly editor of *Direction*, a lively quarterly published in Peoria (America’s Wigan).

Ruthven Todd: another former editor, of the *Scottish Bookman*.

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[The poem by Péret in this issue is taken from his new book; see advert. on back cover.]

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