

Not The Hand Itself

Geoffrey Ward

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DRAWINGS BY PETER BAILEY



PROEM.

FOR I stretched out my hand -
It was night once again -
Not the hand itself,
I mean the garden
Where the hands were growing.

For it was raining cats and dogs
Not the rain itself
(And not these your animals,
Shivering by walls and under hedges)
But rather the word for rain
Soaked the air.

For the sea. The sea
Is not a mirror.
Its topsoil is of paper
And blood flows underneath

For its breath
Will need to speak your words
 n all their senses;
Will knead you
Whose sense is

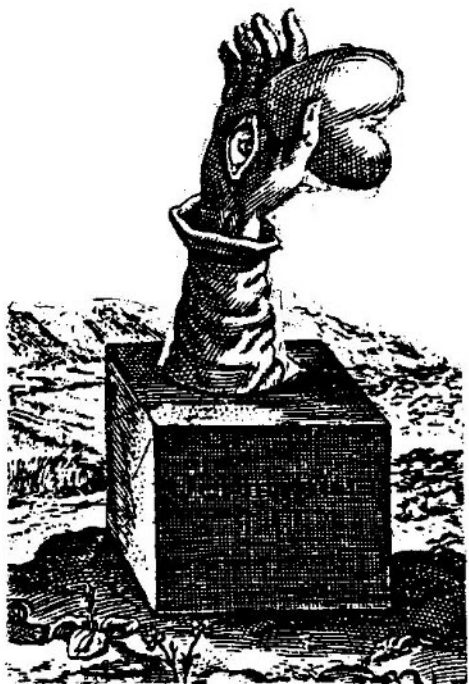
For what little good may be done
When even paper hearts
(For the air, the sea, night
Have all choked, all turned blue)
Are torn in two.

A STORY.

What follows is the true legend of Pandora.

FOR Pandora lived in a pleasant box, equipped with sash-windows for light and ventilation. One summer's day, Pandora was sitting by an open window when the hand of Hope flopped onto the sill and began to crawl towards her. Not unnaturally Pandora screamed and slammed down the frame, guillotining the fingers which shot around the room like fiery grubs and rapidly merged into the furnishings. Hope had moved in. Soon Pandora's conversation was infected by a new aspiration and optimism.

This is the story of how a perfectly manageable world came to be cursed. It also discloses the origin of many well-known proverbs, "Hope crawls infernal to the human nest", "the cut worm forgives the window-frame", and so on.



THANKSGIVING.

FOR choking on the smaller bones.

For the true legend of Pandora considered as a feminist diatribe. (But see also, A. Chafer, *Ausserungsformen des weiblichen Kastrationskomplexes*, Jb. Psychiat., Leipzig, 1920.)

For hellbenders and other amphibians generally thought repulsive.

For one who returns to his house late at night, unaware that in his absence a pantry window has been forced and a large number of feral cats introduced. They are tensed and ready to spring as he fumbles for his key.

For *Salix discolor*, called pussy-willow.

For one who begins a journey by hired car, unaware that the boot contains two corpses, badly mangled. Fortunately he will never have to deal with this as he is about to be decapitated while colliding with a milkfloat.

For snowdrops, and pinks.

For love of the brush. By night, also.

For the pressure of the unsaid on the said. For gremlins and tape hiss, conscience and slips of the tongue.

For one who returns home to find himself lying in bed. Relieved to have passed away peacefully in the night, he does so.

For a moment I thought I was back in the desert. The phone would ring, but I wouldn't answer. Or if I did pick up the receiver I would hear rain on the line but no voice.

For the desert.

For the great winds, trashing the heart as it flutters and bumps. And the aeroplanes, the birds? Not the birds themselves. Some European bombycid the birds ate.



THE BURDEN OF DREAMS.

one.

FOR keeping your face straight in wartime.

Don't hang on for the pips, you'll win
Your stripes; the prerecorded
News that all is well
Some updated Alvar Liddell,
(Ancestral voices prophesying war)
Some censor at the tape-deck rigs or wipes.

For a creeping fundamentalism
Has spread across these aching days
like yellowed maps on famous knees
Its militant duplicity :
History/ dignity/ destiny/
(While agents dream new Opium Wars)
From its rigged deck
The past makes all the bids;
From East Berlin to Brideshead
These blue days are funerary chrysalids.

two.

But it isn't, in fact, fundamental
It's only a look, one more style,
Victorian sage / sentimental,
This mock-up of Samuel Smiles;

Like peeling off layers of history
To stop at the most wearable;
A mutton-chop whisker consistency
Shutting its door on the rabble.

King Arthur, Churchill, Lord Nelson,
None of those figures is real -
The whole of the nationalist pantheon
Is cash-crisis turned to Kriegspiel,

From dreams, and loss, and the interred
Is salvaged each new patriarch,
As a clasped hand (though hollow, preserved)
Might ease a fear of the dark.

FOR JOHN CALE.

1.

Some page of stunted feelings
Chained to his resentments
Enters, bearing a pistol on a cushion
But when he cocks it, puts it to his ear
He hears how the sea
Howls itself down
And sees
In the moment preceding the explosion of the cushion
That the page is blind

2.

The singer knows the crime
Is its own reward
And its own punishment
That begs forgiveness
Of a wounded knife -
But the audience remains composed
Of shop-window dummies
Arranged in postures casually obscene
In this numbed city
He's a feverish oasis
Deserted, a pasture
Compulsive lyre
Ghosting winds over laurels of
Excrement, cracks in the marble stele
Caress
And if you would only stay
He'd give you his heart on a plate
Or give it you right in the breadbasket
Where cobras of desire rise to strike
Enchanted by a gurgling in the pipes
The modest discords of some aging organ
But if you would only stay
You arcades, longing, pummelled
Piers, you wars and locket hearts -
Then this would be a better world
Yes this would be a stronger world
To die in

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GEOFFREY WARD - Born 1954, in Liverpool since 1978 - published collections include : *Tales From The Snowline* (Causeway Press, 1977), *Double Exposure* (Infernal Methods, 1978), and *Comeuppance* (Delires, 1980). He has lectured and written numerous articles on modern and romantic poetry, and is currently writing a history of twentieth-century poetry.

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WINDOWS
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