

GAUDETE

A half-mast sun, gorgeous, gorged and bloated, floats
above tessellar pennants, tasselled trappings and trimmings.
Now, penance is done and forgiveness given for sins once red,
sins are shed, the penitents shriven and forgiven. Since sins are confessed
and wrongs redressed, now they're dressed in their best bib and tucker,
dresses ruched and rucked and tucked and neatly pleated, pinked and prinked
and braided; they gather and parade in decorated bonnets, twirl tournesol parasols,
turn from the sun, from the sun's glare, turn from the sun's stare.
Turn, turn my soul, turn from sin, turn to the Son for solace.

Yesterday, they wrestled with trestles; today, the tables are piled high,
piled with pies and pasties, with pastries, all things tasty, a cornucopia
of quiches and cheeses, dishes of glad salad, snacks and savouries.

But who, who is this? come to the feast, come to the festivities,
come to feast with friends and family at the festivities? Is it he? Her hand shakes
as she shakes hands; he takes her hand and the virginal welcomes the prodigal
returned home to his own town, to his home town, to his own home,
no more to roam. *Render to Rome what is Roman; give to God His due.*

The fatted calf is sacrificed, but will this, will this suffice? Thy Will is sacred.
The fatted calf is sacrificed, cooked and carved and shared, and the scapegoat escapes
to the desert, deserving our gratitude – deserving, but spurned – unswerving,
he serves Thy Purpose. *Thy Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.*

Meanwhile, he whirls her away from the wayward world, and she's a girl again,
an ungainly girl, but growing in knowledge and gaining in gaiety and grace.
Round they go, round and round, and the sound rebounds, twines and winds
and unbinds her; she finds herself unbound, free from the chains that bound her.
And the chains fall from her hands.

But there's blood, red blood, there's blood-red blood incarnadine under his nails
from the nails his hands have driven, unforgiving, through the everliving hands,
through the flesh and the fibre of the Godhead incarnate; the misbegotten has murdered
the Only Begotten, the Son, forgotten, forsaken. *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*

For a moment, the blood-orange sun hangs
from an ash bough, a thought caught, trapped in the branches,
and the branches dance and the sticks and the stones shout aloud;
then at last the sun sinks and the world is left sunless, sinless,
free from sin in the Son.