

Classic Poetry Series

Elizabeth Smart

- poems -

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A Bonus

That day i finished
A small piece
For an obscure magazine
I popped it in the box

And such a starry elation
Came over me
That I got whistled at in the street
For the first time in a long time.

I was dirty and roughly dressed
And had circles under my eyes
And far far from flirtation
But so full of completion
Of a deed duly done
An act of consummation
That the freedom and force it engendered
Shone and spun
Out of my old raincoat.

It must have looked like love
Or a fabulous free holiday
To the young men sauntering
Down Berwick Street.
I still think this is most mysterious
For while I was writing it
It was gritty it felt like self-abuse
Constipation, desperately unsocial.
But done done done
Everything in the world
Flowed back
Like a huge bonus.

Elizabeth Smart

Blake's Sunflower

1

Why did Blake say
'Sunflower weary of time'?
Every time I see them
they seem to say
Now! with a crash
of cymbals!
Very pleased
and positive
and absolutely delighting
in their own round brightness.

2

Sorry, Blake!
Now I see what you mean.
Storms and frost have battered
their bright delight
and though they are still upright
nothing could say dejection
more than their weary
disillusioned
hanging heads.

Elizabeth Smart

O Poor People

Let us invoke a healthy heart-breaking
Towards the horrible world:
Let us say O poor people
How can they help being so absurd,
Misguided, abused, misled?

With unsifted saving graces jostling about
On a mucky medley of needs,
Like love-lit shit,
Year after cyclic year
The unidentifiable flying god is missed.

Emotions sit in their heads disguised as judges,
Or are twisted to look like mathematical formulae,
And only a scarce god-given scientist notices
His trembling lip melting the heart of the rat.

Whoever gave us the idea somebody loved us?
Far in our wounded depths faint memories cry,
A vision flickers below subliminally
But immanence looms unbearably: TURN IT OFF! they hiss.

Elizabeth Smart

Trying To Write

Why am I so frightened
To say I'm me
And publicly acknowledge
My small mastery?
Waiting for sixty years
Till the people take out the horses
And draw me to the theatre
With triumphant voices?
I know this won't happen
Until it's too late
And the deed done (or not done)
So I prevaricate, Egging
them on and keeping
Roads open (just in case)
Go on! Go on and do it
In my place!
Giving love to get it
(The only way to behave).
But hated and naked
Could I stand up and say
Fuck off! or, Be my slave!
To be in a very unfeminine
Very unloving state
Is the desperate need
Of anyone trying to write.

Elizabeth Smart