

## THE ENEMY

The writhing demon at my side won't rest  
He flits around me like a ~~fire~~ ~~XXXXX~~ an unseen fire.  
I breathe him in and feel him burn my chest  
Filled with an endless, culpable desire.

Sometimes, when I'm spurned in love or Art  
He flatters me with womanly devotions.  
Pretending that he has my good at heart,  
He feeds me like a ~~druggie~~ ~~XXXXX~~ an addict with his potions.

And so he makes me mock all pieties  
Goads me, feverish and faint of breath,  
Through stinking wards and dark laboratories

To stab at tissue, ~~XXXX~~ nerve and shibboleth  
With clamps and needles, philtres of disease  
And all the bloody instruments of death.

## THE HEAUTONIMOROUENIST

(The man who tortures himself)

I will not strike in rage or hate,  
But like a butcher on his block,  
As Moses when he struck the rock.  
And when I see your eyes dilate

With pain, no tears will irrigate  
My heart's Sahara, and no cry  
Will make me put my scalpel by.  
No crime of passion animates

My blood - its stream ~~scape~~ ~~X~~ circulates.  
The drives impelling you to live  
Affect me like a sedative.  
No accusations and no pleas

To treat his life like a disease  
Can bring the invalid to sense  
Or cure his inheritance.  
The dog of irony, I ape

The victim that I can't escape,  
The petty murderer, a meaner  
Nero with his Agrippina,  
The type of bastard who would plot

To ~~XXXXX~~ ~~my~~ topple Daddy off his yacht,  
Am I this criminal, or not?  
If you think animals can weep,  
The sick lose hope, that dreams can fret

Or ease the dead, you might interpret  
Mine, if I could fall asleep.  
I am the needle and the vein,  
The madman who is always sane,

The tortured and the dread tormenter,  
The rack that plagues its own inventor,  
Sentenced, not to death, but life.  
I am the wounded and the knife;

The teeth that spike the fever chart  
Are the vampire's in my heart,  
The snake's that bites its tail to feel  
By turns like Ixion and his wheel.

The god of tigers by a twist  
Made me a vivisectionist  
Who cannot smile his work to see  
On all that suffer more than he.

## THE ICECREAM GIRL

The candy-coloured kiosk crowned the bay.  
Back home, it would have fitted into their freezer,  
But Britain was a kind of America ~~lido~~ lido.  
The gull-like cries of swimming kids floated up  
From the lido. The counter was a hatch for marionettes-  
Two girls, a whey-faced small-town usherette,  
Her friend une fille rêveuse de rêve. Her maid's mob cap  
Bobbed like a paper boat on the bouffant wave  
Of her Rock 'n roll chick's high-styled aureole.  
When he offered to take her out, her eyes met his  
Yielding to his swank, his Yankee Twang,  
Gaze shining with the mirrored glints of the sea  
She'd never sailed nor even swum, she said, since a girl  
Had got ripped out by the tide. Then the boy's lust hummed  
Like summer, suddenly aware of the innocence  
That made her his for the taking.

They tacked around the coast.

Once past the reef, he rowed them close to moor  
Beneath a crag, a cave that glittered with wave-tongued  
Light. It rippled across her mousse-pale places, her cheeks'  
Confection of peaches and cream, her snow-cone breasts  
Set with cherries, her blonde licks of hair  
A honey-whip the colour of cornets. He wreathed it  
In seaweed and read her Rimbaud's ~~Bateau ivre~~ Bateau ivre 'Drunken Boat'.  
And the yacht rocked as the tide idly fondled  
The hull, slapping and sucking, juggling the pebbles,  
Kissing the salty, brown-algaed hollows and fissures,  
The secret ~~apertures~~ apertures in their clefts. He didn't ask  
Questions, or answer, or mention their parents, or talk  
Of vacations ending and flying back in a week.  
Their ecstasies were too urgent to notice the shifting  
Current tugging free of the inlet, furtively  
Drifting them into the windless blind bluey  
Whiteness where France lay comme un arc-en-ciel  
Sous l'horizon des mers.

The sail hung slack,

The sultry cabin began to smell as sour  
As the empty bottles it used to be the boy's job  
To wash and put in the crate for collection on the front  
Stoop. Her listlessness became a morose noontide swoon,  
For once unwrapped, she could not keep her cool.  
She was going limp, soft-focus. She tottered aft  
Toward the torpid jib, needing air but the deck  
Only blistered her skin. Gradually the Ice-Cream Girl  
Faded ~~under~~ under ailing, becoming ever more faint.  
Her boobs, two vanillary scoops, slowly slipped

Down the dissolving ribs. The twin tubs  
Of her buttocks smudged puddling under the luff.  
The buttery cleft sweated melting into itself  
Till nothing was left of her but spilt milk.

~~XXX~~ ~~XXe~~

And the yacht yawed, the choppy water cleansing  
The deck, washing the slops into which she had curdled  
In dribbling rivulets over the side. The tide turned,  
The wind picked up filling the mainsail  
Rousing him from his stupor, his guilt-trip, blowing him  
Closer to the seasawing coast. Rocks foamed sucking  
Their teeth, feeding on flotsam. Breakers smashed, grabbed  
At the tiller yanking him into the treacherous headland.  
He worked the rig, pitched, tacked and trimmed,  
Spooked by his unlucky escape. Once more  
He raised the keel, scraped up onto a shingly beach.  
Wheeling gannets cackled, jabbing at crumbs,  
Snatching wafers and flakes from children who grouped  
At a booth where a puppet was punching a baby,  
Stared open-mouthed, sticky-lipped, fingers tasting of tears.

#### FETUS IN FETU

The day I found my father,  
I met my brother's parasitic twin.

Face a frozen fist,  
foot like a fin,  
pariah eye a startled piranha's,  
it floated in formaldehyde,  
a puffer fish Mister Man,  
hypnotised by the ghost of its grin in the glass.

The bell jar rang; my navel vibrated,  
phantom umbilicus linked  
to that telepathic foetus,  
bat-blind ventriloquist,  
dribbling spittle  
in its goldfish-bowl limbo;

'I am your secret self,' it said,  
'lobotomised toddler,  
pipsqueak freak,  
troubled double, the brat  
that rattled your ribcage,  
skeleton in the attic, the waking  
dream which jumped out of your skin.

'I had no brother love, no thanks -  
Bottled horror, bubbling uterine fluid,  
I drowned  
a bug-eyed abortion,  
a runt-red aneurism of rage.

'Crime brought too early to light,  
Nature's humour expressed in a tumour,  
Still-born joke forever undead,  
A last laugh torn from the other side of your face,

'My revenge,' it said,  
'Is that I will always haunt you  
and no surgery  
ever get me out of your head!'

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They sat in frozen rows like robots. When  
The professor of robotics cracked a joke,  
A wave of artificial laughter broke  
In tittering imitation of real men.  
I too dreamt I had joined the robots then,  
Clones minded to be mindless. But you spoke,  
The dying pulse of manhood in me woke  
And all my metal turned to flesh again.  
Our eyes met in the country of the blind,  
And suddenly it was as if there trod  
Amongst a zombie race a living god,  
And I, untwinned from all that robot kind,  
Must with that beauteous body be entwined  
In mortal longing, or become a sod.

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I had no heart to look too long for love,  
Like some wan poet wasting his life's prime,  
Preferring to lust's rougher pleasures prove  
Than suck my pen and hunt the perfect rhyme.  
The sonnet's clockwork had outworn its time,  
The poet's swansong sticking in its groove  
Had jinxed the jukebox music's tinny chime  
And, like a rusty robot, ceased to move.  
Then, you asked, to laughter from the rest,  
'Would robots *lov*?' – It sounded like a sob,  
Pronounced so deep (heart-deep) within your chest,  
Mine felt the shock, and straight began to throb.  
From now on, sonnets will all rhyme with 'lov',  
'Dov', 'abov', etcetera. End of.

\*\*\*\*

Carlos, apogee of manhood, summit,  
Height I would be mounted by, and mount,  
A Chimborazo conquered by my wit,  
A vast volcano, towering beyond count,  
My violation would inflict no pain,  
No gods will punish us for desecration,  
Your fumarole too long has dormant lain,  
Your virgin vent awaited immolation.  
And should you be indignant, vengeful grow  
And pour your lava down my quaking sides,  
Unleash your force in shuddering overflow,  
Like some dark horseman who his courser rides.  
For I would mount you even if I'm thrown,  
Though hearts or necks must break, yours or my own.

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As in a dream that happens on the stage,  
Watched by the finger-wagging ghost of Freud  
Like gladiator twins trapped in a cage,  
We fight, and one of us must be destroyed.  
He (Freud) would certainly have pointed out  
That 'Carlos' is the same as 'Charles' in Spanish.  
True or not, psychologists now doubt  
That, once explained, such conflicts simply vanish.  
In love or rivalry, I guess that I  
Am warring more with you than with your double,  
And since it's comedy, no one should die  
Or leave the theatre as dust and rubble.  
But when we play the Imitation Game,  
Pretence may pleasure, pains hurt just the same.

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**THE MISTRESS:** You think that you can steal my boyfriend from me  
Just because you steal the scene?  
**THE RIVAL:** Is it my fault you act so primly,  
Like a – frankly frigid – sex machine?  
**THE MISTRESS:** He isn't gay, he isn't frigid?  
**THE RIVAL:** He *will* be if you bore him rigid!  
Perhaps, embodying his aspiration –  
The boss's daughter, far above his station –  
You let him feel under your dress  
And now offer a leg-up to success?  
**THE MISTRESS:** You only met the other day,  
Or else you'd know he doesn't think that way?  
**THE RIVAL:** He must – I say it with regret;

He knows you lack the talent, yet  
To guarantee your father sees his work, he  
Cast you, dooming it to be a turkey!

*[The image of the mistress morphs into that of the beloved]*

Were this an opera libretto  
I could play the part falsetto,  
Act my ass off, save the play  
And make you wonder if you're gay.  
Then if for five nights only I'd have been  
Your master-mistress and your fancy's queen.

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Though necking in the cinema and kissing in the park,  
My hand upon your manhood thrilling with the rising spark,  
You persist in acting straight though every fibre in your frame  
Betrays that poor Cesario could more your heart inflame.  
If Chloe has her charms, it's for her father you'd adore  
To play the innocent abroad cum all-American *señor*.

Oh Carlos my Orsino  
I would be your own bambino,  
Play a *pantalòn amada*  
Like a starlet fresh from RADA  
Sexy, if of gender vague,  
So quickly may you catch the plague!

Be women giddy and infirm  
Or men unstaïd and skittish,  
Should a germ disturb the therm-  
al sangfroid of the British,  
Should a womaniser waver  
And invite a gay man's favour,  
There are lines to match their plight  
Both in the Sonnets and *Twelfth Night*.

So let us satisfy our hearts  
And minds and souls and other parts,  
Lest beauty's flower be plucked and die  
Before the sweetness is sucked dry.

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Limp with longing, plodding home alone,  
I crossed a river with my father's name,  
More dead than living, tainted by his shame.  
I came here for the love of one unknown,  
Only his face, not heart, then proved my own.  
But some things change as others stay the same:

Charlie, Carlos! How that name became  
You is the swerve, the curveball love has thrown,  
And now, as in the last act of a play  
Whose characters give our quandaries name and shape,  
Twin selves who ape and mirror our dismay  
At desperate pleasures while spectators gape,  
True counterfeits, we give ourselves away,  
Then make a bow, but hardly an escape.

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When that I was a little boy  
A foolish thing was but a toy  
But when I came to man's estate  
It ruled my mind, both soon and late.  
And when I came unto my bed  
I could not sleep, love filled my head,  
And though I tried to get a grip,  
Hot tears bestrewed my pillowslip.  
No boy would run so after men.  
I think that I was wiser then.

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Dear Sir,

In the early eighties I went to America to study and met my late father (and my half-brother – who was autistic – and French grandmother) for the first time. I can't say he was a pleasant man, although he could be attractive, even seductive enough when he wanted. By then, he was a business man, having taken over and expanded my American family's business, a large Animal Laboratory.

One day, looking through his books (scientific, not literary), I came on a typescript, no doubt marking a significant page. It was a copy of poems of which he disclaimed all memory. But internal evidence proves beyond doubt that he was their author, albeit he wrote them as a very young man.

Two are imitations of Baudelaire, but a third is more original and of such quality that, despite its personal nature, I feel that it is only right to try and give it a wider readership.

I say 'personal' because it is clearly a memory of his meeting with my mother in England. They were both teenagers at the time and I think anything else relevant to its conception (and mine, and my twin sister's, as it happens) can be inferred from the text.

I append another poem I myself wrote a couple of days after discovering 'The Ice-Cream Girl'. The subject is a somewhat grisly medical specimen – again of family relevance – which my father had on display in his library.

Yours faithfully,

John Hocking

ADDENDUM – Some further poems, mostly sonnets are now added by John Hocking's sister, after his disappearance. They seem to have been addressed to a man ('Carlos' – similar to 'Charlie' – the name of our real father, who he had gone in search of on both our behalves) and with whom he was smitten shortly before that sad event, to whose Orsino he had apparently acted Sebastian/Cesario in a Hartford University production of *Twelfth Night*.