

Douglas Lochhead

Homage to Henry Alline

- (from a long poem in progress)

I

Dog did bark. Cattle slushed in their places.
An elm cracked high in its flaked branches.
Blood on the back step. Someone hacked in a craze
of death. I was awake to it. Me. Henry. Savages.
But they did not come. Or did they? It was
a dream-shock. God and myself. Hog-reeves
and pound-keepers, fence-viewers from Halifax.
Larking about.

II

For Sunday. Hair in a queue. Barefoot boy
given to frolics. Fiddle-play and a dance or two.
Black-edge guilt frames the Falmouth shore.
I turn inward. Hymn for one. God
is a place. Set me down.

III

Fountain. Source. Glory. Angelic realms.
Reach for words. Showers. Dead leaves.
Some as birds of magnificent colours.
What is my theme? You ask. *His name*
should be my theme. Until the last period
of my days. Me. My own censor.
Your horse, Henry. What about your horse?

IV

Once sun-colours. The Gaspereaux.
 Black and white are my thoughts. Words.
 Shaped doings. Lightning in my crib.
 Then straight down to darkness.
 I stood on the brink. Like the song.
 I remember it well.
 Out of bed holding hatred
 for the grinning, sinning Adam.

V

Heebie-jeebie world. Given over
 to Big Gruesom. Last night larking.
 Why are you and all the rest
 like hopped-up Adams? Numb with questions.
 Crouched in the attic.
 Waded through pools of pity. Who
 can spell mercy? The blood-let garden.
 Nine at the time, was Henry. Still questions.
 The loving, good God dresses
 in city, sweating jeans? With no blanket of mercy?
 Where is god's tongue?

VI

Speak and write as child. Death
 is my tossing-time. Fear, Dying. Going.,
 All atremble. Swimming. Side-stroke
 in shallow plaes. Foot on bottom.
 I pray while my arms flounder.
 Prayers leave me like limp sparrows
 waiting to be plucked by the great Hand.

VII

Today the field is my place. Thoughts
 stick to burdocks. Birds are wind-hurt.
 Bobolinks startle in daisy grasses. Song on metal.
 Crow. Still as death. I look into branches.
 Horton's elms. Mass of thoughts
 blowing me into a stable. What matter.
 He seems to know.

VIII

I did read and study much. Great.
 Bunyan, Milton, maybe? My Meccano
 was a veritable Babel. It stood.
 The devil's back, my footings.
 Grand conceit. My wave to eternity.
Unfathomable eternity. Close on to mystery.

IX

Key words. Unhappiness. Torment.
 My *Journal* revels. Devil tells me.
 A little mad I was. No annihilation.
 Please. Funny God. Me the goodie-goodie.
 Wailing, leaping, stopping and turning times.
 Crazy doll. I unwind into a ball.
 O Lord, mercy, etc.

X

O the subtlety of the grand adversary!
 Letters of His Law. Night sweat.
 I had seen her before but had
 no great acquaintance with. Will
 not go! No horse could drag me.
 Into her arms. Erase thoughts, words.
 No deeds. Henry, speaking of a horse...

XI

Down by Payzants. Black land.
Scotched hemlock. Birch, Juniper, Pine.
Foreground of weeping plants. Lambskill.
Swamp laurel. Leather leaf. All this
a place, a fore and background
for my laid-out soul. Mouth mercy.
Inside shout. I am no pleaser.

XII

No tools. Chisel. Hammer
unchipped rock face. I am human.
Blood slow. Red cross in red stone.
My hacked-away thanks. Raised beach.
Hard. Words. Caught in the roll of tide.
Feet show. The cross in dark shadow
where the beach stays. Tide snorts.
A doubting song.

XIII

New lights. Parlour game. Let's play.
Jennie fall on floor and froth.
We'll all whail. Voices. Someone will give
running commentary of his/her indecencies.
O Abigail. Don't go. You will be taken.
O Lord rebuke me not in thy wrath.

XIV

Substantial food and settled joy.

I play with the psalms. 38, 40.

My eyes find white lights. White
fields. Trees. The sky is festival.

Enough. Enough. All this in one half hour.

Now I am pointed His Way.

Me. Labourer. Old folk retired.

Red mud on the boots. Unworthy worm.

Worm.