FIVE POEMS BY G. A. L. BURGEON

The Russet

I dreamed I saw the wicked wingèd Child,
    Accoutred like an old, bent pedlar,
Offering my love a pewter platter, piled
    With codlin, crab and medlar.

Jonathan, Ribston, Pearmain, Golden Drop,
    Nonsuches, Nonpareils – "O dip in
"Your dainty hands, my duck," he cried, "Ah stop
    "And stoop, and pick your pippin!"

Next, lip to ear, I heard dan Cupid say,
    As, torn twixt Reds and Greens, she lingered
And, pursing wary lips in wise assay,
    Those happy apples fingered: –

"The great green cooker's shiny-smooth to touch –
    "That Bramley's crisp –" (she prodded)
"But this dry-looker tastes the sweetest – much!"
    She laughed . . . she bit . . . *she nodded*!

"The Russet" was published on 10 October 1946 in the *New English Weekly*. It is posted here by kind permission of the Owen Barfield Literary Estate.

Semantics

Strange men with straight noses,

Dead many years ago,

Made music –

And why strange?

Oh, not merely minstrels, no!

They *made* music!

Made music?

Made "music"; saw and heard

Divine ladies, nine ladies

Sent dancing in a word

Down centuries thrice ten . . .

And still –

Well?

the printless fall

Of their dancing breaks, glancing

From "Muse" . . . "music" . . . "musical". . .

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Tradition in Poetry

"Why choose so much this Attic mould,
"These quick staccato rhymes?
"It takes more plastic forms to hold
"The content of our times.

"A modern poet roams at ease;
"He neither rhymes nor rages –
"All your sonorous cadences
"Are echoes of past ages!"

You sapient ass, of course they are!
My fathers they've been haunting
Since Latin grew vernacular
For troubadours to chant in.

From cell, court, coffee-house they crowd,
At Albion's Rout to mingle:
I wandered lonely as a cloud –,
Hymn, Ballad, Nursery Jingle.

The bursting heart that's choked with grief
Or too too much rejoices
Turns, like a child, for swift relief
To deep ancestral voices.

Let sober men bring forth, with pains
Of labour, in the study
Echo-emancipated strains
More subtle, and more muddy:

But I – when this exciting art
My brain with blood suffuses,
As evening steals around my heart
And Betty, and the Muses –

I – when the hour is waxing late
And dangerous wings enfold me –
The steady throb of Six and Eight
Is mighty to uphold me;

When Fancy tugs and sways – in fine,
'Tis true my hand's unsteady
And, by the Dog, I need old wine
Because I'm drunk already!

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Cosmetics

Only the artist can divine,
    Beneath her accidents, pure Nature,
Crystal in rock, or gold in mine,
    Behind the mask the living feature.

The truth once caught, he bids it stay
    And how he scrapes and how he bothers
Until, the dross all purged away,
    It's extant for himself and others!

So, in those days before I won
    Some slight concessions with a sonnet,
When (our acquaintance scarce begun)
    Your face had still more paint upon it,

Let it be blushed through North and South
    That I'm the man (I take much credit)
Who, past that gash you called your mouth,
    Still "saw" your lips, your face, and read it.

Could my poor songs avail but this –
    To teach your heart how ill they merit
Insult by over-emphasis,
    Your dear dear beauty and high spirit!

What if between you and your glass
    They crept one day – oh, not to upbraid! – I
Would have you whisper: "What I pass
    "Must not demean so praised a lady!"

You taunt me with "old-fashioned," "quaint";
    No, not a whit! I'm not so petty.
My dear, it's *charming* to see paint –
    But much more charming to see Betty!

"Cosmetics" was published on 18 March 1947 in the *New English Weekly*. It is posted here by kind permission of the Owen Barfield Literary Estate.

The Doppelganger

A strange dichotomy I find
    Of mental disputation,
Each time the Betty in my mind
    Meets Betty on the station.

At first, while we say how d'you do
    And talk about the weather,
I see them side by side, those two
    And match them both together.

"Look there and here!" says eye to heart,
    "And *there* – your fancy hid that!
"Admit your memory took her part!
    "You rather overdid that!"

Like snow the first one fades away
    And melts into the second:
I lose my head and hear it say:
    "She's sweeter than you reckoned!"

"The Doppelganger" was published on 3 July 1947 in the *New English Weekly*. It is posted here by kind permission of the Owen Barfield Literary Estate.