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Life Has Become More Cheerful

Shearsman Books
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Life is much better, comrades. Life has become more cheerful

—Joseph Stalin, 1938
SAMPLER
I

The Book of Revolution

SAMPLER
SAMPLER
Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand

this evening the atmosphere in the streets
as if the buildings themselves
the bedding roadway’s earth
can feel and receive the smell
interpret moments of great significance
by corner and storeway entrances the people are seized

onlooking, listening, the alarm signal
knot of friends and stranger
bright faces mobile, earnest and a few frightened
of unknown quantities, expect unexpectedly
wild estimates, the discussed theories
the turning of heads to the tones down roads

empty other but all observers
a little children, current running
but roaring that resounds in the far canyons
and the urban watercourse
is not fire from the throats of children
or survey, call the shots which thunder

rattle windows, poverty-stricken restless
shudders nerve
the anxious and enthralled
child’s eye wants to know and surprised
which a woman shining
although perhaps only reflects
A Literate People Lives Happily

And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book

in the central kolkhoz market
the peasants come to sell
their produce to the workers of the town
fruits, tubers, bulbs carefully weighed
all sorts of unexpected goods
may suddenly appear in the shops

in the Kharkov Palace of Industry
a bare rectangular functionality
coexists with an exuberance
of heights, form and regular windows
just as you heard the timber
of the previous edifice give loud cracks

a class in the liquidation of illiteracy
is in progress, empty faces turned
to the reader of documents
formerly deemed fatally toxic

there will be no burning of books:
it is better economics to pulp them
for printing again with better words
Poor Realm

Soon the enlightened nations will put on trial those who have hitherto ruled over them. The kings shall flee into the deserts, into the company of the wild beasts whom they resemble; and Nature shall resume her rights

—Saint-Just, 1793

ing tocsin
calls to revolt
trompetcall awakes
from slaves everywhere

fashioning wonders, faith
in plots and conspiracies –
provision of bread
certifies public order

infinite happiness will lead
from this anywhere,
the end of injustice, war,
conflict and shipping

the raised question is that persons
would dare to think,
people’s knowledge acquired
finally to bring revolution

the spirit of moderation is to be expunged
armies launched against speculation
and greed, patriotic
of rural areas

an army that could work
to eradicate and punish the traitor,
monopolists, moderates, peaceful
innocents, all sorts of cold and suspect
war in castles
peace in the cottage
priests forced oath of hatred
— pauvre paysan, pauvre royaume

farmer is not sufficiently engaged
to accept the blood sacrifice
their son, the evil that besets us
that we do not have government

republican terrorist past infection
dechristianisation or democratic
watch committees scrutinize
foreigners and suspected activities

what fruit is plucked
from the tree of liberty?
what right of equality
until his own property be abolished?

unordered more
unattended more
time comes to end
dying of hunger and cold
Dead Souls

_In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread_
—Genesis 3:19

it’s no use being too clever
a man who works on the land
is purer, nobler, the factories
will come into being by themselves
I am afraid I shall move to the town
which ends in gambling and drunkenness
one may buy a library of books
and never read them a shadow
of gloomy black melancholy – here
the manuscript breaks off
for two pages a damp
dank cell reeking of soldiers’ boots
a voice echoing in hollow distance
Dreams

_Thy merchants were the great men of the earth;
for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived_

awake, awake, utter a song
a bitter wind blowing from
Paradise, the end of order

in dream time we plot
the fall of autocrats
and it need not be in play
a good bomb well served
will do it nicely –
by whose authority
is it forbidden
but by theirs
we do not recognise?

thou shouldst not kill
– but they do
impoverish or imprison
– but they do
torture or sow fear
as they do

we fast, our wives
are made widows
the compact roll of portable memory
carried through the fires of disaster

those days before the revolution
were glorious days – days of struggle,
of romance and heroism, fervour,
bright hopes and pristine thought,
a vision of dignity and justice
the destruction of the unjust regime
is but one necessary step

there is no greater poison than power
but someone must take it
The Redistribution of Joy

*I have lived a dissipated life but loved goodness*
—Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

look at the book, comrade
it is written in the book
I suddenly see a new self
far removed from previous
troubles and vanity
if I have a defect
it is that I am not always
sufficiently cheerful
and self-confident

we must have colourful fabric
with cheerful patterns
associated with the revolutionary spirit
dress reform and thought unity
society reordered
with the virtuous at the summit

technocracy and money-grubbing
will give way to the reign of virtue
when people work for the good of all

if I wanted to work for the democracies
how would I know what to do?
who knows what the strategy
and tactics of Wall Street are?

we are advanced people
we want to lead a cultural life
we want bicycles, pianos
phonographs, records, radio sets
there are still many administrative workers
and former people
who travel about in cars

deleterious
we must shove the mountain
back into place

here on the industrial front
we must also have heroism
the mountain has crushed man like a frog –
we must shove the mountain
back into place