

Aidan Semmens

SAMPLE  
*Life Has  
Become  
More  
Cheerful*

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2017 by  
Shearsman Books  
50 Westons Hill Drive  
Emersons Green  
BRISTOL  
BS16 7DF

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office  
30-31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB  
(this address not for correspondence)

[www.shearsman.com](http://www.shearsman.com)

ISBN 978-1-84861-553-3

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the editors of the following magazines, in which some of  
these poems, earlier versions or parts of them, have appeared:

*Blackbox Manifold, Free Verse, In Suffolk, Litmus, Long Poem Magazine,  
Molly Bloom, Noon, Otoliths, Shearsman, Tears in the Fence, Under The Radar.*

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*Life is much better, comrades. Life has become more cheerful*

—Joseph Stalin, 1938

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I

# The Book of Revolution

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1917

*Blessed is he that readeth, and they that bear 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

ring tocsin  
calls to revolt  
trumpetcall 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

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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

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## 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

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## 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

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the destruction of the unjust regime  
is but one necessary step

there is no greater poison than power  
but someone must take it

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# 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

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

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