

The Missing Poems

When New Bats in Old Belfries was published in 2005, two poems had to be omitted from the book¹ because their subject was still alive, and unwilling to give his approval for their inclusion in his lifetime.² It can now be revealed that Bowra's target in the excised poems was Patrick ('Paddy') Leigh Fermor, writer and traveller – and Cretan war hero as a result of his activities while serving in the Special Operations Executive (SOE) during the Second World War. Leigh Fermor, born on 11 February 1915, died on 10 June 2011, aged 96.

In an extended correspondence with one of the editors of Bowra's poems, Leigh Fermor showed that he was much put out by the ones on himself, especially 'The Wounded Gigolo', which he felt was 'a bit cracked'.³ He vacillated about the other poem, but in the end voted against, no doubt partly influenced by the opinion of his late wife, who 'thought that all the people mentioned in the collection would have been cut to the quick, however much they put on non-spoilsport faces'.⁴ When James Morwood of Wadham College visited him later in his Greek home – to ask about his friendship with Bowra on behalf of Leslie Mitchell, Bowra's biographer – he found that the hurt of reading the poems was still smarting. To Hardy, Leigh Fermor wrote: 'Could Maurice's shade ponder all this now, I think I might emerge as more of a saviour than a spoilsport.'⁵

The Wounded Gigolo

O Balasha Cantacuzène,⁷
Hear the war-cry of the Gael!⁸
In his last fierce fight he's losin';
He will fight, but he will fail.
Cruelly his lady spurned him,
Struck him when he asked for more,
Flung him down the stairs and turned him
Bag and baggage from the door.
Oh unhappy gigolo
Told to pack his traps and go;
He may mope and he may mow,
Echo only answers 'No'.

¹ On pp. 99–101 and 104–5, where spaces of the right size were left for later use.

² A name was also omitted from one of the poems, 'Russian Cradle-Song', for the same reason. This was 'Ludo', i.e. Ludovic Kennedy (1919–2009), journalist, author and television presenter.

³ Letters to Henry Hardy of 25 October 2004 and 4 March 2005.

⁴ Letter of 3 November 2004.

⁵ Letter of 4 March 2005.

§ This poem is an update of the folk-song 'Oh, no John'.

⁷ Balasha Cantacuzène (1899–1976), a Romanian painter from an aristocratic family. Leigh Fermor lived with her for some years in the late 1930s, first in the Peloponnese, then at her family's estate, Baleni, in northern Romania. They parted on the outbreak of war when Leigh Fermor returned to England to enlist, and did not meet again until 1965.

⁸ Leigh Fermor was of part-Irish descent.

Hasten, every loyal Cretan,
To your wounded master's aid;
He will not admit he's beaten
While there's money to be made.
Stalwart heroes stand beside him,
Captain Moss⁹ and Major Xan,¹⁰
Knowing that, whate'er betide him,
He is still their perfect man.
 Oh the hero gigolo,
 Bleeding from a mortal blow,
 He's been cut off from the dough,
 And he murmurs 'Woe, woe, woe!'

What avail him now the dances
Which he led on Ida's¹¹ peak?
No more like a ram he prances;
Gone the bums he used to tweak.
Let him pick and scratch his scrotum,
Wave his cock and shake his balls –
She will never turn to note 'em,
Never listen to his calls.
 Oh the jiggling gigolo,
 Plying his fantastic toe –
 Like a wounded buffalo,
 He can only belch and blow.

What avails the apt quotation,
What the knowledge of the arts,
What the lore of every nation
Learned from many unpaid tarts?
Ah, his mistress will not listen,
Floating vaguely to the moon;
Vainly do his molars glisten
When he tries to break her swoon.
 Oh the learned gigolo,
 What was there he didn't know?
 Now there's nothing left to show
 To the girl he dazzled so.

Yet remains his greatest glory,
His proud prowess in the bed.
Never too renowned in story
Had so fine a lustihead.

⁹ W. ('Billy') Stanley Moss (1921–65), Leigh Fermor's second-in-command during their audacious kidnap of the German general commanding Crete in 1944.

¹⁰ Xan Fielding (95/1), an SOE colleague of Leigh Fermor's also working alongside the Cretan resistance movement during the Second World War.

¹¹ Mount Ida, the highest mountain in Crete; according to legend, the birth-place of Zeus. The kidnapers and their prize (see note 9 above) followed a route across the mountain's summit.

Can he not be up and at her?
Strike the target? Ring the bell?
Ah, to her it doesn't matter;
Nothing can restore the spell.
 Oh the potent gigolo,
 He could make the semen flow!
 Though the cock may crow and crow,
 He must pack his traps and go.

17 April 1950

On the Coast of Terra Fermoor

On the coast of Terra Fermoor, when the wind is on the lea,
And the paddy-fields are sprouting round a morning cup of tea,
Sits a lovely girl¹² a-dreaming, and she never thinks of me.

No, she never thinks of me
At her morning cup of tea,
Lovely girl with moon-struck eyes,
Juno fallen from the skies,
At the paddy-fields she looks
Musing on Tibetan books,
On the Coast of Terra Fermoor high above the Cretan Sea.

Melting rainbows dance around her – what a tale she has to tell,
How Carmichael,¹³ the Archangel, caught her in the asphodel,
And coquetting choirs of Cherubs loudly sang the first Joel,¹⁴

Loudly sang the first Joel
To their Blessed Damozel.¹⁵
Ah, she's doomed to wane and wilt
Underneath her load of guilt;
She will never, never say
What the Cherubs sang that day,
When the Wise Men came to greet her and a star from heaven fell.

Ah, her memory is troubled by a stirring of dead bones,
Bodies that a poisoned poppy¹⁶ froze into a heap of stones;
When the midnight voices call her, how she mews and mopes and moans.

Oh the stirring of the bones
And their rumble-tumble tones,
How they rattle in her ears
Over the exhausted years;
Lovely bones she used to know
Where the tall pink pansies blow
And her heart is sad because she never saw the risen Jones.

¹² Joan Eyres Monsell (1912–2003), daughter of the 1st Viscount Monsell, photographer. Bowra described her as his 'beautiful friend' (*Memories*, 286) and Alan Pryce-Jones (57/3), her former fiancé, recalled her as 'very fair, with huge myopic blue eyes' (*The Bonus of Laughter*, 1987, 82). Cyril Connolly, another admirer, attributed to the fictional Jane Sotheran (in his unpublished story 'Happy Deathbeds') Joan's alluring physical qualities, including 'enormous eyes of clouded violet-blue': Jeremy Lewis, *Cyril Connolly: A Life*, 1997, 418. An edited version of 'Happy Deathbeds' has since been published, in *The Selected Works of Cyril Connolly*, ed. Matthew Connolly, 2002, vol. 2, *The Two Natures*; but this passage has been omitted.

¹³ Members of the Cretan Resistance used 'Kyr Michali' ('Mr Michael') as a code-name for Patrick Leigh Fermor (see headnote above), their SOE colleague, who later became Joan Eyres Monsell's second husband.

¹⁴ Perhaps a fusion of Joan and Nowell.

¹⁵ As in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's eponymous poem.

¹⁶ Thérèse ('Poppy') Fould-Springer (1908–1953), who suffered from sporadic mental and physical illness, married Alan Pryce-Jones after his engagement to Joan Eyres Monsell had been ended by her parents' opposition (he had no clear prospects).

Cruel gods will tease and taunt her: she must always ask for more,
Have her battlecock and beat it, slam the open shuttledore,
Till the Rayners¹⁷ cease from reigning in the stews of Singapore.
 She will always ask for more,
 Waiting for her Minotaur;
 Peering through the murky maze
 For the sudden stroke that slays,
 Till some spirit made of fire
 Burns her up in his desire
And her sighs and smiles go floating skyward to the starry shore.

10 June 1950

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¹⁷ John Rayner (1908–90), Features Editor of the *Daily Express* during the 1930s, had been Joan Eyres Monsell's first husband.