

A Poem by Sofiul Azam

Concordia Discors, Cui Bono?

Cedant arma togae, concedant laurea laudi.

– Marcus Tullius Cicero from *De Officiis*

1. The Rest Nowhere

Let's watch freaks turn up at every conference hall
to know what 'war on terrorism' brings in the offing
and crash as cars often do on the hilly passageways.
Confreres scream: "Eclipse first, the rest nowhere.

"Sob, heavy world: *Roma locuta est; causa finita est.*
Oh, our leaders are pimps whose love's far to seek.
Forced to find the stench off hyenas pretty balmy,
and believe each day that has dawned is our last,

"yet we won't cut our conscience to fit their rage,
right now more ready to not stop dead in our track
than see the whole lot of Pascal's reeds in scare:
arsonist networks, threats, explosives, anthrax etc."

Montroses come from the prison to the scaffold.

2. The Finest Farce

Sir, I think the weather of diplomacy does fine up!
invaders talk of liberty to be given to the invaded;
and this ceaseless talk smells sour, prove that I lie.
Yes, on the battlefields is this farce being staged.

Let me talk to a chap who's still at the crossroads:
back home, first change into trousers and the vest,
splash your face with water and switch on your TV;
now tell me, dear fellow, if you see on the screen

anything but skeletons still crusty with burnt flesh
or buildings broken like sandcastles on the beach
or overcast skies rent by long cries in the gloom.
Is this gallant Mr. Perdition living with Miss Chief?

I just sympathize with those civilians who scream:
there is no neutral thing like blood, nor any trick as war;
yes, for the riches of greedy countries we morons suffer,
agree that the Strong shall thrive and the Weak perish,

invaders can't ever counteract our stark grief by grace;
when'll we be brisk about life cropping out of the ruins?
Tell why we're thrust into this world for misery's jaws
which we can't gratify with anything but ourselves?

By Gothic Horror Harbour I sat down and wept:
I'd got nothing but photographs of the catastrophe
(the octopus from whose tentacles none escapes)
and of the lunatics wallowing on burning tyres.

Days glide swiftly on as dirty worms in a drain,
their swiftness none counteracts by glaring eyes.
Cry, my beloved heart: without tears you can't have
grace more longed for than this dose of naivety.

The butchers have taken charge of the Sanatoria.

3. The Embalmers' Art

Centuries are nothing but chronicles of wreckage.
Asked by German soldiers in his Parisian studio
if he painted the bomb-shattered city in Spain,
Picasso replied, 'No, you humble Germans did.'

Now get ready to flee your city and never return:
somewhere in an art-gallery you'll see pictures of it
and nightmares cropping out of the hoary ruins.
All artists feast on the remains of nightmares.

Things have changed since I burst out of infancy
to see nightmares bloom like flowers on the ruins.
Cluster bombs are no drizzle on the grassfield,
rather chronicles of suffering and embalmers' art.

Each negative value has its price in positive terms.
Strange that the fraudheads speak the nicest words,
vow with so much spirit, swear with so much grace.
I am glad of a triumph of all the embalmers' art!

Last summer I heard whispers of further wreckage,
I can't laugh away the whispers sharp as needles,
nor comfortably stay in my den where TV shows
how the whispers come true, piling on the agony.

Yes, everywhere I see the frenzy of nightmares.
Lamps go out, and generation to corruption turns;
eggs of wreckage fall from flying machine birds,
oh, lavish expenditure on shrouds and fire-woods.

You know why artists grope for solid nightmares;
what's the good of nightmares if I ain't with them?
I keep writing on the turmoil in our blaring bush,
hope that I will succeed by the sweat of my brow.

Is it Progress if I think art and war are inseparable?