



Image from Westends61

Christopher Bernard

The Wall

I stand thick as mountains,
high as the sun.
I float at the end of your fingertips,
yet hold you close as your skin.

I serpent over continents,
compact as a nut,
strangle gardens cold as weeds.
I clear whole countries out.

No one knows who built me,
though scientists pretend.
I only grow, like a living thing.
with no beginning or end.

I'm built of bricks of silence.
the mortar bleeds at my core.

My night is made of glass.
I surround you. I roar.

What Is It?

What is the ghost at the foot of my bed?
What is the shadow close to my head?
What is the chill I almost can't feel?
What is the cold, hard edge of the real?

Some say it is power,
some say it is dust,
the electric flower,
some say it is lust
and thrust and must,
for the brief hour
we come thereof.
Some say it is love.

What is the sound at the end of the night?
What is the dawn of shaming light?
What is the despair I have felt since my youth?
What is the cold, hard hand of the truth?

Some say it is power,
some say it is dust,
the electric flower,
some say it is lust
and thrust and must
for the brief hour
we come thereof.
Some say it is love.

What is the thing I must fear each day?
What is the word I can hear but not say?
What is the flag I must lose to, unfurled?
What is the cold, hard stone of the world?

Some say it is power,
some say it is dust,
the electric flower,
some say it is lust
and thrust and must
for the brief hour
we come thereof.
Some say it is love.

To Create a Hope

To create a hope,
take a beautiful
memory. Add
a cruel word.

Blend in a reminiscence
of the smell of the sea,
a young woman's eyes,
a flourish of guitar,

a loving caress,
a betrayed promise,
an enchanting sunrise,
a black star,

a question without an answer,
a drop of bitters,
seven sleepless nights,
and five lost years.

Put inside a pan, that,
for each summer wide,
is ten winters long.

Dust the whole
with a cloud of doubt.

Place in the oven
of a heart that is broken.

Bake
for an hour or a lifetime.

*

You will know it is done
when the stars are brighter
than when you began,

when the sea chants
to the sleeping hill

and blind with morning
is the sun,

when the birds dance
in the clouds and shout,

when the snake slips
from its curdled skin,

when, with the sun,
the old earth leaps
in the savage dance
of all beginnings,

and you see an angel
cross the sky

and wake, weeping
with a wild joy,
wondering, where
your despair has died.

Take a spoon
made of a dove,

summer light,
secret power,
ocean's spray,
echo clear,

and feast on it,
o dearest love,

on the shortest day
of the longest year,
at the darkest hour
of the deepest night.

Christopher Bernard is an award-winning poet, novelist and essayist, and a co-editor of *Caveat Lector*. His collection *The Socialist's Garden of Verses* won a PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Award and was named one of the "Top 100 Indie Books of 2021" by *Kirkus Reviews*. He is also recipient of an Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award. His novels include *A Spy in the Ruins* ("one of the best American novels since Thomas Pynchon and William Gass," Miguel de Cervantes–award winning novelist Juan Goytisolo), *Voyage to a Phantom City* ("an enormous achievement," award-winning translator Peter Bush), and *Meditations on Love and Catastrophe at The Liars' Cafe*. ("puts one in mind of *Ulysses* as much as *Naked Lunch*," award-

winning poet Ernest Hilbert). His most recent books are the middle-grade stories, the first in the “Otherwise” series, *If You Ride A Crooked Trolley . . .* and *The Judgment Of Biestia*.