

## Evidence

“Evidence of what experts think was the punishment of an adulterous affair was discussed yesterday by archaeologists studying the largest ancient necropolis in Britain. The man, aged 19, and the woman, who was 30, were buried alive and pinioned in the earth by a wooden stake between them. In her death spasm, the woman gave birth to a baby conceived three months previously. Its skeleton was found beneath the mother’s pelvis.”

— *From a newspaper report, September 1978*

The delicate quadrille of love danced secretly,  
Stealth in each softly taken, swaying step,  
Taut cries of pleasure stifled and suppressed.  
Yet even pain of awful death could not prevent  
The coupling patterns of the blood’s imperative.

Passion muffled to prevent discovery, tip-toeing furtive steps,  
Of dancers partnering each other in coition’s gentle arabesques.  
Naked, self obsessed with self, dancing in the empty ballroom of  
adultery,  
Filled to potent fullness by the hard flesh-hug of love,  
Its choreography engulfing to the point of shuddering outburst.

Intimate, entire, complete, sense-giving for a moment —  
And somehow news of it leaked out.  
The lovers and their love child, husband, those who judged,  
Their bones disgorge the evidence: grim punishment;  
Apportioned blame and guilt; the dreadful dance of death.

Life’s genesis within this doomed affair, began its slow ascent from  
nothingness,  
Inter-stepping, budding, flowering, the cells’ impacted seasons flooding  
out,  
A thousand springtimes shining in the weaving patterns of conception  
and development,  
More delicate, more masterful than any lovers could invent,  
(The shadow of the stake which cuts the cord, all unsuspected yet).

The movements spin and glide towards birth, their fleshly genesis  
looks ponderous now,

Unlikely as a source of life as hitting stones together for a spark.  
This miracle of bio-alchemy reversed,  
Fire kindled from the body's flint put out,  
Flesh striking flesh made brutal, the golden seed returned to lead.

The whole thing bluntly stamped on, doused, condemned,  
Earth-slapped, induced too soon to live, the embryo's soft bones  
collapse,  
Lungs fill with dirt, breath chokes on shovelled mud and hurt,  
A mocking echo of the buttock smack which makes men smile,  
As new born babies, prompted, gulp their first breath down.

What can be said of little tragedies like this,  
Beyond recording their bleak altitudes of pain?  
Each one an Everest of suffering which its hapless victims have to  
scale,  
Life pinioned in the earth, gassed, nailed or gunned down  
Here, at Auschwitz, bleak Golgotha or Tiananmen. . . .

And those who say that God is love should sift the earth between their  
lips,  
Feel the brittle ash of tortured bones beneath the pinioned body of the  
past,  
Watch easy answers crumble in the dust and leave the choking taste of  
pain and love,  
All inter-mixed, ancient, intimate and real, mysterious. Evidence,  
If only we knew how to judge, of smothered meaning, buried guilt and  
innocence.

*Chris Arthur*