

A MAJOR WORK OF SCIENCE FICTION IN WHICH...
a giant space cruiser becomes a crucible of man's wildest fears and desires. These
are the epic songs of the lost space ship ANIARA.

ANIARA

HARRY MARTINSON

Aniara

A Review of Man in Time and Space

Harry Martinson

Adapted from the Swedish by
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Aniara

A Review of Man in Time and Space

Introduction by Dr Tord Hall

The poem you are going to read is about Mankind—and thus appeals directly to the imagination—but since both the narrative and the scenes have a highly technical background, a brief survey of the author's scientific thought may make it easier to follow Aniara and her passengers on their journey.

Aniara had long challenged the author's imagination, although it was not published until 1956. From Martinson's first volume of poetry, *Ghost Ship* (1929) onwards, a cosmic trend can be discerned in his works. Occasional articles and poems during the 'thirties again revealed his deep interest in science, even if his first consistent efforts in the new style did not bear fruit until 1953 with the publication of *Cicada* (which contained the first twenty-nine songs in *Aniara*). A shortened version of the epic, in libretto form, was adapted in 1959 for the opera of the same name.

The 102 Songs of *Aniara* form a symbolic poem about our own age, and the symbols have been taken from modern science. The work is not only exciting as a technical saga, but also as a folk-tale, in which the moral story of technical exploits is entertainingly spiced in order to make it more palatable.

The ‘goldonda’, Aniara, with eight thousand emigrants on board, plies to and fro between the radiation-poisoned Earth and Mars. The take-off is achieved—not as in the days of Ikaros, nor as in our own time, by means of stage rockets—but as may conceivably occur in the far-distant future, the future in which Harry Martinson has set his plot in order to obtain a poetic distance from the present. The goldonda is towed up by gyrospinners towards the zenith’s light,

‘where powerful magnetines annul
Earth’s pull...’

The anti-gravitational field thus engendered outweighs the force of gravitation, and Aniara, contained in a kind of magnetic bottle, glides up through space like an air bubble through water.

During one of her routine journeys the goldonda runs into trouble, almost colliding with a previously undiscovered ‘asteroid’ Hondo. She saves herself by making a sudden swerve. Further complications arise in the form of meteors and other ‘space gravel’, and Aniara, with her rudder jammed, thunders on in the direction of the distant Lyra—poetry’s own constellation—right out of the circle of planets, into the void.

‘Thus it was when the solar system closed
its gateway of purest crystal and cut off
the space ship Aniara from all
the associations and promises of the Sun.’

The pilots—the leaders on board—soon realize that there is no way back, and gradually the terrifying news spreads to the unsuspecting passengers. After a period of panic and desperation, they resign themselves to their fate. Life goes on as usual, and the all-night vigil of Midsummer is kept—although no sun rises. Many seek consolation in escapist reveries. These dreams are conjured forth by the ‘Mima’, and the poet himself, having taken over the role of priest, ‘looks after the Mima, calms the emigrants and livens them with pictures from far distance’.

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One may pause here to consider some of the changes which have taken place in the scientific view of the world during this century, and what new possibilities of expression they have made available to the poet.

The accepted concept of cause and effect has been challenged by Planck and Bohr, and by the radioactive decay. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle would appear to exclude determinism as defined in classical physics. Meanwhile, Einstein’s formula of 1905, showing the equivalence of mass and energy—an atom is as unsubstantial as a ray of light—has shattered the old robust concept of matter, and de Broglie’s wave-theory of matter emphasizes still further the fundamentally dream-like character of the material world. A lump of lead is woven of ‘such stuff as dreams are made on....’

The mechanical nineteenth-century model of the universe has vanished, borne away in the smoke wreaths of mathematical symbols. The physicist of today does not think according to a given model, but instead employs abstract mathematical concepts such as tensors, matrices and potentials. These concepts have no physical reality, nor do they offer an explanation of the universe; they merely describe, better than did the old model, the behaviour of the observable objects in different situations.

For a poet, this scientific evolution has a positive as well as a negative side. The negative aspect is the totally abstract character of the modern concept of the world—for the desire of the poet is always to reveal, and to create a picture, convey a vision. The positive aspect is the opportunity now offered him to fashion scientific data according to his own fancy—a direct result of the physicist's inability to lay down any definite rules for a picture of the micro or the macrocosmos.

Perhaps it would be more illuminating to compare these aspects with two parallel lines, which, in the world of the new geometries, may conceivably meet—in a vision.

The excellent popularizations of Eddington, Jeans, Gamow, Hoyle, and others, are the chief sources from which Harry Martinson has taken his basic ideas of scientific evolution. We shall briefly touch on the use of, for instance, the indeterministic character of modern physics, the law of entropy, and the advances

of astronomy in *Aniara*, but some explanation must first be given of the actual terminology employed in the poem.

Martinson has created dozens of new words. This in itself is not original, as the same technical exoticism can be found in most books of science fiction, although on a smaller scale. A scientific motivation exists for even apparently meaningless combinations of letters. This is conditioned by the semantic difficulties which arise when we apply everyday words to the world of the atom. Relying on experience in macrocosmos, we have invented concepts such as particle, wave, velocity, position, time, etc., and transposed them without further ado to microcosmos. Yet we have no guarantee whatever that these concepts represent what really happens inside the atom.

The majority of physicists will agree that in all probability they do not. Eddington, who has inspired much of the terminology in *Aniara*, says in his book *The Nature of the Physical World* (1928), with regard to the movements of the electron round the nucleus: 'Something unknown is doing we don't know what—that is what our theory amounts to.' (It did not amount to more in 1928, nor does it today.) Immediately after this—from the epistemological viewpoint—highly unsatisfactory statement, Eddington quotes from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*:

'T'was brillig and the slithy toves
did gyre and gimble in the wabe.'

The object of these lines, in themselves quite meaningless, is to give the reader mental associations in the direction intended by the author. Eddington goes on to show that Carroll's verses may be as efficient as (or even more efficient than) prose in describing an atomic process—on the condition that one attaches numbers to the words.

According to this line of thought, the new words in *Aniara* are symbols which conjure up pictures of objects and happenings beyond the range of the reader's imagination. All words are, in a sense, symbols—but whereas the word monkey, for instance, evokes a familiar image for most people, expressions such as *phototurb*, *protator*, *gopta*, or *atom*, give, in their context, at most a vision. Here lies a poetic playground in which Harry Martinson loves to romp.

The new words do not have to have any given significance, and the reader is free to test his own imagination with varying interpretations. For symbols—unless they are purely logical—can obviously be read in many ways, and among the different variants there may well be those of which the author himself was not at first aware. A few interpretations—mainly as given by Martinson himself—appear in the glossary.

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Mima, the ingenious 'transmitter' on board, is the main source of comfort to *Aniara's* passengers, and

their sole remaining contact with the earth. From a technical viewpoint, her prototype is a mathematical computer or 'electronic brain'. In finding names for her component parts, the author gives his fancy full scope: '*the Cantor works have octopus feelers*', the '*ninth protator*' signals movement, and so on.

Mima is equipped with miraculous powers. She can intercept and reproduce events from other worlds in distant galaxies, and her pictures are capable, like dreams, of dissipating both the passengers' memories of Douris-Earth—which, in spite of all, they long for—and their realization of the hopeless plight in the present. Gradually, the inmates of Aniara become a sect of Mima-worshippers, who kneel beside the Goddess's pedestal each time pure terror threatens to annihilate them. Mima herself is incorruptible, and faithfully reproduces all that comes her way.

But,

'perpetually through space sweep evil rumours.

Good rumours always leave less trace ...'

and for this reason the poet, 'the faithful Mima's blue liturgist', occasionally tinkers with the transmission. He bottles 'every memory that's suitable', administering now and then, as a cure for Angst, a dose of Mima's 'dream preserves'.

One sees, on closer examination, that Mima only superficially resembles a modern mathematical computer; a large number of her activities lie beyond human analysis, and have been invented by Mima

herself—whose powers are ‘three thousand and eighty times greater than anything a human being could achieve, if he or she could take the Mima’s place’.

When the atomic bomb smashes Dourisburg, Mima collapses under the strain of the ghoulish news she has to break. ‘She suffered with the very stones’,

‘for she had seen the hot white tears of granite
when stones and ore are vaporized.

It wrung her heart to hear these stones lament.’

The simplest interpretation of Alima is that of a universal conscience, or soul, with whom the poet communicates.

The pantheistic structure of Martinson’s *Cosmos* is most clearly indicated in Song 13, in which the ‘Chief Astronomer’ describes Aniara’s journey through the curved space of the universe by comparing it with a crystal bubble moving imperceptibly round the circumference of a glass bowl.

Another theme in *Aniara* is the indeterministic character of present-day science. In the ambiguous 47th Song, ‘a philosopher of point-sets, nay, a mystic of the school of transfinite numbers’ tiptoes quietly in to Isagel, the Isis-Urania of modern mathematics and astronomy, with a question about ‘the frequency of wonders in *Cosmos*, gauged by point-set mathematics’. Robert, the robot, who is a decent chap, receives his instructions from Isagel, and begins energetically shifting and sorting-out the ‘point-set

load' on the 'Gopta waggon'. But Robert's efforts bring no solution—it appears, unfortunately, that the frequency of wonders corresponds to the frequency of chance,

'that Chance and Miracle
have a common source, and consequently
the same answer would seem valid for both'.

This theme recurs in the 55th Song, when an astronomer on the 'stardeck' holds a popular lecture for listeners who are, for the most part, lethargic or scornful. The astronomer—'modest in his knowledge'—

'describes to us how the universe plays dice
in distant solar systems with the scalding novas'.

A contrary opinion to this was expressed, for instance, by Einstein, during a famous discussion at a physicists' congress in Brussels, in 1927, when he ironically asked Bohr and others whether they really believed that God plays dice ('——ob der liebe Gott würfelt'). Einstein was, towards the end of his life, almost the only defender of this deterministic viewpoint. *Aniara's* author does not accept his attitude, but he does accept another philosophy which is often linked with determinism, namely pantheism. Indeterminism, on the other hand, fuses with pantheism in the 88th Song, when Isagel, 'the ruler of pure thought, our spirits' succour', who was also 'the Mima's very self, the Mima's soul', is

summoned by ‘a messenger from the Mansions of Eternity’:

‘Invisible to us, she glided quietly
into the region of the Laws of Numbers
where endless, unexplored reserves await us
when the Powers of Chance decide the hour has
come.’

According to the second law of thermo-dynamics—the law of entropy—the evolution of Cosmos moves unhesitatingly from order towards chaos. Suns issue from the wombs of dark nebulae, speed proudly on their blazing courses, and disappear again into the darkness from which they came. The 77th Song is a mournful variation on this desolate theme, which also appears, for instance, in the last line of the epic, and in the Song of Disintegration (83).

‘Hear the rusty trombones. Hear how the zittras
are playing
of the Sphinx, marred and ravaged by lepra above
desert sands,
to comfort the races which have seen all their
customs disintegrate
like boulders obscenely devoured by the merci-
less ages’.

Thus Harry Martinson applies the second law of thermo-dynamics not only to dead objects but to Man himself. Also in our souls, he says, the entropy of evil is continuously expanding, and the dark

instincts of destruction point the way to death and chaos. Who knows whether they have not already become so strong that neither good deeds, tenderness nor love, in the long run, can continue to oppose them? That deadly minus sign, the spear of emptiness, has pierced us all. Before Man, 'the King of Ashes', God and Satan flee, hand in hand.

In Song 62 the author speaks of 'the long battle light wages against darkness without end'. The combination light-darkness forms a 'Leitmotif' which gives associations to the sinister law of entropy and also to Gnosticism and Manicheism. Yet, throughout *Aniara*—as a consequence of modern science—like an arrow pointing to the future, runs an awareness of the inherent danger of lucidity, of all light. We have, as it were, become conscious not only of the visible light, which was once a divine element, but also of an invisible, dark illumination—the light of roentgen and gamma rays—which, though admittedly a healer, is also a deadly threat to our existence. Earlier, the words lucidity and light were associated with such concepts as harmony and Olympic peace. We imagine Goethe, for instance, as a representative of this sublimity. Today, science has placed Man in quite another position—consciously, or unconsciously, we associate lucid realization of our plight with the word Angst.

The association is understandable; for although science continues to advance, the ethical progress of Man—gauged by the behaviour of the different

countries towards each other—has lagged behind, seeming to remain roughly where it was during the Stone Age. We are now facing the consequences of this unequal race, in the fear that Man will not be able to control the destructive weapons produced by science. *Aniara* is the tragedy of a generation which cannot solve this problem.

Harry Martinson is a pioneer of the poetry of the Atomic Age. No poet before him has tackled the formidable task of studying Man with the aid of modern science; of penetrating his soul with gamma rays, of testing his mind with ‘electronic brains’, or observing him in the astronomical perspective of the two-hundred inch reflector at Mount Palomar. In *Aniara*, poetry and science have become organically fused, and it is to the fact that the images culled from science fit so neatly into its general pattern and purpose that the poem owes its overwhelming impact. What the reader witnesses—at a distance too short to be entirely comfortable—is a poetic nuclear explosion; the songs follow each other in blast waves; in their wake, he senses the hurricane draughts, the seething heat and the gradual aftermath of radiation in a work whose symphonic breadth derives from one shuddering theme—Man’s journey through his own emptiness, humanity’s fall away from earth, into the trackless void.

1 My first remembered meeting with my Douris
shines with a light stronger than light itself.
And yet with a simplicity in meeting
that all may have in any transit hall
where the forced emigrants are herded off
to their fell gangways for the planet Mars
and to the tundras. Earth must have a rest
for all her poisons, launch her refugees
out into space, and keep her quarantine.

She writes out the embarkation cards,
her five small finger-nails gleaming
like dim lamps in the hall's half-light,
and says: 'Please sign your name just here
where the light of my bloneness falls
on this card, which you must keep. In case
any trouble should occur to jolt
both space and time you must come back
and write your impressions of it here
in this space, look, set apart for that.

'Now you must state precisely what
particular part of Mars you want to reach,
as the form states you may each take
a pot of non-infected soil
with you, and I'll seal up also

at least three cubic feet of earth
for every passenger on board.'

She looks at me with the disdain
beauty so easily assumes
on seeing whichever way she looks
the clumsy movements of the folk
thronging the stairs to the starting points.
And watches the ever-increasing crowds
huddling like sheep through the exit there
bound helplessly for other worlds.

The sheer absurdity of living
stands out so appallingly then for us
who've tried year after year to find
some chink through which a ray of hope
might reach this hideous hall where now
these flocks of numbered emigrants
start up whenever the siren blows.

2 Goldonda Aniara's closed.
The usual signal goes to quit
our gravitational field, and now
her gyrospiner starts to tow
her up towards the Zenith's light
where powerful magnetines annul
Earth's pull. Soon zero signal's given.
The space-ship's free, and weightless

floats upwards like a bubble or a cork
vibrationless and undisturbed
away from Earth, a normal start.
A simple gyromatic job
with no sense of adventure now.

Who could foresee that just this flight,
all in the day's work as it seemed,
was singled out to be unique
and doomed to bear us all away
from Earth and Sun, Venus and Mars,
and life's entire environment?

3 A swerve to avoid the asteroid
Hondo (claimed as 'discovered' thus)
jerked us off route. So we missed Mars,
bypassed its orbit, and avoiding
the field of Jupiter set course
on the field ICE-twelve
in Magdalena's outer ring.
But meeting then with a dense swarm
of leonides fell back even more
to Yko-nine, 'till in the field
of Sar-sixteen we needs gave up
our effort to turn round since we
just on the point of turning saw
a ring of boulders which gave us
the echographic picture of

a torus, whose empty centre now
we wildly sought—and finally found,
but only at so steep a tilt
the intersection brought disaster
to our Saba-aggregate, peppered
by a great hail of leonides and meteors.

So when the ring of boulders
left focus, and space was clear again,
we'd passed the point of no return,
our course pointing to Lyra now
and no change of direction could
be thought of. We lay in 'dead space*'.
Luckily our machinery
still worked all right—our central heating
and lighting both unharmed altho'
some of the instruments had been destroyed
while others were repairable perhaps.
Our unhappy fate was certain now,
our only hope the Mima would
keep going to whatever end.

4 Thus it was when the solar system closed
1 its gateway of purest crystal and cut off
the space-ship Aniara from all
the associations and promises of the Sun.

So at the mercy of impassive space
we sent our hailing signal 'Aniara'

through crystal-clear infinity,
but we could make no contact now.

Though space's vibrations obediently spread
Aniara's last call in ever-widening rings,
since these and Aniara were concentric
the call simply vanished in the void.

Sent in anguish by us in Aniara
our hailing signal just echoed and re-echoed
Aniara... Aniara...

5 The pilots are more resigned than we,
being fatalists of the new sort space
creates through the hypnotic power
of seemingly unchanging stars
on man's passion for riddles, since Death
accepted as inevitable fits
naturally into their scheme of things.
But even so now, in the sixth year of our flight,
one can see how even they look down
as from a precipice of fear.

In their unguarded moments sometimes,
able to read their expression, I can see
despair shines like the glow of phosphor
in their still ceaselessly questing eyes.
This shows most clearly in the case

of the woman pilot. She often sits
gazing at the Mima: and then
a change comes in her lovely eyes.
They become mysterious, the irises
full of melancholy fire, a hungry fire
seeking fuel to preserve the light of her soul.

She told me once, about a year ago,
she herself was ready to resign,
accept her fate and prepare for death.
She suggested we should have a farewell feast
and then just disappear. Many agreed.
But the passengers, and all
the naive emigrants who, even now,
hardly realize their hopeless plight,
are the un-relinquishable trust
of the leaders in their forward cabin
whose duty is eternally inescapable now.

6 We see through the Mima life exists
in many different places, though *where*
the Mima cannot show. Pictures appear,
fragments of landscapes and we catch
snatches of language spoken somewhere.
But *where*? Our Mima does her best
and searches, searches constantly.
Her electronic equipment registers,
her lenses give their basic report

to her selective cells, and they
assemble and project what they can,
pictures, sounds, and scents in a rich stream,
but cannot show where these come from.
That is always beyond the scope
of the powers given to a Mima.

To use a metaphor, she gets
her fish in other seas than those
we are sailing through now. and makes
her space-catches in the forests and valleys
of undiscoverable worlds.

I (the Mimarobe) look after the Mima,
calm the emigrants and liven them up
with pictures from far distance
of many things no human eye
is formed to see. The Mima never lies.
Her selective transmitting power they know
is incorruptible and cannot lie
and is three thousand and eighty times greater
than anything a human being could achieve
if he or she could take the Mima's place.
Yet every time I start the Mima
they prostrate themselves as before an altar,
and I have often heard them whisper,
'Imagine—if only one were like the Mima!'

It's well the Mima has no feelings
and no vanity built into her

but simply goes on as usual
transmitting pictures, sounds, and scents
caught up from undiscovered lands,
and does this quite impervious
to flattery or worship, unaffectedly aloof
she does not notice how in this dark room
(the compartment in which the Mima's house,
members of a special cult gather
to caress her, stroke her pedestal,
beg from her, the noble Mima,
a word of comfort or advice
about their journey, now in its sixth year.

Then suddenly I see all's changed.
The emigrants have begun at last
to understand that 'what's been *has been*',
their earlier lives irrevocably gone,
the only world open to us now
this world we journey in with Mima
that has no landfall and no goal
save death by vanishment in endless space.
We journey on towards certain death.
Even so the Mima still comforts
all these souls, preparing them in peace
and resignation for the last hour
which comes to every human being
no matter where he or she
may find temporary refuge.

7 We still cling to the habits of our time
on Earth, the customs we followed in
the land of Douris. We divide our time
in day and night, pretend to see
daybreak, twilight, sunset, though space
surrounds us with everlasting night,
so bitterly cold that those who still
live in Douris have never felt its like.
Our hearts are synchronous with the clock
that follows sunrise, moonrise, and the set
of both as seen from Douris' plains.
Now it is summer night, Midsummer Night,
and the people keep vigil hour by hour.
But in the Assembly Hall all but those
who keep watch in infinity
are dancing—dancing 'till the sun goes up
on Douris. Then suddenly they know
the sun did *not* go up, that life,
already a dream in Douris, is
even more a mere dream here, and now
the dance hall is filled with sobs
and vain hopes no one any longer tries
to conceal. Dancing and music cease.
The hall is deserted. All thron
to our Mima and for a short time
our Mima can ease the pressure of despair,
dispel the memories of life on Douris,
for the world Mima shows glimpses of
can often take the place of the world
we remember but have left forever.

If this were not so the Mima
could never hold us, and be worshipped
as a holy being, nor would the women
approach to stroke her pedestal
in bliss and trembling.

8 Our souls are wasted by dreams, the ceaseless chafing
for lack of reality of dream against dream,
and each new dream's a ladder
to the next dream-filled air-pocket.
Everywhere far distant is our home.
Our support lies beyond all boundaries.
I pour out my need to Douris' valleys
—and our perpetual longing to be there
is health itself, the art of living here.
We seldom think now of our immense
proud wonder of a space-ship. Only
during funeral speeches do we suddenly
realize that this is actually our world.
Then many a sombre thought swoops below
the vaulting of these indifferent rooms
which, filled with the echoes of their own life,
glide on forever through unfathomable space.
We hurry to the Mima—to receive
the comfort she can let us see but never reach.
So thousands flock in never ending streams
through every opening to where Mima's housed.
Perhaps in a flash we may remember then

the ship's length is sixteen thousand feet,
her breadth three thousand, and the number
of passengers aboard her eight thousand!
That everything was built for emigration
on a vast scale; and that this ship
is only one of many thousands
all of the same construction and size
which ply regularly to Mars and Venus
—that we alone have been flung off course
until one day the Chief Star-master told us
we were in the inner astronomical field
no longer, but everything possible would be done
to make life in the outer astronomical field
a voyage of discovery and a step,
the longest so far, towards the next astronomical
field.

When, later, it became clear to the leaders
that there was no means of return
to inner space and that the laws
of outer space were of another kind
to those which clearly govern the routine
of inner space, there was panic at first,
then apathy, which, between bouts of desperation,
spread its frozen insensitivity, its cold doldrum
world
of lifelessness, until the Mima,
like a friend in need, to everyone's relief
threw open her treasury of visions.

9 Certain features have developed in the Mima of a kind hitherto unknown to human thought, such as, for example, the third *Vebe*'s function in the focussing apparatus, and the ninth *Protator*'s signal of movement in the phase of unfocussed vibration before the selective cells take charge of everything and distribute and assemble it.

The inventor himself was shattered completely the day he found half the Mima he'd made lay beyond analysis and had been invented in fact by the Mima herself!

Oh, well, as we all know, he changed his title. He was modest enough to admit once the Mima had taken form

she was superior and he himself a mere machine-minder, a mimator.

He died, but the Mima still lives on.

He died, but she developed her own style and carried on in the knowledge of herself and of her possibilities and limitations; a telegrator, with no conceit, industrious, capable, a patient searcher, unbribable, clear-sighted, a filter of truth, beyond reproach.

Who can be surprised then if I, the mechanic, Mima's guardian in Aniara, am moved, when I see how men and women fall on their knees in holy faith before her.

I pray myself when they pray to Mima that what is happening is true, and that

this consolation Mima gives is a glimpse
of the light of true consolation
seeking us in this lonely house of space.

10 The empty sterile universe is terrifying,
its stare, concentrated on us, glassy,
the immitigable glare of nothingness.
Seen through Aniara's rounded crystal windows
the stellar system seems rigid, immobile.
So it becomes vital for us to preserve
our dream pictures of Douris' valleys, and here
in the motionless ocean of space
jealously preserve every memory,
every pulse of feeling.
The faintest sigh seems like a balmy wind,
all tears are fountains, and the ship herself
a hind leaping forward in silence
towards the constellation of the Lyra
whose stars do not seem to move
a fraction of an inch either to right or left
and whose distance away is so immense
in time and space our minds cannot conceive it.
It seems that everything's congealed,
fast-frozen in mountains of infinity
like specks of diamond dust inside
a crystal enfolding eternity
in massive halls of endlessness.
And all our words, worn out by use

and employed to describe mountains,
expanses of water, and landscapes
to which they were never adequate
have been exhausted by a race
which could not foresee a time would come
when these words so carelessly squandered
would be needed just where they really apply
—on this space-ship bound for the Lyra.

What then is left to us, who need
every word we can find to express
these boundless reaches of the autumn of space?

To comfort ourselves we must seek
for other words—for words instead
which can reduce and minimize.
So the word Star becomes obscene
and the slang terms for a woman's paps
or vagina respectable.
Indecent too the brain which caused
our deportation into space.

11 A spokesman for the Leaders now stands up
before the people in the great halls
of the ship's stern. He tells them not
to despair, but to understand their fate
in the clear light of scientific knowledge.
He says that this is not the first time

the like has happened—sixty years ago
a big Goldonda having on board
no fewer than fourteen thousand souls
was lost. Going towards Orion's Belt
her instruments disintegrated.
She dived at wildly increasing speed
towards Jupiter—and was engulfed
in its deserts and buried under
the giant star's heavy casing
and deadly mattresses of frozen hydrogen
which, to a depth of about a thousand miles,
armour that evil star with ice-cold gas.
Things could have been just as bad here
but we are luckier, he says,
not having crashed on to any star
—*our* journey lies ahead of us,
a lifelong journey to an end
from which there is no possible escape.

12 The jazz bands goad us in a crazy dance.
The girl I partner uses every chance.
She hails from Dourisburg and says quite frankly
that though she's danced up here for several years
in Aniara, 'there's no difference in this Yurg
from what we used to dance in Dourisburg.'

So long as we are dancing we are clear
that everything is wonderful up here.

There's Daisi Doody swaying from the hips
with all the slang of Douris on her lips,
glorious nonsense, just as in the Yurg
we danced, or thought we did, in Dourisburg.

You gamma down, dear, and go jail and dori.
You've never seen *me* dozzled like a lori!
No chadwick bothers me, you know, pouts Daisi,
I piv in pisty, lollop on my lazy,
never quarrel with my morals, as i fondle with my
 rondles
and wathed in tari gimble with my gondles.

I feel bewildered as we sway and swing,
the grief I nourish threatens to take wing
as, with this human child, I dance the Yurg
and baffle space with slang from Dourisburg.

13 In the sixth year Aniara flew on
with unbroken speed towards the Lyra.
The Chief Astronomer addressed
the emigrants on the scope of space.
He held a delicate glass bowl.

Slowly we realize the space
we travel in is a different kind
to what we always pictured in our minds
when the word space' caught our imagination

on earth—it dawns upon us now
the extent to which we are cut off
must be far greater than we first feared
—that knowledge was a blue naivety
which from a measured dose of thought
inferred the Mystery had form.

We gather now what we call space,
this glassy void round Aniara's hull,
is Spirit, everlasting and elusive,
and we are lost in oceans of the Spirit.

Our space-ship Aniara is borne on
in something that has no container
and needs no directing brain-stuff.

She is borne on in something which exists
but need not follow in the ways of thought,
through God and Death and Mystery she goes,
our space-ship without trace or goal.

Oh, could we but turn back to our base
now we have fathomed what our space-ship is
—a tiny bubble in a glass of God.

Listen to what I know about glass
and you'll see. In every glass
which stands for long enough, untouched,
a tiny flaw or bubble may appear
that moves with infinite slowness to a point
within the glass, and in a thousand years
the bubble's made a journey in its glass.
So too in boundless space, a gulf
of light-years forms the arcades

which enclose the bubble Aniara.
Although she travels at tremendous speed,
swifter than a planet in its course,
by the standards of the universe
her speed is no whit greater than that
the bubble achieves in its glass.

Appalled by this perception
I stumble shivering from Mima's hall
back to the lights of the Dance Hall
to find Daisy there. I plead
for the shelter of her arms again.
I beg for entry to a hair-clothed vagina
where the cold certainty of Death
may be forgotten. What remains of life
in Mima's Hall at least is there
in Daisy's warmth. Douris still lives here
when in each other, free from cold and danger,
we forget the vacancy round Aniara.

14 A group called Ticklers has been formed.
They meet to tickle and be tickled.
Most are women, though the leaders are men
and are called the kindlers,
an ancient word from pre-Goldondic days.
The word appears in the 'Blue Archive'.
It is connected in some way with food
in an ancient sense, and with flames.

More I do not know—as a child
at school I remember seeing
a naked flame on one occasion.
It was lit from a piece of wood
which was shown round. It spread smoke
and even a little heat. Then when
everyone had seen it the twig was dipped
in water and the pretty flame put out.
Wood was rare then. It was plentiful
in pre-Goldondic days, but since
owing to the radiation disaster, scarce.
We were quite excited, I recall.
As we stood there in a ring and saw
the tiny twiglet flame. But that
was long ago—Alas, so very long ago.

15 I turn off the Mima, go my rounds, and listen
to the emigrants and to the crew,
and hear an old space-sailor's tale
of Nobby—obviously his love story—

She was hardly good-looking, my little Nobby,
pale and scarred by radiation bums.
Tainted three times, she very nearly
fluttered away but was hauled back
each time, thanks to gammosan
and Tebe rays—and after a few years
in the bleak wards of the hospital barracks
on Tundra Two, caught a cheap goldonda back

from Mars to Earth, and there began
her refugee help—her endless money-box
collections for the needy on Mars and Venus.

Mars' folk need protecting from the cold,
Venus' folk from their swampy climate.
Did she wear herself out? You bet she did.
To go on I fell very much in love
with little Nobby, and cannot forget
the poor snatched chances we ever got
for love's dream on Tundra Two, the few
times I was there—a mere volunteer
in the fifteenth Goldonda then, named Max,
built for the Venus trip but later rebuilt
for refugee and rescue runs to Tundra Two.
The thirty-second war had just ended.
Control plan three was carried through.
You all know how things were—a new
Dick at the helm, tortures in the cells
for those who hadn't voted for him. The rest,
already sufficiently subdued, their rucksacks donned,
were hustled off on convict-goldonda seven
for three years' turf-digging on Tundra Nine,
one of the worst tundras to be found
on the whole slum-planet. We were there once.
But enough of administrative pretence! The way
the card-index was juggled with was worst.
The hard and heartless, and the kindly ones
were changed in the card-index many times.
At regular intervals human goodness

was shuffled to a card-index for evil,
and in this ghoulish jungle of controls
one must admire the Mima who can restore
to proper order such a contrived chaos,
for every one played at least four parts
in the hide-and-seek of these spectral politics.

16 Through swing-doors which continually revolve
as swing-doors do when a stream of folk goes
through,
a few voices are heard above the general din,
all sound—of despair or faith or courage—merges
in and is lost.

And one hears scattered voices singing songs
whose nature shows they are still sung
with some mystic hope seeking immunity
in the vacancy of space or through the Mima's
visions.

'Soon they'll be here, my happy cast-iron days,
when I can stand proof against the fire and cold
which threatens to destroy my peace of mind.
Soon they'll be here, my happy cast-iron days.'

But the murmur grows, and all flock to the Mima
shouting as though in grievous lamentation
till Mima's comfort comes from hidden worlds
in pictures drawn from an inconceivable source.

The shores of bliss reflected by the Mima
shone for us hour by hour in all their glory
but now the world of bliss has passed away.
Slung out towards a new infinity,
this saga was submerged in darker shadows
by waves which even Mima cannot stay.
And we are left to shiver, weak, alone.

17 The profound plunges you may seem to make
into imagined depths on which you can stake
some hope are all entirely without value here,
for there are no depths here to reach.
Here we can follow every dive you take
and measure just how far, how deep, it goes.
Such dives make no impression on the crystal
where we can see any such manoeuvre is
a turn-back to the point from which you dived.
Such feats do not convince us any more.

The man who is space-conscious seldom dives.
But should he ever essay to explore the void
he very soon comes back and divests himself
of such equipment as science seems to offer
for even the briefest dip into this sea.

His thought is merely to obtain a view
of this illimitable vacancy's sole cloud,
the long stiff cloud of white metal

which, luminous with reflected light, lies still,
or seems to lie, although in truth she moves
at a speed which would stand on end the hair
of those who do not realize how fast we go
towards the Lyra in our space-ship Aniara.

I was sent out once to make a check
of the Mima's cell-works, and from this direction
seven to eight thousand metres radially
Aniara looked majestic as she lay.

From space's sea I saw with deep emotion
our poor old dhow, so far from Douris' land
as she drew patiently on towards the Lyra
from space's Zanzibar, with the slave-burden of
our time.

This kind of ivory is heaviest of all
where branded with the hard name of association
from an unreachable and hostile world
it grimly hampers Aniara's voyage.

18 Attempts at respite through the flight of thought
and constant transference from dream to dream
was often our method of seeking relief.
With one leg steeped in a flood of feeling
and one supported by a lack of feeling
we often stood.
I questioned myself but quite forgot to answer.
I dreamt of life but quite forgot to live.

I ranged the universe—but could not travel farther
for I was imprisoned here, in Aniara.

19 The woman navigator enters
the Mima room, and gives a silent sign
that I should switch on the Mima.
How sovereign she is, and how aloof.
She wounds, but as a rose may wound,
not always, as expected, with its thorn.
A rose will always wound you with its rose,
although the sore may seem a thorny scar.
Perhaps more often it will be a mark
of sheerest beauty, beauty's fire alone.
How gracious Douris, now in this sixth year,
changed more and more into a distant star,
a sun which like a spark burns in my eye,
and with its immeasurable golden needle pierces
my heart through all the reaches of the intense inane.
She blazed more broadly once when she was nearer
but stings more sharply now she is so far away.

I start the Mima, sit awhile, and wait
to see how gradually the expression brightens
in curious transformation on the face
of this lovely woman pilot who with such aloofness
surrounds each changing aspect of her beauty.
But Mima works and Mima explains all.
The pale cheeks of the fair one flush and redden

She is filled with heavenly intoxication
when Mima shows her all that still exists
unreachable in boundless space.
She smiles, she laughs ecstatically, helplessly,
as though she were suddenly seized by God,
but just as she seems near the acme of bliss
the third veben switches Mima's focus
and other worlds crowd in upon the Mima.
The lovely woman's colour changes swiftly.

I close the Mima. She is meant to comfort
and not to tantalize her human watchers
with glimpses of worlds like that they've left.
Problems and experiences which absorbed us all
in the far-off days while we were still in Douris
are not what should be shown this woman now.
I caress her then by switching off the Mima
because the Mima's truth is incorruptible
showing the sheer truth of all created things.

The woman rises, nods me
her silent thanks for shutting off the Mima.
She turns round in the door, tells me to call
her back sometime when Mima intercepts ...
Intercepts *what* she does not say, but I can guess.

Friendly familiar Douris, kind Douris,
far-distant Douris, now a noble planet,
on which we long to land. Now she's a pin-point
star.

Oh, if I only knew from where she glimmer,
now in this sixth year of our fugue so wholly
merged
with suns of space, that I can never find
that star again! The noble planet, Douris!

20 All one has dreamt so long of intercepting,
remote, unseizable visions of old agonies
and happinesses so long exhausted
come to us on spent waves through the Mima.
On far, forgotten waves the picture's turned
and cast in a mysterious echograph
in labyrinthine curves through the void,
and all the rumours of space reach us here.
Perpetually through space sweep evil rumours.
Good rumours always leave less trace,
for goodness does not belong to the life of action,
its light is the same light this year and every year.

21 But doubt is an acid which corrodes
more dreams than any dreamer can conjure up
and only through the Mima can we see
and relive the warmth and beauty of our dreams.
I treasure therefore every memory I can
that has consolation's glow, and recalls life,

and each time terror tiptoes through, the ship
and fear and despair tear at our nerves
I serve a few of Alima's dream-preserves.

22 The doctor who keeps watch over our eyes
and sees the zest for life grow dim in them
is perplexed by *lacus lacrimalis*
where crocodiles are no more to be seen.
A flood of tears like this in Alima's halls
pays tribute to the distant scenes of Douris.

And yet it almost seems as tho' these tears
despite their obvious sincerity are cold.
Like crystal water risen from great depth
they fall with a too-pure transparency
like virgin rain which never touches earth.
Our disillusioned weeping in the Aniara of our
thoughts!

23 We found support from the Chief Astrolobe.
He knew all about the light of distant stars.
But suddenly the star of reason was extinguished
in the Chief Star-master's own brain.
Pressed to his death by our expectancy
his mind gave way and died of spiritual need.

24 Frustration storms on in its own way,
blasphemes and curses space and time.
But many think already that we suffer
just punishment as we fly on to the Lyra,
for we ourselves by the hard laws of space
have shut ourselves in the sarcophagus
where we must conduct our living burial
till all our vanity lays down its sceptre.

After a millennium or a myriad years
some distant sun will capture a grey moth
which flies towards it as tho' to the lamp
of autumn long ago in Douris valleys.
Then our space journey will come to an end.
We'll all sleep heavily in Aniara
and things will quickly change in Mima's hall.

25 The sarcophagus bears us quietly on.
We cannot harm the planet as before
nor even spread again the peace of death.
Here we can question freely and answer truthfully
while our lost space-ship Aniara
flies on through lonely space, time left behind.

26 The stone-deaf Mute began thus to describe
the worst sound he had heard. 'You could not hear it.
Yes, just before my ear-drums burst apart

the last sound came—a sigh of surging reeds—
when the Phototurb burned and blasted

Dourisburg.’

‘You could not hear it’ whispered the Deaf Mute.

‘My ear was not in time to hear

when souls were tom apart

and bodies hurled away

as six square miles of townland twisted

themselves inside out

as the Phototurb destroyed

the mighty town which once was Dourisburg.’

Even thus he spoke, the deaf mute who was dead
and since it’s said that stones cry out in anguish
this was the dead man calling through a stone.

He shouted through the stone: Can you hear me?

He shouted through the stone: Can’t you hear me?

I come from that great city, Dourisburg.

And then the blind man started to describe

the appalling fiery glare

that burned out his eyes.

Describe it he couldn’t.

He mentioned but one detail: He saw with his neck.

His whole scalp, flayed open, was an eyeball

which, dazzled beyond the bounds of bursting,

was lifted, whirled away in blinded trust,

in the sleep of death. But that was not a sleep.

Even so his words are like the deaf mute’s

and since it’s said that stones cry out in anguish

so he cries out through stones with the deaf-mute
They cry out through stones to each other.
They cry out from the stone-pits with Cassandra.

I dash towards the Mima as tho' I might
arrest the frightful action with my anguish,
but Mima shows it all, uncompromising,
transmits to the last picture, fire and slaughter.
And turning to the passengers I scream
my agony of pain at Dour is' destruction.
There is protection against almost anything,
against fire and damage caused by storm and cold
Yes, count up everything you can think of,
but there is no protection against man!

When it is really necessary no one sees clearly any-
how.
No, only when the point was to destroy,
to obliterate all that the heart had saved
of dreams to live on through cold evil years.

Mima's put out of action by a sheer blue blaze.
And I'm struck dumb by what's befallen
the wretched Earth—the blaze shoots here
into my heart as into an open sore,
and I, our faithful Mima's blue liturgist,
with frozen blood the hideous tidings hear
Douris has perished in distant Dourisburg.

27 I seek a last comfort of Daisi now
for she's the only woman left who can speak
our lovely Dourisburg dialect, while I
am the last man who understands what Daisi,
alluringly, with nimble tongue, still prattles
in the happy idiom of our lost city.

'Come rockasway and shimble,' coaxes Daisi.
'Droom dazily, come hillo in my billows.
I don't quarrel with my morals, as I fondle with my
rondles
and wathed in tari gimble with my gondles.'

And I who know how Dourisburg has been
devastated forever by the Phototurb
am content that Daisi's just the way she is.

What would be the sense of breaking the enchant-
ment

Daisi, unsuspectingly, has kept so well
that she, lying carelessly at her ease,
or swaying in sensual bliss after the dance,
has no idea that since some hours ago
she is the widow of great Dourisburg?

She asks me to sing to her, and I start
the Cast-Iron Ballad I used to know
about the town of Gond, destroyed by war.

But Daisi prattles, unsuspecting, gay,
her whole being is so manifestly meant
only to sing the praise of dancing, and dance the yurg.

What were I but a monster if I shattered
the living magic she conjures up
from her own breast, her joyfully sensual heart?

She prattles as in fever till she falls asleep.
Around our place of vigil Aniara is still,
tho' not in sleep. Clear thought is still awake
mindful of the far earth now lost forever,
and only Daisi's heart beats free of danger
while nightmare clearness reigns in Aniara.

28 For several days after Douris' destruction
the Mima showed disturbance from the Phototurb
and the third veben fought as against a cloud
of deepening distant shame. On the third day
the Mima prayed deliverance from the sight.
On the fourth day she gave me some instructions
about the octopus feelers of the Cantor works,
not till the fifth day was she calm again,
receiving a broadcast from a better world,
and once more her cell-works glowed serenely.
But on the seventh day there came a surging
from Mima's cell-works I'd never heard before,
the indifferent third veben's tacis
switched off, then reported itself blind,
and suddenly the Mima called me forward
to the inner barrier, and with apprehension
I went towards her, towards the awful goddess.

And as I stood there, shaking and cold with fear,
and full of anxiety for her condition,
the Mima's phonoglobe began to speak
suddenly to me, in the dialect
she and I used most, for every-day purposes.

She bade me tell the Leaders here that she
for sometime past had felt as guilty as the very
stones
for she had heard them crying out
as stones will do, on distant Douris' plains
and she had seen the hot white tears of granite
when stones and ores are vaporized,
it wrung her heart to hear these stones lament.

Her cell-works dimmed and damaged by the cruelty
which in his evil only man can show,
she came, as might be expected, to the point
where she at last, as even Mimas must, broke
down.

The indifferent third veben's tacin
sees a thousand things no human eye can see.
Now, in the name of these, the Mima
craved for surcease. She will not speak again.

29 But it was all too late. I could not keep
the crowd from rushing in to Mima's hall.
I shouted, yelled to them to turn back

but none of them obeyed me, for, though all
would gladly have fled in terror, yet
they were irresistibly drawn to see the worst.

A flash of blue fire leapt from Mima's screen
A rumbling echoed through Mima's hall
like thunder long ago in Douris' valleys.

A wave of horror broke upon the crowd
and many emigrants were crushed and trampled
when Mima died in space's Aniara.

The final words she uttered were a message
sent by the Victim of Disintegration.
She let this witness testify for himself
and stammering, incoherent, tell
how ghastly fission is in mind and body,
how time comes surging in, and surges on,
how time comes surging at the wail of life,
prolonging the grim second of one's dissolution,
how terror whirls about,
how horror blows away,
how ghastly fission is in mind and body.

30 A time of bitterest misery ensued,
and long I sat in silence, brooding
in Mima's hall to which the evil sent
the storm of its dark rays from uttermost space

Despairingly I struggled to repair
our hallowed Mima's mechanism of skill and com-
fort
and with the tensor calculus strove
to revive the miracle's centre in her breast.

But the voice of her phonoglobe was silent now,
and her sensostat only received messages
from some Boeotian spirit of such dullness
that it lay far below both man and God.

And now too I was pestered by the mob
who crowded in, flinging jeers and curses
upon me, crushed already in the pit
by all that reached my heart from distant spheres.
Even Chefone, the Goldonda's ruthless master,
came in to me and mocked me every day
and though his malignant triumph was quite clear
threatened me with the penalties of the law.

He often tried to make a mystery
of his own role in our Goldonda's world
and devilishly to force all souls
to believe that we were bound for Hades.

He succeeded in this, and backed
by the grim ghoulishness of space
gave the impression of a man who drives
his people with delight to defeat and extinction.

31 Chefone now instigated persecution
and I and many others had to find
a hiding place deep down in the Goldonda
till the vials of his wrath ran out.

Down there dwelt experts in every branch
connected with the tensor of the Fourth Degree,
the while those who continually corrupt
pure thought bathed in vainglory.

Confused and unconvincingly they tried to prove
that Mima's tragic fate was all our fault.
Her flow of pictures had been disturbed
by each ego thinking its own thoughts
defiling her screen, thus dimming her comforting
glow
and obscuring the space waves, Mima's radiation.

Protesting our innocence we did our best
to explain and instruct, using technical terms
yet in the language of the common man
strove to achieve a measure of lucidity.

But this new language, meant to explain all,
became nonsense to ourselves, a Blind Man's Buff
of words avoiding words, putting obscurity
into the lucidity which is the soul of space.

So next we tried to draw, as if for savages
mid prehistoric races of the kind

one reads of as belonging to the aeons
of past existence and a primitive stage.

We made these hieroglyphics look like trees and
plants,
we sketched the ramifications of a river,
hoping by these means to devise a text
which people, needing such visual aids, might
understand.

But when we ourselves heard only alien sounds
in a tongue stripped of all formulas
we scarcely understood the very lessons
with which we'd tried to give a helping hand.

And finally this court of arbitration
which was to absolve us from space's doom
became differentiated *in absurdum*
and the bridge between us as empty as before.

32 With a system for the analytic testing
of Mima's whole cycle of formulas, phase by
phase,
I became in due course such an expert
at watching everything everywhere as through
glass
that in the third year following the day
of Mima's demise in Anira's halls

I managed to hit on the trans-Thomist
which govern human rise or fall.

On this discovery I went almost mad,
the wild intoxication of deep unreal joy
transformed my soul into an all-seeing eye
taking in the whole house of space at once.

I was brought up from my prison in Amara's
—where the woman pilot also was confined—
back to the hall of our once-hallowed Mima,
and rumours spread. I heard the jubilant laugh
They all spoke of this great discovery
and of Mima's come-back in the starry night.

33 But beyond every solution lurks a mystery.
I exulted all too soon in Mima's hall.
I saw the key indeed, but as through reaches
of clear glass and fathomless mountain crystal.
Without the aid of Mima, once my guide and
helper,
I faltered, weak and poor in spirit;
the power of thought in consternation ebbed away.
Deprived of Mima, I saw a mirrored world
which glimmered and died out on Mima's screen,

By Mima's ruin, as though fallen among fixes,
I saw her breast, a blackened burnt-out shell.

34 I have no name myself. Attached to Mima
I am known therefore as the Mimarobe.
The oath I took is called *goldondevan*.
The name I used to bear was erased at the first
testing
and must forever be forgotten.

With Isagel, the woman pilot, things
have so fallen out that her position
decides her name, which is a code-word.

Her true and secret name, the one she whispered
close to my ear, I cannot here betray.

Her eyes reflect the inaccessible
yet gentle light of things unspoken,
the light so often seen in mysterious things
when beauty has surpassed the mystery.

And as she draws the graphs, her nail-tips glimmer
like opaque lamps in the half-light of the halls.
She says: Please follow the graphs here with your
numbers
where the dark shadow of my sorrow falls.

And then she rises from her *Gopta* table
and the radiance of her thoughts illuminates me.
Our glances meet, and, soul to soul, in silence
we stand. I worship Isagel.

35 The inexorability of space drives us
to practices and beliefs we have not had
since pre-goldondic days, now half-forgotten,
and Aniarā's four religions
with priests, crucifixes, and temple bells,
the Cult of the Vagina, clamouring Yurginnor,
the Sect of Ticklers, perpetually laughing,
reappear in space, crowding on each other's heels
to fill the vast deserts of eternity.

And I who, in my role of Mimarobe,
am held responsible for all illusions
which have been broken, must make room
in Mima's crypt, and hold everything in line,
when the lustful libidinous women and voluptuaries
in the sex dance of the Cult surround their god.

36 I look at the women embellishing their beauty.
(For many of them this is not so hard).
Here wanders Yaal, a dormifid Yurginna,
whose power of love is now at its prime
and there stands Libidel, from Venus' green
perpetually fertile jungle spring.
And close beside Chebeba, Yurg-obsessed,
and with a Candian jewel on her thigh
stands dormijunen Gena. Round her surge
the flock of novices whom she instructs.

At one time I developed the idea
of so placing a thousand mirrors that they
could give us everything that mirrors can
of bright reflection and seemingly-widened space
which optically magnifies every inch
to an illusory depth of some eight thousand inches,
and when we had furnished twenty halls like this
with mirrors taken from another eighty
the results were so magnificent
that for four long years with mirror glass
I could entrance the soul-distraught.

To keep our minds off our fatal journey
and turn them to the happy world of mirrors
I introduced so many to the bliss
induced by mirrors in a house of mirrors
even I myself found time for Yurg
with Daisy Doody from far Dourisburg.
And even with Chebeba and with Yaal
I and my reflections danced in Mima's hall.

They come in relays. I see them livened
by Yurg and Cult, and cannot but admire
when, Yurg-entranced, they circle between mirrors
reflected eightfold in a mirrored world.
From all directions, swaying in the Yurg,
they seem themselves a dancing heavenly host
in all the glory of eightfold reflection.
Chebeba eight times over, eight times Yaal,
and Gena eight times in an octagonal hall.

See Libidel with skilled unerring hand
as she eggs on a man from Dourisland.
And now Chebeba when in Yurgian bliss
she whirls across to mirrored nothingness
where eight Chebebas, dancing in to meet
show her eight times again her breasts and feet.

For everything must shimmer like a mirage
when mirrored dance is danced on mirrored limbs;
illusions point the way through Yurgian halls
to mirrored valleys and to mirrored plains.

37 Desire and piety go hand in hand.
On rolls the chariot, drawn by a team
of men and women members of the Cult.
The chaste staff lifted by Isagel
is held up with the Lantern of the Cult
when Libidel, her retinue eight libidinnor,
glides to the ceremony, lies down in readiness,
Later, when all are warmed by vaginal fire
and lie there drowsily and in content,
Isagel, with her lowered staff, moves forward
and touches with the lantern thrice three times
our holy shrine, our blessed Mima's grave.
Then comes a sigh like wind-swept reefs when Yaal, peace
in her bosom, absolved from desire,
kneels lingering by the shrine, supplicating
with tender whisperings the Goddess's bier.

What peace in her expression as she hears
the dutiful singing of the Day of Days,
and Isagel and Libidel and Gena
circle the grave in chorus with Chebeba!

38 In her dressing room behind Mima's hall
lovely Libidel sat one winter night,
a watch upon her thigh, beside her a Buddha cat;
a glistening jewel in the hollow of her navel.

In her bosom flashed a heart-shaped pendant.
Her breasts, warming the coldness of the stone,
bore round her nipples a dark ring of charcoal
well calculated for the glow of Tyrsos lamps.

But watchful envy lay in ambush, waiting
and purring quietly its panther song,
ready to tear to shreds the legend of her beauty
and scatter it in triumph to the winds.

Her subtle lines still granted her the right
to lead the Cult, but the day was drawing near
when bikinillan would but enhance their fadings
and could no longer intrigue the devotees.

But now she began to hide the promise
which lay but a few inches from the sacred centre

and a Xinombric complement draped round her
hips
helped to distract the mind of the beholder.

But many connoisseurs among the pious
nourished in secrecy their growing doubts.
No longer did they queue as formerly
to enjoy her favours when she led the Cult.

Libidel, apprehensive, smooths her hair.
Her jewelled navel now seems like a sore
but she hopes, all the same, her ample breasts
in fellowship with graceful thighs
will keep her for another year at least
at the high altar of the Cult, tho' even now
her autumn shows grim signs of its approach

In sunrose sarathasme and plyell
the luscious Yaal stands quietly by her side,
still young enough to wait for her high day,
the time when she herself, one dazzling night
of shooting stars, will succeed Libidel.

39 A discovery not hitherto foreseen
was made by Isagel, the woman pilot,
one morning she sat quietly in the Gopta room
where she was working on her Jender graphs.

She called out suddenly and bade me come
to the Jender table where, at lightning speed,
she caught, and sealed provisionally, her finding.
She shrieked for joy, and pressed to her heart
the lively, struggling inspiration
which safely delivered now, had been conceived
through love of the Law of Great Numbers.

When I studied this child I could see clearly
that it was healthy, with the strength of form
which always characterizes bagel's work
in the world of higher mathematics.

If this discovery had been made in Douris,
if only Douris' valleys could have been
a dwelling place for artisans of numbers
it would have made a great sensation at once
and deeply changed the Gopta calculus.

And as we sat and discussed with each other
the possibilities this discovery would have opened
if only we had not been here in space,
trapped in the emptiness we were filling through,
we both grew sorrowful, but still retained
the desire bom of pure thought, the kind of joy
which we could quietly share together
during the time still left to us in life.

But now and then my Isagel would weep
to think of this overwhelming, endless space
where everything can only fall forever,

as she herself must fall—and must fall with her
this great problem, now solved and clearly mastered.

THE SPACE SAILOR'S STORY

40 The transport to Tundra Three took some nine
years.

Evacuation Gond as much as ten.

I was myself on board the eighth goldonda.

We flew alternately with other space-ships,

Benares, Canton, Gond, and a few more.

In about five years we moved three million
fear-stricken humans to the novel planet.

Those memories throb like raw sores...

Mostly memories of the embarking times...

The same frantic scenes repeated every time
when tears and anguished prayers were blended
with the gay songs of green-clad Space Cadets.

When the day's quota of refugees from Gond
is hustled complete with index passports and
identity discs

away from all the sin and shame of Earth,
they shiver and, in spite of all, recoil...

But forced on by the weight of their own numbers
they come to the goldondas's human corrals

where a few hardened Venus vets

examine them and with a rollicking wink

tease them with Ha, ha, ha,' and 'Welcome home

to Heaven's kingdom from Jerusalem.'
All apprehension is explained away
until each index card has been adapted
to the soul it represents through tests and then
placed in the microrolls which automatically
register every plus and every minus.
And so they lift for heaven's endless reaches
to be hardened on the tundra planet's beaches.
Others to Venus's quagmires are transported.
What happens in both places is well known.

In murky mines imprisoned crouch the peoples
who, used and misused like mere articles,
are sorted out and driven roughly down
to the Caverns at Ygol.

Inconceivable, this form of torture
defies description both in words and pictures,
with stony executioners in daily charge
of locks, of taps, electric switches,
and glass-constructed peepholes trained upon the
Caverns
beside whose outer walls the serfs of death
unblinking, sluggish and unmoved
peer in with chilly devils' eyes to follow
the captives' struggle
against walls of stone.

Now let's go on (too late to draw back)
to Tundra Two, where the plexi barracks are,

where Nobby and I once planned to wander,
in the Martian landscape's ray-untainted Spring
There proudly flourishes the black ice-tulip
impervious to the marshy planet's chill
while on the tundra the throaty cockerel crows
its saga of the tundra's sterile state.
Pathetic, starved, and yet by all revered
that bird knows much about both cold and need.

The only form of growth is arctic willow
—if we may pause to think of vegetation-
struggling, dwarf, hard as wrought-iron
with black, inedible, unappetizing leaves
well-hardened for these frore bare fields,
digestible only by the cockerel whose gizzard
is connected with a chain of stomachs.
And when it gorges on these scanty leaves
it seems as though one had heard the key
turning finally in the door of life.

For all one then can see is the shuttling gizzard,
and when the bird swallows, one watches,
fascinated;
it sometimes even wrings a laugh from one.
Yet to this land of poverty and hardship
my Nobby was attached with all her soul.
For bitter years of want set other standards
than those applied when Nature is benign.
Among the scrapings of the frozen planet
in the willow's sighing she found fortitude.

She wandered on the moors and sang of Spring
when the cold grew milder and the cockerel crew
and willow trailers crept across the tundras
hungrily stretching to a half-grown sun.
She often sent odd willow leaves to Earth
and wrote; leaves from the forests of the soul.
Behold, Spring winds blow o'er the spirit's fields,
my heart brims over. No doubt you can guess why.

These were the days when evil Gond was twisted
into a spiral by the Phototurb.
A seething coil of fiery gases,
a town in headlong flight through Douris' valleys.
Against all that the extreme coolness
and icy air surrounding Tundra Two
was surely preferable, and the cockerel's
scraggy and wizened shape might seem a Blue Bird.
No wonder Nobby found contentment there,
in comparison with Earth's blackness.

The girl herself was clever indeed
to wrest anything out of this existence.
I don't think there were more than two
kinds of life on the whole planet.

Picture her wandering among the prison barracks
where crowds of rough men like starving wolves
tear off the saucepan lid and strive to devour
the cockerel, skinny and uncookably tough,
which defies every trick of tundra cuisine.

But Nobby was a girl unlike all others.
She found it meaningless to blame
men who would soon be buried in the tundra
forgotten by their fellows.
Nobby's existence was clearly reflected in the
mirror,
in no way polished up or glorified
yet never sullied by the despairing look
every prisoner, shocked and frightened, gave
to the impassive glass.

I love to linger with the happy memory
of this courageous woman who took part
in everything once known as suffering and
sacrifice
but now called something more prosaic,
for when the altar gets too bloodstained
the thin veneer of holiness falls off.

That was the last Spring that Nature bloomed.
She died that very Spring, stricken by a wind
which blew hot hurricanes between the mountains
and with great thunder filled the land of Rind.
A sunclap sounded, lightning threw its forkings.
I still can hear the screaming: *sombra, sombra*,
of human beings, already dazed and blinded,
who fled towards their God in search of succour.
They did not know God too was in the flame
of substances which, blasted and polluted,
punished Xinombra with primaeval fire.

The power of matter was all-engulfing.
The unforgettable years came upon us
when everything was Hooded by it.
One saw souls trying to maintain a stand
helped by their heritage of faith,
but the giant outflow drowned them one by
one.

The faith and principles held in their hearts
were robbed of meaning by the flood,
the drama of their own lives swallowed up
and drowned in the general
all-overwhelming wave of impotence.

They were reduced to cells within a state
which made demands upon them as before
but now without caring that it had destroyed
the moral being from which it craved a tribute.

And thus a human being condemned
to exile far away on Tundra Two
knew damn all of the nature of his crime
but all the more about the giant's grim demands,
and about the hopeless fate awaiting him
in the jaws of a mine
and in the giant castle made of glass
which, for the sake of ceaseless supervision,
rotated at the cesium mineshaft's edge
in the town of Antalex,
metropolis of this land of punishment.

God's Kingdom never was of that dark world
and receded further as the years rolled on
and those who could made their way to the
Heavens
with bodies first when souls were barred.

And we observed how many a tough tyrant
surged up in time from these valleys down on Rind;
we had to contend with boorish ruthless fellows who used
their elbows to get through the goldonda
gate.

Surely the pious should have stood together
against such fellows, and shown their teeth in
time.
But their desire for peace at any price was far too
great
and ruffians soon gave them their quietus.
And unassuming souls in every country,
taken by surprise, died at their rough hands.

The shy and timid and the gentle-mannered
were often left marooned in gamma-poisoned parts
and found another way of reaching Heaven.
They never found their way to Mima's halls.

A sailor of the spheres, I saw this happen,
I who for thirty years have cruised in space
between the Earth and the bare barren tundra.
A job like this is bound to leave some trace.

During the years one's memory collects such facts,
none of them based on anything but truth.
Without the precious image of my Nobby
what would life have been worth to me?

For love of others she has sewn and washed
for tundran prisoners, in pure self-denial.
That is why I have told you the tale
of Nobby, the Good Samaritan.

THE CHILD

41 Chebeba sat in her most fruitful year
in deepest bliss beside a tiny bier
where lay the little rosy bud
that she had saved from growing up
in Aniara's realm.

Then entered Yaal, she too at her prime.
She saw the fair dead child upon its bier
and said in tones that were both hard and clear:
You are going home. But we must stay on here
in Aniara's realm.

Then Gena came in too, declaring:
To you, my child, I will in reverence go
and play no part, but stand here without guile
before you, who, released from sin and wrong
sleep quietly in Aniara's realm.

Yaal tiptoed out. Then Heba took her place.
She could say nothing, only stood and gazed,
watching the tiny child so peacefully
sleep on in space, borne towards the Day of Days,
borne on, away
from Aniara's realm.

42 *is omitted, in a agreement with the author, as
untranslatable.*

43 While Mima lived we were as trolls
who, crowding about Mima, chose
to see and hear, without any risk,
all the woe and struggle in the land of Gond,
and who, whenever excitement ran high
and the taste of blood was salt in every mouth,
urged Mima's guardian to switch the knobs
and change the picture, taking another wave-
length
to see something new. Our menu thus became
a balanced diet, in which death at sunset
alternating with happiness at dawn,
answered questions which in fear and torment
were broadcast from some far remote city.
The reconciliation of opposites then appeared

as something pretty good, and the land of Gond
a country which had seen better days
but was laid open now to evil's sway.
Making full use of Mima's incorruptible eye
we shared all the sensations of Xinombra
when, during our space travels, we changed
others' agonies into mere sounds and pictures.
And although Mima, at Xinombra's fate,
was seen to shudder as once at Dourisburg's,
we travellers watched the holocaust,
the hyena in us getting its full due,
we joined the lion, risk free, as he pounced
and growling, wiped out qualms of conscience.

The number of slaughters we saw in this way,
the number of battlefields we wallowed in,
is legion. Though we could see the fallen lie before
us
we trampled on in order to be present
at the next phase of the battle.

Our faithful Mima reproduced it all
relentlessly, without any censoring,
and if sometimes we turned quite stiff
with terror, and felt horrified by many a deed,
the deeds themselves were actually so many
that memory retained only the very worst.
These were known as the Extremes, and then
lost in the tide of horrors flowing between.

In Hall No. 7 is the Blue Archive of Thought
but seldom visited, tho' there are things there
that can bear long thinking about still.
There a man stands called the Friend of Thought
ready to teach each one who may so wish
the elements of the laws of thinking.
He points in sorrow to a set of thoughts
which might have saved us had it been used
in time for cultivation of the spirit,
but which, since spirit was lacking,
was put aside in some forgotten lumber-room;
but as our emptiness here was never-ending,
there were always some who came and asked to
see
an occasional ancient train of philosophy
which might, they imagined, be given a
new significance and occupy the mind a little.

45 The Cynic, who is always close to hand
to calculate our minimum of hope
is ahead of every flight of thought
and pulverizes the goal of our hopes
in ways so comic that the thought itself
somersaults and falls like a skater on sheer ice.
But then the brain laughs as the brain will do
like an intellectual snob, caught out in a slip of
thought,
or as a savage quite nonplussed by calculations,

A shrug mimicking his victims in the past,
is the Cynic's sole answer, or an icy grimace,
reflex of his bitter loneliness.

46 Daily we listen to the phonodiscs—coins
supplied to all on board and played
by the Fingerspeakers worn on our left hands.
We exchange discs of many different values.
Everyone plays whatever he has, and though
a space dime scarcely weighs an ounce
it sings like a cicada on every hand
grown soft and white through lack of useful work.
Thanks to this device we still retain
some little contact with the past.
The goster-penny still croons out its rondi
and the rindel-penny still tunes up its gondi.

Her hand held close by her lovely cheek
and the Fingerspeaker murmuring in her ear,
sits Heba, listening idly to a space dime.
She gives a sudden shiver, changes the coin, and
soon
a stream of yurgian music fills her head.

I asked her later, when I went my round,
why she had trembled. I heard, she told me,
a cry for help, a prayer for mercy. A scream,
transmitted through the disc, from Gond.

47 A philosopher of point sets, nay, a mystic
of the school of transfinite numbers, often comes
his question card completed, to the Gopta centre
then quietly bows to clear-eyed Isagel
and tiptoes out in Aniara's hall.

And Isagel, who finds the question reasonable,
accepts his flock of formulas and readjusts them
to the third thought-combination of the Gopta table.

And when she has transformed the group of
numbers
and carefully goptated tensor classes,
she places them upon the Gopta waggon
and harnesses it to the space-lackey, Robert,
our Brains Trust's faithful ox.

When the philosopher himself comes back
the only thing that Isagel can say
is that, despite all Robert's frenzied efforts,
no Gopta can explain the problem set.
For the question concerns the frequency of wonders
in the Cosmos, gauged by point set mathematics.
But it appears that Chance and Miracle
have a common source, and consequently
the same answers would seem valid for both.

And then the point set man, as we have called him,
bows sorrowfully in quiet acceptance
and tiptoes off to Aniara's halls.

48 A poetess appeared within our world
and the beauty of her songs lifted us quite
out of ourselves into the world of spirits.
She gilded our drab prison bars with fire,
brought Heaven to the dark rooms of our hearts,
changing each word from smoke to red-hot flame.

She had come to us from the land of Rind
and the strange myths woven about her life
warmed us like sacred wine.

She herself was blind from birth, a child
of a thousand nights without a trace of day,
yet her blind eyes seemed in themselves to hold
the depths of a dark well, the nucleus of all song.

And the miracle she brought with her
was the game of the human soul with language,
the visionary's play with joy and sorrow.

And we were enraptured by her songs of bliss
and blinded by the glory she revealed
in the infinity of space, where she, though blind,
and trapped by night, composed the Songs of Rind.

THE BLIND POETESS

The long road I've come from Rind
to here has the same night-color
as the paths I trod in Rind itself.

Dark as before. Dark as always.
But our darkness grew cold.
Therein lay the difference.
All accustomed darkness deserted me
and against my forehead
and against my breast,
which was a part of Spring,
the cold darkness struck
and stayed forever.
A dreary moaning from Rind's aspens
surged in the night. I began to shiver.
This was in autumn. Some spoke
of the fire of maples, some whom I heard
passing, praised the sunset hues
on a nearby valley.
They said it was crimson, pale
with spreading rays, purple in the evening.
Against it, forests flamed in the night.
They told too how shadows under the trees
gradually whitened after frost
as though grass were summer's hair
rapidly ageing,
so they described to me the look of tilings.
A silvering of hoar frost and gold
that flashed and glimmered each rime summer
her debt to her grey creditor, the cold.
And autumn's gay extravagance was also printed:
all gold thrown into summer's grave.
This flaming grandeur, so they said,
had the gaudiness of a gypsy funeral

with its riot of red and yellow streamers
and gilded banners brought from Ispahan.

But I myself stood still and cold there in the dark-
ness

and only felt all that was near to me
vanish before a dark and icy wind
while the last shudder of the aspen leaves
told me that in the land of Rind
summer would soon lie dead.

Then the wind changed
and in the night
a terrible black heat swept in.

I fell into the arms of one
who came running.

That frightened me.

How could I tell in the hot darkness
who it was?

He caught me as I fell and held me
—whether a devil or a man I knew not—
while the rumbling increased
and the hot wind, black as before,
grew to a tempest.

He who held me shouted frantically
in a voice which yet seemed far away:
'Protect your eyes. It's coming. It will blind you'

I made my own voice as loud as I could
and shouted back at him: I am already blind.

I have never seen.

Then he let me go, ran for his life.
I cannot say where, in the hot blast of darkness
which was suddenly swallowed up
by fearful thunder claps
crashing towards me, a blind woman!
I fell again, began to crawl
and struggled on through Rind's forests.
At length I reached a stony crevice
where no trees fell and the heat was not too great.
There I lay, almost happy, between stones
and prayed to Rind for help.
And through the roaring, *mirabile dictu*,
someone came to my pit
and carried me away to a closed carriage
and conveyed me through the night
to Rindon's airfield.
There was a refugee committee there, nigh stricken
dumb,
their voices cracked by tiredness and shouting.
I whispered my number and name, and they told
me to follow
the crowd which surged to the goldonda exits.

The years which followed sealed my fate,
for, on the Martian tundra, I learnt how
as a messenger from Rind, to soften the guards
with my songs of grief over a cruel doom.
By touching faces with my hands
I learnt to tell great sufferers from others
and at length returned to Rind

to gather, by my singing,
union for the Tundra refugees.
The land in Rind was bare. All vegetation stunted,
but iron wills insisted on their plan
to save some ground with a new substance
the scientists had given them—Geosan they called
it.

How this worked I do not know.
Many said it was a complete failure.
Man to man the plan was defined as something
everybody hoped for
but no one could achieve.

Thus I left my home, the source
of all my songs of Rind. I applied
for a post as singer in the Third Saloon.
There I work now. I sing ‘Alas, the valley,’
and ‘Tiny Bird In the Bower of Roses’
as well as the Cast Iron Ballad, which the
Gondians
so often sing aboard our space goldonda.
Each fight for Heaven is a fight for joy.
The goal of every heart is Paradise.
How fearful then if treacherous influences
lead and persuade the selfish and the angry
into this fight, thus darkening our way
with banners of hate, revenge, and malice.

How hard it is for man to feel a keen
and natural desire to maintain truth!
How hard it is to know one’s duty early!

How hard to join in Mass at the high altar
invoking so a God of whose strange laws
we know no more than that He suffers deeply
in every act that does not wholly please Him.

How hard to fuse one's faith with daily living!,
How hard to understand God's sacrifice!
How difficult in secret not to wonder—
Has not the blood of sacrifice run dry,
and why are executioners still with us?
How difficult in secret not to wonder!

How hard to understand the words of mercy
for us who have never spoken with the dead
or had an answer from the grave
where fairies never tiptoe in with wands,
where only one has burst the bonds of death
to meet his God, while all the others, blind
and silent in the foulness of dissolution
must lie in dust until the Judgement Day!

How hard to trust in life beyond the grave!
How right to wish for life beyond the grave
for this is proof of joy in living
and the desire to taste life's beauties further,
not just to die like fireflies on the shore!

How right to show an honest joy in living!
How right to value living over death!

flow harsh the grip of the tomb!
flow easy to trust in life beyond the grave!

Committed to the earth they lie in ranks
in the blind ground beneath the winds of Spring
and there in unison they join the chorus
of all the blind chanting the songs of Kind.

With limbs already mouldered into dust
they praise each day in song the God
who, although blind, knows all and never needs to
see
the bodies to which He granted spirit.

Slowly the flesh will crumble into dust.
Only the bones endure.
But time goes on, and soon
even the bones will mingle with the earth.

And soon their song choir will dissolve
into the treetops from where every leaf
will tell the winds that pass
how death hidden in summer sings for joy.

Forgetful of itself the summer fades
so too the spirit of Life, elusive as
delicate summers which have flowered away
to come again with every changing year.

We listen, entranced, while the blind girl speaks.
Some murmur as they stand:

What gracious words she tells her story in,
what gracious words come from the land of Rind
—but they are only words, borne on the wind.

50 Sandon, the High Comedian, refreshed and
delighted
all of us the light-years had touched and blighted.

When the blaze of our sun was turned away from
the outcast group
Sandon stood up to our paralysed loss of hope.

And, in the hull of our joy, in the glare of strange
suns after,
Sandon the Clown would explode with bursts of
his zany laughter.

And we bawled Bravo! when he came on stage
with his three-legged trolley
and he shouted zanily back at our plaudits, volley
on volley.

But the grave is a joker too. Clowns all go offstage
by and by.
And Sandon, Comedian, has gone to his grave in
the streams of the sky.

Sandon the Clown, used up, worn down, gave up
his art, his breath,
under the heavy burden of human fate, to the
zany death.

51 A lady of the world, a graceful gold leaf
on a delicate branch of the nobility of Yedis,
exquisitely formed, her hair parted
to show one half blue, the other black,
with a gleaming, jewelled comb of rarest Yabian
fire-agate
in the upward sweep of her high crown of hair,
describes to another Yedian lady
how from a palanquin above the heights of Geining
she once looked out
across the inland sea of Setokaidi
and watched the moon sail up, a figured lantern,
dripping with autumn gold.

I came upon these ladies
one day, when sorting fragments of the mima
and working with them in solitude.

Once upon a time the mima must have shown their
features,
catching the serene beauty of the Yedis-eyed,
echoing the language they once spoke
by Setokaidi's inland sea.

Alas, that Mima is extinct.
Alas, the Mighty One is dead.
I cannot understand it. It is inexplicable.
The goddess crushed by grief. And we are damn A

52 Look at her, sweeping past
draped in the appropriate sleekness of the latest
fashion,
surely forever worthy to remain
by seas that curve from Teb to Cape Atlantis,
an Aphrodite with eternal life,
untouched
by time and salt!
Do not believe it.
That woman has been dust
four million years, and nothing,
not even the great age of culture
which gave her birth, has left the faintest trace.

What radiance!
Lord God, how do you do it?
Look at those graceful modem clothes.
Heba, do you see
that gorgeous belt
and mark the tailoring of the waistline?
What testimony
to woman's genius
for making her clothes live their own life

in time, throughout the seasons,
a life
so subtly and beautifully moulded
that its true background is the sea
by Cape Atlantis!
Lord God, how do you do it?
Whose is the sharpest pain?
—Thine, who harvests all,
ours, who see and know
how all is harvested?
Thy mighty power—our helplessness.
Switch off. Let's go back to our yurg.
Did you notice
the cut of that dress might well be used
in our Tany line, the Yibb, the Sesi-Yedi
and other tailoring
from Dourisburg?

THE SPEAR

53 In the eleventh year we saw a vision;
the slenderest, the tiniest of sights;
a spear that travelled through the universe.
It came from the same direction as our goldonda
and did not swerve aside but held its course.
Its speed was greater than that of the goldonda
and consequently the spear
rapidly drew ahead of us.

Afterwards we sat for a long time in groups
talking excitedly to one another
about the spear, its path, its origin, what it por-
tended.

But no one knew, and no one could know.
One made a guess but nobody believed him.
In some way there seemed nothing to believe,
as an object of belief the sight was meaningless,
It merely whizzed across the universe.
The spear of emptiness went on its aimless course
but even so this spectacle
had power to change the minds of many of us;
three went quite mad, a fourth one took his life,
another set up a new sect,
a noisy, boring, unaesthetic crowd
who long disturbed the peace in Aniara.

And thus, in spite of all, the spear had pierced us.

CHEFONE'S GARDEN

54 In order to keep in touch with the corps of
inventors
the leaders entertained them to dinner in
'Perpetual Spring',

A winter garden of a type often seen in goldondas
and popularly called 'flying gardens of space'.

The best of humanity mounts guard there over life,
tiny gardens of Eden where nothing withers or
dwarfs.

And where among blossom and greenery, a man
can find rest
from the glassy technique and cold staring darkness
of space.

There sit our Leaders now, absorbed with the
inventors
in how best to safeguard 'Perpetual Spring'.

And how to cultivate still more of delicate life
and protect our inherited share of 'the gardens of
space'.

First they all looked about them, out there in the
wondrous park,
framed by pillars and archways, merged with the
grass-covered earth.

The illusion was such that the Spring heaven glowed
and the stream
ran a carefully planned circle in the shade of
enchanted green hedges.

The dove fluttered high to the heaven last seen by
our eyes.
A nude woman sat by the hyssop-blue risings.

With her gracefully curved breasts, in a posture
enhancing her beauty,
she seemed to me wonderfully fair, for the evening
was near.

Yes, that woman was lovely indeed, a delight to the
eye,
and just for this reason I moved even closer to
see.

Yet in spite of the wines I had recently tasted, the
sight
of such beauty has rarely awakened such pain in my
breast.

I rubbed at my eyes, half-believing I was still not
fully awake;
for this was the nymph of the Mountain, the prey
of the Dragon.

The hackneyed old song which nobody now
wanted to sing
was suddenly apt in the oceans where Goldondas
swim.

We can dismiss the sage after noting the woman is
nude.
But who can dismiss magic mountains, make light
of the Dragon?

Still, as guest of the Leaders, I wanted at least to
find out
how dragons behave, how they function, what they
are about.

I said to her: Beautiful creature, so lovely, so
naked,
Does the park you are in belong by some chance to
the Dragon?

She answered: I come of the people in hell-fire who
once shouted 'Sombra',
and you of the people who blasted all life in
Xinombra.

I hate all your people, as deeply and fiercely as I
treasure
every tree, every plant in these space-circling
gardens of pleasure.

And then as I stood there, the halls of Chefone
darkened
and shame added its weight to my woeful load of
sorrows.

I shrank from the look the woman slave threw
me
and nothing that happened thereafter had any
importance.

I bowed to her silently, made my way back to the
path
where a myriad birds winged their songs to the
dome of the sky.

I guessed that Chefone had no thought of me or my
place
as I tiptoed away from the 'flying gardens of
space'.

But my thoughts lingered long with that woman,
so graceful and naked
and for long I felt shame, as though I in myself
were the Dragon.

55 On the planetarium deck, domed by the arch
of a plexi-roof, transparent to the sky,
lifts are unloaded of those who wish to stroll
at leisure to and fro upon the star-deck
and watch a nova's fire, the glow of which
comes to us from the coils of Berenice's hair.

And the astronomer—modest in his knowledge—
describes to us how the universe plays dice
in distant solar systems with the scalding novas
which, tired of ceaselessly offering gifts
to the great Photophag suddenly

break down and in extremes of fury hurl
the last flames of an expended passion
On to the Photophag's indifferent waves.

A dandy, who deserves a thrashing, listens with
contempt,
and, in a drawling and degenerate voice
which instantly reveals the Gondian,
passes a comment of deliberate disgust
which drops and dwindles to a sneering whisper
on a level with his weary space-grimace.

And the astronomer, chilled to silence by this,
mutters apologies and ends the evening's viewing
of the sights to be seen in outer-space.

56 One day I met Chefone in the passage
which leads in to the third Gopta Hall.
Scornfully he asked me: What about the songs
of cuckoo and thrush this year from Douris?
Had the Mima overcome her trifling ailment?
I saw that you searched wildly and long
below her breast to find the cause of trouble.
Perhaps you found the right spot in the end?

I stammer out a scared Goldondic greeting,
report to him that Mima died of grief,

despite her visionary powers seeing no salvation
for those imprisoned in this hold of death.

And then Chcfone laughed as though he saw
sights that were comic here in Mima's hall.
I felt like collapsing in my dumb despair
at thought of my lost home in Douris' valleys.

But Chefone, impatient, bored by tears,
strides on, and I am left there stiff and frozen,
remembering the time when a thousand Springs
turned to eternal winter in Mima's hall.

Is there still any hope of our salvation
in Aniara, now that She is dead?
I search for comfort, look in every comer,
but all in vain. As vainly do I test
advice and visions too.

57 One day Libidel lay prostrated
by the drug she had placed on her tongue.
We sang by her grave, while the flames leapt
to encircle one no longer young.

Our shuddering conscience contracted
frost-touched in the cynical heavens.

And our stainless steel vault was sealed up
in seas where love's splendour had faded.

58 A religion strongly rivalling the Cult
has grown up in the torment of our darkness.
Its adepts worship Light as an ideal, and fire
the goddess of their sect is a pure flame.

The girl from Rind was chosen for this role.
And the choir bellows like a great wind
when she, the singer, whose own sight is gone,
appears before the altar clad in light.

She chants her hymns about the god of light
and tells how she who once lived on Rind
looked into light and saw it with her skin.

The vision seared her. This is what it means
to feel one's skin scorched by the fire of
God.

Ecstasy seizes her. No one can clearly hear
what she is saying, but a vast choir
of voices carries her as on the crest of a wave.

Placed among a thousand lights, the blind saint
in fireproof mantle made of silicates,
surging towards the barrier of the Photophag
pleads with shrill cries for light, more light, on
Rind.

I often wandered towards the hall
where this sect met, for its spirit moved me
as it did many, on our long journey through
darkness.

59 A Mass of Repentance is held in the Hall of
Memory

and those of us who feel deeply contrite
forgather there, our foreheads strewn with ashes,
torturing ourselves with dirges of penitence.

‘Prepare for doom. The walls of wrath are closing
around our fate, the fate we brought upon our-
selves.

Our punishment is but the mirror reflex
of those tortures we invented long ago.

‘When no excuse distorts the picture any longer
the image in the glass itself is Hades
and mirrors scorch you—best keep your hands
off—
they reflect what was said and done.’

Day after day I hear the dreary chanting
of hideous songs by these grey fakirs of contrition
and feel revolted. For who can rival
the degradation they thus impose on themselves?

For me, a more important question is to find
some means of healing Mima's broken spirit
and recreating the celestial membrane,
ruined by space waves from the darkened earth.

60 Many an overwrought inmate of the space ship
will listen gladly to the tranquil voice
of Anlara's astronomer as he tells the tale
of pre-goldondic days and the glacion.

He points out then how meaningless it is
to speak about a cosmic clock of doom
since the rhythm of Cosmos follows quite other
patterns of time than those we knew on earth.

For generations which should have been punished
had already slept a thousand years in the deserts
when space, using the scourge of frozen climate,
struck mankind with an ice age.

Quietly he explains, with sober illustrations,
the course of the most recent glacion
when the gondilder of the twenty-third century
in the ice clime slithered from his throne.

Man was busy just then with the millennium
whose dawn, however, was overcast by wars;

he was about to till the earth again
when all human plans were suddenly crushed and
broken.

For the frozen nebula of Golmos met the sun
which started then upon a pilgrimage
through Golmos' night; and Golmos' shadow-play
chilled our world with the moan of glacial winds.

The heavy cap spread out across the earth
a circumpolar covering. So great countries
were clad in ice many kilometres thick.

Not only arctic snow came moving down
—the hexagons of frozen convolutions—
but cosmic snow too from the nebula,
turning winters into aeons.

An icy crust concealed the lands of Europe
which hidden under huge sheets of ice
were bedded down for sixteen thousand years,
deprived of every ray of sunshine.

And people in these countries
carried their technical skills as far south
as possible, making some resistance for a while,
then sank frozen into a barbarous coma.

So through a period of twelve thousand years
man was a savage

who, armed with fragmentary memories of
technology,
waited to see the sun return again
to kindle the woods of nature and realms of
culture.

Succeeding generations turned the wheels
and spun the threads in primitive workshops
where they were re-educated for hard living
and accustomed to ice age conditions.

The nebula of cold now passed the sun,
yet to humans in pre-goldondic days
it seemed for fifteen centuries like a mourning
veil,
a titanic cloth of coal-black satin
which every evening rolled across the heaven
darkening the galaxies with its widow's weeds.

In time this dark cloth passed further off
and being, by cosmic standards, small,
it lost as it grew more remote
its first resemblance to a mourning veil,
and hardly more than eleven thousand years
after the centuries when the sun left Golmos
and continued on its way to renewed glory
this sombre patch had almost disappeared
from the centre of a heaven refreshed.
By then the ice had melted and new races
tasted the blessing of clear Springs in Gond.

61 I invented, with the utmost difficulty,
a screen composed of two sorts of rays,
and found a way of hanging this as it were
out in space, some miles from the goldonda,
and towards this space-screen then I could send
a third sort of ray which transmitted pictures.
In this way I contrived to establish
the illusion of a wall in space—a kind of frieze
stretched out there and made up
of pictures of forests and moonlit lakes,
mountains and cities. Sometimes I introduced
a mighty army of people carrying banners
of victory—all to make a seeming wall
which could shut out the intolerable void.

Later I built up yet another wall
this time on another side, and in between
these two resplendent walls of dense illusion
our space-ship glided—well screened from the
immense
and gaping gorges which could no longer
stare in at us, as they'd done for the last nine
years
stinging us like lances, pricking us like needles.

But even such tapestries of fantasy
need the support of some human will at least,
the contribution of some secret dreams
from those who only crave but never give us
—anything but emptiness, a void

which must be constantly filled and embellished.
And now this emptiness turned against me,
pursuing me to dark corners of the ship,
threatening my life when I could not
explain at once why emptiness remained.

I saw then how things are and how they were.
No one can hide his inner emptiness.
Mima had been smashed against the waves of time
like Humpty-Dumpty on his famous wall.
No one could mend poor Humpty-Dumpty then.
Still less have I any chance of mending you.
Your emptiness is terrifying indeed.

I keep on conjuring—but at bottom
the effort is hardly worth the trouble,
but you contribute nothing of your souls,
and so the pictures faded clean away.

62 We turn the wheel of routine. I lecture
space-cadets on the science of the Gopta.

Through the observation tower, suns
peer in at us. They seem motionless
though we know that with thunderous roar
they sway and rotate in everlasting night on pyres
of roentgen light.

and while in my mind's ear I hear them sound
like terrible war-drums in the long battle
light wages against darkness without end,
I hear my own voice making feeble sounds
in answer to my question on the Gopta.

'Only by revaluation of the new era
and new extensions of the tensor calculus
was it possible to find a means
of discovering the split-up symmetry
which through the formula of five divided by
three
was simplified and turned to real advantage
in every tour made by the Gopta chariot.'

And then the space cadets got up to go
in perfect line into the hall
where the next teacher, worthy and placid
Giles, speaks to them about goldonda buildings.

63 A woman from Gond, now a widow,
was often seen with her husband
on the star-deck. For years they'd sit there
with their bundles strapped ready as tho'
expecting a landing. Though many looked at
them
with irony, which grew colder and colder

as time went by, nevertheless these two
maintained a touching expectation
gazing serenely on towards the Lyra.

Still in their fond minds lingered
the scent of thyme fields they'd known
and of bread she'd once baked in the ovens
they'd been forced to leave behind in Gond.

How many thousand times these two had studied
Heaven's prospectus, sitting close, absorbed,
no mortal being here can tell, in space years
which passed them by without a trace
until they both grew grey at last
and she was left sitting there alone
in quiet recollection of bygone days
when they had lived together, safe
in Gond, till a game of Jacob's Ladder
was suddenly proclaimed by wailing sirens
and forced their headlong flight through Douris'
plains.

Huddled close together on Goldon's airfield
they took sad farewell of Douris' valleys
and with a parting prayer they laid
their emigration problems in fate's hand.

I used to notice how for several years
the widow sat alone there, quiet and bowed,
while we, who with ingenious leadership

endeavoured to guide fate's hand, began
to despair of reaching the Promised Land.

64 Hear us, Xinombrians, who
haunt you with memories.
We who have passed on, and know,
pursue you with visions.

For several years Xinombra's ashes
floated gently down
like snow.

Each time you wake we stumble forward,
our blackened arms
holding up your shame.

Xinombra's pillar of ashes
travelled across Rind.
It reached the coast on the fifth day
and came to Cape Atlantis on the seventh,
but the survivors found no hope,
no refuge even in the open sea,

Where jellyfish were seen to founder
and octopodia rose dead from great depths.
Like flowers of death Xinombra's ashes
floated across the waters.

aquatic demons and angels
girded round together,
of them dead.

Religion swam into men's thoughts
carried on the gulf-streams of death.

The holy stone of wisdom
Jiidden in the slaughter-mask of genius
was shot into the heart
of the city of Xinombra
which died for the third time.
Oh, what a precious jewel was lost!

65 We lowered a curtain of dreams
and between ourselves and memories of Xinombra
a blessed forgetfulness
filled with its own life sprang up.

Thus magnified, transformed,
our senses soared
in a new guise,
bent on adventure among the dimensions.

An intolerable nucleus of pain dissolved.
We felt quite clearly
the point at which it burst and welled out,
giving a nameless bliss

in which Aniara was no more
and Chefone had died,
no one knew how or cared.
Relief pervaded us all so easily.
Isagel was there also.
Libidel and the libidinnians
with the eight dormifides came gliding in
changed by the drug as tho' by dew
in mountain glens at break of day.

66 More and more deeply has each tortured soul
drunk of the Paradise I have here described
but every time our laudanum is drained
our visions of Eden quickly fade,
Xinombra's shrieking ghosts swarm in upon us
sworn to revenge their ravished city's fate.

67 I am roused by a scream. It is Chebeba's.
She stares at me with failing eyes
their brightness lost. They dim and die.
O God, she cried, I can't bear to live
where there is neither joy nor hope.
How fearfully, how clearly, I recall Xinombra.

Parched heat swept in from all directions,
its climax,

expertly prepared in torrid formulas,
the Phototurb
which transformed all the air
into stifling oven-heat.

It was in autumn
refugees spread the tale
of cool lakes where, in final agony,
one might attempt to drown.

It is all over now,
and there is no one left to blame.
The men responsible? All dead!
The instigators in oblivion!

The tools of power which held
everything in a cast-iron grip
were suddenly changed to ashes.

All that could bum crumbled to ashes.
The stones were glazed
to a depth of four inches.
In some places the glaze went even deeper,
A foot or more
of granite surface boiled.
But humans were spared the sight of this,
they had been whirled ahead, above, around
like shooting cinders.

What happened inside the houses?
Hardly anything.

It was so quick there was scarcely time
to grasp that it had happened.
Imagine to yourself a bedside clock
which, set to measure time in seconds,
is taken unawares by its own dissolution
and then boils up and whirls away as gas
all in the millionth part of one small second!
Or the woman who lay asleep and unsuspecting
and who, at the fatal instant, woke up and shivered.
No! Spare our feelings I hear you screaming . . .
From the purgatory of repentance is heard the cry
of Sombra
like those which echoed, echoed, in Xinombra.

68 We felt ourselves drawn off our course
and indulged the hope that an end
was close in the unutterable vastness.

New hope fired the veins of the ancients
as they felt her lurch in her orbit.
Among all who were weary of suffering
and longed for the peace of Nirvana
the cry rang: She staggers, our beauty!
She lurched once again from her course.

Our innermost hopes found expression
and no one derided his neighbour

when different doctrines and religions
met up in the halls of the ship,
with pennants and crosses and emblems,
prayer-streamers and the Sign of the Lotus.
She violently lurched in her orbit again
and now hope was distorted by terror
but soon raised its banners again.

69 We ran into something like a fog
which grew thicker every day
till on the fifth day it began to smoulder
against the ship's nose-cone. Quickly thereafter
strange new phenomena appeared.
A rainbow-shimmering gauzy veil
wrapt itself marvellously round the ship
covering it with a splendid spray of colours.
Then a terrific display of fireworks
dazzled all on board with blinding light.
This festive image did not last long. We met
resistance of an unknown kind next
and a hurricane of glowing particles induced
stark terror. The fear of immediate death
seized all of us.

We all thought now of doom and death.
The many thousands who had occupied
the four thousand rooms on the goldonda
choked up the passages in their panic.

At least a hundred refugees from Gond
were trampled under the assembly halls
and thousands were injured in other ways.
The disturbances of gravitation
which spread abroad sent waves of Chaos
through all our souls
when a thousand vibrations as from
the impact of huge rocks made every heart shudder
rousing such fear that nothing on the journey
equalled the hideous terror
which soon filled the halls and stairways
where crowding in itself caused death:
a human mill driven by human fear
grinding itself in swirling waves of madness.
Like a spiral drill employed by Titans
the ship whirled up a cosmic sand cloud
which smouldered, glimmered, and was soon put
down
against the shuddering metals of the nose-cone.
And like a spinning top, in flames, lit up
as though by nearby suns our ship plunged on,
amid the thunderous roars of the surrounding
matter,
deeper and deeper into its gorge.

And then
as suddenly as it had started
it was all over, and the goldonda fell
along the loxodrome
which she retained in falling.

What could it have been? The question rose.
In spite of all our dead it was put first.
It seemed in some way most important
for our fantastic world of fear still gliding
on its customary course towards the Lyra.
And now among these dead and mangled bodies
the leaders were obliged to say what they believed
and deemed a probable explanation:
a cloud of cosmic snow perhaps; the ice
of some strange substance; cosmic crystal powder
adrift for centuries; some form of eternal snow
drifting about in space for a billion years
searching for a mountain
to rest upon,
to rest up in peace.

The passengers accepted this hypothesis,
bowed themselves and gathered up their dead,
whose souls, having reached the haven of peace,
had become cool as the snow
which finds its resting place
on mountains of the Spirit

But much was changed thereafter in the life
we led within that world which now was ours.
The Hall of Mirrors, which for four long years
had nourished our illusion, lay in ruins.
A thousand shattered fragments, heaped in drifts,
littered the floors once used for dancing
and cut to pieces between jagged splinters

lay many a beauty, struck down by the yurg
the Cloud had danced in space with our goldonda
With jewels placed high upon her hip lay Heba,
and Daisi still as beautiful, while Yaal
lay dead beside the wounded Chebeba.

This all befell in the twelfth year
after our take-off from Dour is' valleys.

70 Back to featureless everyday we drifted on
following as before the streams of Ghazilnut,
the name given to that lobe of our galaxy
which in contrast to other lobes
can be described in human star terms.
Which does not mean that Ghazilnut
can be mastered or contained within
the boundaries of human life!
No, Ghazilnut just means, as things stand,
a smaller lobe measuring four galactaves,
one galactave is fifteen thousand light-years wide.
In astronavin one usually reckons
that the entire Milky Way covers a span
of some eight hundred thousand galactaves.
No, save us, please, the torment of trying
to explain in measurements the vastnesses
into which Aniara has been plunged.

THE SPACE MARINER

71 Every time I try to check my memoirs
it seems to me that I can trace
Nobia to tlalocitli,
a tiny hospital base in the mountains of Doraima.
This is a town which no one sees
where hospitals are blasted into rock.
An old deserted mine was once donated
for the building of this town which
—after some needed reinforcement of the
mountain
alteration of its inner structure—
was established at a depth
of fifteen hundred feet under the valley.

I journey in thought now
more and more often to this place
which the Samaritans, with their money-box funds,
have bought and built themselves.
They say it cost something like
tse sum ot three million dyma
—in Gondic currency five hundred thousand gondi,
in Rindic phonocoins five million rondi.
They collected this money for eleven years,
they built, as deep as possible, for safety
a reserve station among Doraima's mountains.

When one has lived long among fiends
such goodness is like an exotic garden

whose fruits evince its real nature
and single happiness is voiced
by cuckoos singing in the gardens of the heart.

72 Time went on, years came and vanished in the cold
and glassy reaches.
Life grew gradually more timeless for most people as
they huddled
peering from the lofty windows, half-expecting
that some planet
would break loose from its companions, head to-
wards them and come closer.

Children grew up, played and gambolled on the
tundras of the exiles,
on the mouldering ballroom floorboards, now grown
shabby and uneven.
Modem times breed modem customs. Yurg was long
ago forgotten
and poor dance-demented Daisy slept for ever in her
corner
of the vault where only honoured prima ballerinas lie.

I myself sat quietly thinking of the glorious Karelia
where I once lived long ago, where I lingered through
a lifetime
spending more than thirty winters, more than nine
and twenty summers

before seeking other countries, meeting other,
fresh adventures
on the path of transmigration.

Memories return in flashes. Here in Cosmos there's no
barrier,
ages merge and I still see fragments from the
different countries
of my soul's long pilgrimage.

Fairest of these memory pictures are the glimpses of
Karelia
like a blue streak between tree-trunks, like the paling
summer waters
in the June-translucent twilight when an evening
scarcely deepens
ere the cuckoo sends his flute-like invitation to sweet
Aino
to swathe veils of mist about her, rise above the
summer waters,
go towards the soaring smoke wreaths, come to meet
the cheerful cuckoo
'midst Karelia's murmuring winds.

Oh if one could take advice,
good advice, from days long past
where laws are dead, whose fields
time has burned away.

Here I sit on Mima's halls,
remembering that once I lived

another life in which I learned
wisdom from plain fare.

Here I sit. Where is my mother?
Here I sit. Where is my sweetheart?
In a better world than this one?

Was it because I used my knife
that I may not have my dear one?
Plunged it into my stepfather's chest
as he smugly left the sauna
squeezing my girl's breast with his hand. . . .
Where did all that happen? I recall.
I can still see the glen, the forests
deep in Karelia, the land of sagas.

Here I sit, with all those others
who boast roughly of their worlds,
what they did and how they fared
sumptuously on the King of Stars.

Ninety centuries ago, one evening
I sat quietly in the glen
with my sweetheart, just before it happened,
before the God of Judgement exiled me
from Karelia's woodland glens.

It is good that sometimes one forgets.
Fortunate that memory only glimmers

for a moment now and again,
soothing to escape constant reminders
of one's dreary pilgrimage.

Best to watch and say nothing.
Maybe divine guards are sitting
here and listening. Who can tell?

If I can endure, be patient,
if in silence I repent,
perhaps, some far-off evening,
I may see the end of all my memories,
reach the limit of my wanderings,
and scrubbed clean and labelled worthy
of the noble Star of Kings,
settle, like a bird in foliage,
deep in the Karelian woods.

LIBIDELLA

(Secret song of Melancholy)

73 Does my dog sniff round your shadowy glen
Libidella,
and my cat slumber in high disdain,
soft-purring Libidell?

Does my ear hear only its own refrain
Libidella?
Does my home lie in someone else's house,
listening Libidell?

Libidella
yield me your Isthmus urn.
Now let Stella
alpha lights dimly bum.
Midst the riddle of Alpha Centauris
we wonder and weep together.
O nuda now
in nudis glow
under mandola's moon for two.

Libidella
with me to Sirius turn.
Nudinella yield me your Isthmus urn.
The widow, so tantalizing,
obsesses the thoughts of men.
O nuda now
in nudis glow
under mandola's moon for two.

Libidella
unclad in nudinell
lift towards Stella
moon-pale your nudibell,
in the starlight of Alpha Centauris
we pledge these toasts with our tears.
O nuda now

in nudis glow
under mandola's moon for two.

74 Fear stares into a void that is too clear
interpreting without the aid of thought.
So obvious is glassy death in Cosmos,
so obvious the emptiness which eases
our understanding of the meaningless.

So obvious the shooting star of fear.
My friend, you know too much
without having had to ponder.

So, while you slept, vast seas of space,
mercilessly clear, drowned your illusions
and fear's own light blazed forth like a sun.

75 A prize amounting to ten million gondi
—a sum of money eagerly desired—
was promised to anyone able to turn our goldonda
round
and point her nose-cone back to Douris' valleys.

But that was years ago, the prize today
concerns the Comfortress in Mima's hall.

All, who can penetrate the Mima's secrets?
Who can give the enchantress back her wand?
This is our cry, resounding in outer space.

76 With statistical notes on my knee, I listen quietly
to our space historian, giving a lecture
about the pioneers upon these seas
which, tho' conquered, have yet been the grave of
many.

'In former days we ascended much more steeply.'
(Ikaros, for example).

Yes, there were those who actually imagined
that, given suitable leverage, one might be 'fired'
from a rocket-pedestal, and thus avoid
the curving forces and fields of outer space.
When this idea was finally discarded
(after costing those wretched folk many sacrifices—
for instance, Thanatos)

the second phase emerged, called 'heaven's ladder'
when in a succession of power thrusts
one could propel one's liner from the fields
—this, in itself, was a method quite acceptable
albeit extravagant and not without its risks.

The accident statistics we see here
speak for themselves of the problems that were
vital
in those far-off days before space was deflowered.

Compared with the curve of our own age,
judged too by our modern methods of measure-
the curve of earlier days would seem deficient,
we are entitled, in fact, to term it crude.

77 We shudder when we see, through the ship's
telescope,
coal-black sun, extinct, nameless,
a sun in mourning in the graveyard of space,
at once the blackened corpse and tombstone of a
sun
which once glowed in a firestorm at the Cape of
Time
flinging its flames into the jaws of darkness
until it was gradually, in accordance with
the law of entropy, sucked up by the Photophag
which left only cinders and shell behind,
a gravestone on the empty plain of darkness,
one of many thousand dark stones standing
invisible
in endless night in the cemeteries of space.

This sun reflects no light, but shows itself
as the eclipse of a few gathered stars
which only a month ago were seen
on this same spot where now this murky sun
stands out, sharp-contoured, like a jet-black coin.

Presenting in sombre majesty
a rounded profile against the gaslight of the
nebula,
it seems a dark circular mountain mass
in whose turgid grotto the spirit of the lamp
died long ago in the embrace of darkness
and choked by dingy cinders is kept frozen
in a grave of light, in nameless oblivion.

78 Our Chief Engineer,
a man from Upper Gond,
an acknowledged authority on Yesser tubing,
collapsed at his post
on Wednesday, the fifteenth of November.

In view of his long years of service
and important contributions to the science of
goldondas
his express wish to be entombed
in a Tube of Rescue was granted,
and he was duly shot off
towards the Star of Rigel.

A large crowd followed his body
to the antechamber
where the Tube of Rescue stood on a catafalque,
and sang at parting
'Wide the embrace, the distant haven',

then they went away, and the antechamber was
closed.

One could hear nothing but the rumbling
of the aggregate machinery
when the capsule of death was hurled
into its grave of light-years.

79 We came from Earth, from Douris' land,
the jewel of our solar-system,
the only planet where Life has found
a land of milk and honey.
Describe the landscape that was there,
the days that dawned and darkened,
describe the men who there in beauty stitched
the white shrouds of their race
until God and Satan hand in hand
from a defiled and poisoned land
past plains and mountains fled
the face of man; the King of Ashes.

80 Far out on flaming horizons
quivers an eye, a nucleus
moving in pity—the distant
star of love, magic, eternal.
Every time it looks at the earth

a meadow springs up, and blossoms.
Pollen spreads day after day
blithely through joyful summer.

Flowers raise high from the soil
a pageant of moving banners.
The butterfly spreads its yellow
draperies over the acuties of thistles.
Bumblebees drone in the grass
where the shadows of straws trace a pattern
Summer wind lingers, in passing,
in swinging clusters of poppy.

How elusive happiness is! A moment's
sunburst in white-clouded summer.

Far beyond sentiment, high, above evil,
summers' bright 'Love Star'
ghmmers on flowering meadows,
the first among midsummer blooms.
What better reason than this
to be carefree and pious?

81 A growing sense of oppression
affected many minds in the nineteenth year.
I sat with a pen in my hand
making Goptic calculations concerning the traces
of intensified radiation from the Lyra
which had some mysterious meaning.

So, in our twentieth year, we sat
studying the light from the Lyra,
Isagel interpreting traces
of Beta and Gamma rays.

The ironic winds of her soul
alternating with tremors of horror
joined forces with Isagel's breathing
and merged in the waves of her tears.

And all the romantic sorrows
whose lachrymose floods roused ridicule
now joined the commonplace needs
in a darkness bereft of all joy.

I gathered my Isagel closer,
comforted by the warmth of her tears,
for she was the only living warmth
now left to me on board.

And so towards the gleaming Lyra
our ship sped on, her casing defaced with scars,
mementoes of the meteors
we had met in the starry heavens.

Isagel asked me not to sing,
but, in spite of this, I had to
hear my own insensitive voice
crooning about asbestos and silicates.

For the shivering, sobbing girl
I sang of the theory of elasticity.
I also sang of our honour deflowered
and of our lost irreplaceable goddess.

Then Isagel gradually ceased her weeping
—yet weeping may be no worse than other
phenomena!

This was in the twentieth year
of the journey we cursed in our hearts.

82 An event of special note
has been celebrated
in space today.
Our leaders ordered us to dress
in our Sunday best
in honour of the Law of Cosmos.

We climbed up a hundred steps,
and all the four thousand rooms
and two hundred and thirty halls
were emptied in a flash.

In the enormous central hall
(known as the Hall of Light-Years)
which holds ten thousand people
the others and I met again.

We saw for the first time
how mercilessly the years
had dealt with every one of us
when under burning chandeliers
we stood among the crowding masses
known to you and me.

It seemed as though the spirits
of all Earth's people
had gathered here today
in the halls where songs by angel choirs
and speeches by goldondiers
echoed and re-echoed.

The Chief Goldondier spoke to us
about the great significance
of this most solemn day.
'How mighty is the Cosmos,
how powerful its secret,
how puny am I.'

Then the chorus swelled out
deep in the Hall of Light-Years
and the people shuddered on the brink
of the precipice of Eternity.

Many thousands wept
and a few hundred said:
This is the law of fate.

Our space-ship Aniara
has been upon her journey
full twenty years today.

And many stood in silence
till someone said abruptly
'A light-year is a grave.
Our twenty-year-long journey
is sixteen hours of light away
across the light-year sea.'
At this we did not laugh.
No, nearly all, we wept.
'A light-year is a grave.'

The Chief Goldondier dismissed us
with a flourish of his baton
and once again we went down
the hundred steps,
all treading very quietly,
'A light-year is a grave.'

83 The flocks of exterior atoms on Nineveh's stones
disperse with the passing of time from the seat of
the mighty.
Each stone is eroded in grooves and in forkings.
One by one the incised features of lions and priests
crumble away.

O scar-ravaged stones, keep them imprisoned, do
not let them vanish.

Time has corroded and licked at the mane of the
lion
like the manhood which ravished the virtue of
Syria's women,
like the saliva from rain which eroded the tower of
Han.

The vices of disintegration survive through the ages.
Dissolution's carousal gives life to the rose on the
grave
where the covetous tongue of the grass in depravity
stretches.
The nose of the stone-wolf is gnawed by the lupus
of caves.

As stones fall to dust, so the law is corrupted by
man.
Every hypocrite furtively fears the sour stench of
decay.
When the clearness of insight pierces them, things
come into daylight
like the dry, burnt-out holes in the lava which
buried Pompeii.

Hear the rusty trombones. Hear how the zittras are
playing
of the Sphinx, marred and ravaged by lepra above
desert sands,

to comfort the races which have seen all their
customs disintegrate
like boulders obscenely devoured by the merciless
ages.

84Our Chief Astronomer showed us a picture
of a galaxy which appeared to be receding,
and many sank down on their knees
and began praying: Make it come nearer, Lord!
They professed the religion of the galactaves
and when I saw them praying, I recalled
how Sister Nobia once described
the wide, high plateau of Doraima
where the neighbouring galaxy in Andromeda
during clear nights ingeniously magnified
in order to be seen from the roof-tops of light
cities—
seemed to shine like a goldfish,
outlined by a giant mirror stretching for miles
to the people of Doraima.

85The galaxy swings round
like a wheel of shimmering smoke
which is the light of stars,
or sun haze.

For lack of other words, you know,
we call it sun haze,
I mean just that languages do not suffice
to express everything
contained in that spectacle.

The richest of the languages we know,
Xinombric, has some three million words,
but the galaxy you are watching now
contains far more than ninety billion suns.
Has any human brain ever mastered all the words
in the language of Xinombra?
Not a single one!
Now you understand?
And yet—do you?

SONG FROM GOND

86 Now comes a God of Roses
for the day of the Rose has come
and the goddess of the Lilies is here too.
How peaceful when men fall asleep!

Look, curious fairies appear,
and tints are mixed in the cashets.
The God of Violets wants colour.
The day of the violets will come.

We sink in the glens of the gods,
turn to soil, and to pistils and rays,
and the gods will soon paint summer flowers
on the canvas of our dissolution.

The sooner we vanish and die
the less will the gods feel their sorrow.
Our life melts away like the snow
when summertime starts for the gods.

87 Time passed, change and decay began to show
like wear and tear on the upholstery of chairs.
Indolent minds, and aimless wasted spirits
sat fettered by frustration, stupidly reclining
in goldondic comfort which had known better
days
but which, owing to the laws of stress, was only a
memory now.

Boredom, the borderline between satiety and
apathy,
had long ago been reached and crossed,
and now our souls tinned back for solace
to the sufferings which had marked our time.
And novel words, the latest dance craze,
followed
close on each other, merely to sink, forgotten,

in rapid streams of time, which swirled
in sluggish currents towards the shores of death.

The lazy brain became a burden to itself
and the spirits on the bookshelves, never read,
were seen to turn their backs on gluttoned minds
which could no longer be disturbed by thought.

Strange signs were visible in space.
But since they could not be comprehended
in the daily programme were soon forgotten.

We came, for instance, fairly close one day
to a strange sun, a half-extinguished neighbour
of the one which shone so gloriously on Douris,
and Isagel came in to me and said:

‘Dear Friend, what do you think? Shall we—or
not?’

I replied that although the time seemed ripe
space was, after all, a question mark.
It might be wiser therefore for some time yet
to keep the moth away from the bright flame
which offered itself here as our cremator.

And Isagel left things at that
though her eyes blazed phosphorus with wrath,
a wrath which at that time was pure and holy,
and so behind the backs of our dull crowd
she protected our space goldonda, Aniara.

88 But our clear-eyed spirit Isagel broke down.

A sickly demon came into her eyes.

Her widening pupils sought the sources of the soul
and she heard cries and echoes from remote dis-
tances.

She said that she had heard a voice which called
her by a name she did not know
and that afterwards the same call had often
sounded in the halls of Mima.

It came from Mima's grave, and so one night
when everyone else was asleep she obeyed the
voice,
crept to the graveside, and found sitting there
a messenger from the Mansions of Eternity.

I pretended to believe her, though I knew
that Isagel, my friend, of all the things we'd met in
space
had been pierced by a splinter
when we collided with the leonide.

Thus it is not the wilds of space alone
nor the spiritual void through which we travel
here
but also many a carefully guarded personal secret
which deeply, cruelly, wears down our courage.

She suggested once, sitting thoughtfully,
that she identified herself with death,

who, keeping watch in Aniara's night,
measured the meagre life-spans of the passengers.

I thought at first this was a joke, such as imagined
spleen,
in deserts where there was no hope of rescue.
But when I realized her trend of thought
I tried to turn her soul to different pursuits.

The ruler of pure thought, our spirits' succour,
thus prepared herself for the fields of Glory.
The deserts of space had no means of compre-
hending
but I understood in my heart how this had
happened.

Invisible to us, she glided quietly
into the region of the Laws of Numbers
where endless, unexplored reserves await us
when the Powers of Chance decide the hour has
come.

89 When one we love has passed beyond death's door
space seems more cruel and sombre than before.

Our burden becomes heavier, we are crushed,
our soul will never again be released
from the dead grasp of evil space.

And so from the Picture Archives I take out
all that I put aside from Mima's days
and Mima's hall turns into a crowded grotto
where fragments from the Mima's visions paint
in colours of the afterglow a frieze,
a sunset in the realm of Aniara.

90 At one time, out of favour with Chefone,
I was hunted by his men and then condemned
for an indefinite time to the ship's deepest dungeon
in which only gangsters were usually confined.

And yet, I thought, the day will surely come
when Chefone, though he'll not do it gladly,
must liberate his expert on the Gopta,
and when that day comes I'll be released.

Almost as if in answer to my thoughts
a violent tremor passed through the goldonda.
It was as if my Isagel had called me
from the hidden kingdom where she dwells.

And that same night, after the watch had ended,
Isagel came to me in a dream
of supernatural light which filled my heart
with warmth beyond description.

And being now an expert in the reading
of signs, and able to deduce

what power they have to generate new thoughts
resembling the Mima's formulas
I saw now, filled with reverence, who she was,
my Isagel, and why she still
lingered so faithfully, harking to my questions,
so that when need be she could answer me,
and it dawned on me then that Isagel,
the fair and glorious bride of my own mind,
in this space world beyond the God of Life
was Mima's very self,
was Mima's soul.

In Anicara's Gupta vault, equipped with aerals,
tremors of Isagel-like sensitivity
caused much disturbance, even to Chefone.
So, against his will but at his orders
I was brought back to freedom.

In ordinary language (an inheritance from Douris)
the disturbance I have mentioned revealed
that the balance of our ship was now in danger.
So, released from prison to locate the fault,
I was restored again to Mima's hall.

91 We plummeted deep into the abyss. It sounds like a
tall story
written in desperate fear in every face.
But there was general agreement on this.

One could not complain of lack of mass suggestion.
A puzzling failure in the gravitation centre
gave us this sense of falling, the illusion
that no matter what we did we'd keep on falling
in one direction, downward, through a void
no longer rounded or vaulted,
but like a well into which we dived headlong.

My Gopta knowledge stood me in good stead
and seldom have I seen people happier
than when, helped by the Gopta Calculus,
within a few hours I could lift the load of fear
and sense of endless falling from their hearts.
That was a red-letter day among celestial stars.
Isagel, my beloved, where are you? Our fame is
now assured.
The Gopta calculus has scored a triumph.

92 All the fire that used to burn within us
derived its light, its soul, from Mima's waves.

Never again have we found those scenes
which, grouped round Mima, we saw then.

Beliefs long preyed upon by time,
and impoverished more and more by our own
emptiness,
are difficult to hold in honour.

Continuously uttering their lamentations
the exorcisers stood in Mima's hall,
swollen mouths sucking the goddess' blood.

Even human sacrifice was reintroduced
though custom had frayed its sanctity
with its constant stream of broken oaths.

Such sacrifices, however, soon lost their interest
for us since we could find no redemption
in sacrificial blood, indifferently offered,
which, thus, meaninglessly flowed away.

People who had experienced the scale of the Photo-
turb
and known Xinombra's day of holocaust in Gond
found such offerings here ironically lukewarm
imagined against the redhot backcloth of
Xinombra's.

Even the memory of Mima's days
had a significance. And those who knelt
in attitudes of prayer, following rites
enacted only with a pretence of feeling,
were ashamed.

Soon, too, the soulless disciples of the Cult
felt the flow of sacrificial blood grow cold
sensing their own vacuity
beside the remains of truth-loving Mima.

Thus in due course even they refused to assist
in the ceremonies commanded by Chefone.
What a blow for that autocratic
hardened circus-trainer!

93 Now everyone refusing sacrifice was humbled,
for Chefone inflicted hideous punishment.
Torn between four deadly magnets
every rebel died in nameless agony.

From that day on, no one entered the Hall
where Mima slept, and where the Cult had faded,
for hope had little chance there against despair
and even Chefone became apprehensive.

In illuminated letters on his screen he published
new laws to lessen the strain of our last days.
He dressed up gangsters to look like good
Samaritans
and ordered them to mitigate the effects of
penalties.

And Chefone himself, now strangely benevolent,
was seen quietly mixing healing ointments,
and, as though suddenly transformed by magic,
helping the sick and caressing the frozen.

DEATH CERTIFICATE

94 An evil-minded baleful self-torturer,
a wallower in egoistic sorrows,
presided for a time in Mima's hall.
At Ygol he had murdered a whole people.
Now he was the ruler
of those who had come from Douris' valleys.

After he had practically devoured himself,
leaving only fragments
which could not gobble themselves up,
he vanished.

The very floor on which he used to stand rejoiced.
He was called Chefone from Xaxacal.

95 Now I no longer in this gorge
set up a balance between fact and illusion.
No one came now, indeed, to seek for illusion.
The facts were all too obvious at last.

As though from inside an enormous coffin of crystal
all of us, or nearly all, saw whither we were going,
for everywhere there was a window facing horrors
and words of hope could deceive us no longer
and only stars a million miles away
peered into that coffin as it glided on

bearing inside it the proud race of Douris.
And as in a mourning bell of glass
the clapper of each soul tolled in ecstatic fear
against reverberating, transparent walls.

We crowded close there in Mima's hall.
I was squeezed in among the rest.
Fear extinguished every memory of Douris.
I shared with them the agony of that moment.

96 The Leaders could no longer hide from us now
the near approach of extermination;
even so, they still tried hard to hide the facts
in formulas from our fifth tensor calculus.

They refused me admission to the calculus
and forbade my entry to the prognoses rooms,
but those who have once learnt to tell the time
can always thereafter foresee the eventide.

I went to Mima's grave and fell prostrate,
bowed deep in prayer to which god who can tell.
I begged in the cold hall in desperation
for a miracle to be wrought with inanimate matter.

And then, although there was no outward sign,
I heard how inanimate things bore witness

to a great mystery, which was deepened
by light from Mima's guttering graveside candles.

97 All thought collapsed and imagination died
at the beginning of the twenty-fourth year.
Crushed by the unending incomprehensibility
of heaven's reaches stretching to infinity
all our dreams gave up and finally confessed
their humble trunk in Ghazilnut.

Total darkness filled many souls.
Lost to reality they moved about
in the halls, vainly questioning each other
about the way home, and far familiar things,
crowding round the lamps as moths do
in Autumn in the distant plains of Douris.

98 A sorcerer in Mima's hall
I hail all conquerors of bitter cold,
I beg the seraphim for their support,
I ask that visions may be vouchsafed.
I pray that Isagel in this chill hall
may rise unscathed from the shell of her urn.
Arise, my Isagel, from the ashes of death.
Arise O Isagel, and give me strength.

99 I moved about the halls at a late hour.
I shivered that night in Mima's hall.
The memory of Douris, now freezing cold
and foreign to all softness, tore my soul.

Corrosion penetrated ever deeper
into every cranny our dreams tried to preserve
and dust fell like the sand of time itself
on tables and on floors in Aniara.

So, in the twenty-fourth year, the goldonda
travelled
with unchecked speed towards the Lyra,
and now the distant star of Douris mingled
with countless others in a dust-storm of stars
which seemed to gather in flocks for company
but which in actual fact quivered and hung
so sparsely scattered in the eternal cold
that each star was a martyr of the void.

Quieter, more and more desolate, Aniara became:
a proud goldonda once, now a sarcophagus,
which, bereft of her own strength, could only
fall
along the loxodrome which
she retained in falling.

The pilots' cabin had long been empty
and former navigators who had worked in the
ingenious nose-cone

had lain for years now in the quiet place where
 Daisi Doody slept,
entombed, as befits the queen of Yurg,
in the centre of her court.

The halls themselves were hushed, but somewhere
 in
the nooks of the giant capsule sounds were heard.
Walking some thousand steps towards this noise
one arrived in the Mima's hall where, frozen stiff,
many space emigrants were sitting still.
Absorbed in sorting various forms of death or
 sleep
they played a game of chess with infinity.
Then one of them, who had unobtrusively gone
 mad, a demagogue,
suddenly stood up on a ladder of words
and discoursed on the travels of mankind,
on Punt and Tyre, Wineland and Da Gama.

But rhetoric froze to silence in his mouth,
and this last speaker abruptly ceased
and stared about him shuddering in the hall
where fife's journey had now gone far further
than anything ever dreamt of in the plain of Tajo.
Only the echo of death came back in reply
to the speech he had made for the fast-dying
who now, in icy rigidity, empty-eyed
peered at the Lyra from our Aniara.

100 There were no longer any lamps to light.
A simple lantern burned by Mima's grave
where those still left had gathered now, turning
their backs against death's oceans, in helpless agony.

The final ebbing hours of human time
were lighted by that one flame, and filled with
questions.

So on the earth many a prisoner has sat
beside the light of his last lamp, watching its
flame
and listening as the squad comes marching up
to the harsh stone of walls
which will soon mirror the flash of firing.

For space can never be more cruel than man,
more than its match is human callousness.
The bleak despair of prison cells on earth
builds a deep vault around the souls of men,
and chilly stones are heard to mutter dumbly:
Here man is master. So here is Aniara.

101 This was our final night in Mima's hall.
Soul after soul broke down and vanished
but before each ego finally dissolved
the soul's will made itself quite clearly felt
finding at last the strength to separate

time from the grip of space, and thus to grant oblivion to the race of Douris.

102 I had coveted a Paradise for this race
but since we left the one we had destroyed
the Zodiac's lonely night became our only home,
a gaping chasm in which no god could hear us.

The eternal mystery of Heaven's stars,
the miracle of the celestial mechanism,
is the law but not the Gospel.
Mercy can only thrive where there is life.

We failed to grasp the true meaning of the Law,
and found an empty death in Mima's hall.
The God on whom we fixed our final hopes
lay wounded on the plains of Douris.

103 I turn the lantern low, enjoining stillness.
Our tragedy has ended. But with the right
of travellers down the ages, I have told
our tale, a vision in galactic night.

With unabated speed towards the Lyra
the goldonda droned for fifteen thousand years.

like a museum filled with bones and artefacts,
and dried herbs and roots, relics from Douris'
woods.

Entombed in our immense sarcophagus
we were borne on across the desolate waves
of space-night, so unlike the day we'd known,
unchallenged silence closing round our grave.

By Mima's graveside fallen in a circle
transformed once more to blameless dust we lay,
impervious to the sting of bitter stars,
lost and dispersed in oceans of Nirvana.

Glossary

ANIARA—A combination of letters, rich in vowels, which represents the space in which the atoms move. The adjective *aniaros* (fem. *aniara*) in ancient Greek means *sorrowful*. Thus, Aniara = the ship of sorrow.

GOLDONDA—Space-ship, from the 'gondola' of earlier air-ships, the imaginary land of Gond.

MIMA—From the Greek *mimos*, an imitator or reproducer, and *mimesis*, imitation, art, especially acting. The word can also be formed from the first two letters in minimum and maximum, and in micro and macro.

DOURIS—Also the name of one of Okeano's daughters. In Aniara, the positive, motherly element (the earth). The valleys and plains of Douris represent the fertile, generous earth.

THE MIMAROBÉ OR SPACE SAILOR—Mima's special guardian, and the poet's voice.

DAISI DOODY—The personification of sensual joy on board.

CHEFONE—The master of the goldonda, a hard and hated dictator.

THE BLIND POETESS FROM RIND—In nordic mythology. Rind is an earthly goddess. The Rind papyrus is called the oldest known papyrus with a mathematical content (approx. 1800 b.c.)

NOBIA—A Samaritan, the spirit of mercy and unselfishness.

ISAGEL—The Isis-Urania of modern mathematics and astronomy. Aloof from Aniara's passengers in her austere purity of thought, her search for truth is as uncompromising as Cosmos. Represents the immortality of art—her presumed survival in 'the region of the Law of Numbers' kindles a ray of hope in Aniara's darkness.

*An Interpretation of Some New and Unfamiliar
Words in Aniara*

- Song 6 VIRAK—Adulation (incense)
- „ 12 YURG—The equivalent of any current dance-craze
- „ 12 DORI—Lethargic, drowsy, from the French 'dormir'.
- „ 12 LORI—Suggests a Malayan ape of the same name, perpetually dozing with crossed arms.
- „ 12 CHADWICK—Relates to the discoverer of the neutron. Sir John Chadwick.
- „ 12 GONDLES—From goldonda, the land of Gond.
- „ 12 WATHED IN TARI—Draped in a robe, or sari.
- „ 15 GAMMOSAN—A drug, relating to gamma rays.
- „ 26 PHOTOTURB—An atomic bomb in which the total mass is transformed to light quanta. Relates to fiery light, turbulence, typhoons.
- „ 28 THE CANTOR WORKS—Relates to Georg Cantor, the German mathematician who developed the theory of sets (Mengenlehre). Also to a transfinite organ which interprets the harmony of the spheres.

- Song 30 THE TENSOR CALCULUS—Einstein's theory of relativity.
- „ 32 TRANS-THOMIST PRINCIPLES—Trans = beyond, Thomist relates to the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274).
- „ 34 GOLDONDEVAN—Oath of allegiance taken by a space sailor.
- „ 34 GOPTA—Invented mathematical concept, amplification of the tensor.
- „ 35 YURGINNOR—Female dancers of the Yurg.
- „ 35 LIBIDINNOR—Libidinous women.
- „ 36 DORMDFID—From 'dormir' and 'sylphide', a slender bedmate.
- „ 36 DORMIJUN—From 'dormir' and 'Jimoescuc', an ample bedmate.
- „ 38 BIKINILLAN—Play on the expression 'Bikini swimsuit'.
- „ 38 XINOMBRIC COMPLEMENT—The shorts of the swimsuit.
- „ 39 JENDER CURVES—Invented term for a graph in higher mathematics.
- „ 40 XINOMBRA—A hot desert village in Mexico. X. in Aniara refers to Dourisburg or Gond, towns which, like Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were wiped out by atomic bombs.
- „ 55 PHOTOPHAG—Swallower of Light.

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