

MEMORIES

Homage to Salvador Allende *by E. P. Thompson*

'Our enemies have beat us to the pit:
It is more worthy to leap in ourselves,
Than tarry till they push us . . .'

—Brutus at Philippi

Well, comrade president, what is there left to say?
Predicted all the way: and buried in the end
Without the benefit of media, before the mass
Could say its newses over you, the cameras
Squat in your wounds and blow them up.

Failure makes you like us, our kind of man,
Killed by our kind: petrol-pump patriots;
Loyal executives; most loyal constitutional ladies,
Wed to destroyers, setters-on of jets;
Our kindly patient partner, General Fabius,
Who when he strikes strikes hard, getting us in the guts.
Your face was too much common. Money fled uphill
And cost them in their lives who cost your death.

Your art was always an impossible.
Couldn't you learn, with less than half the votes,
The prose of power, the public man's inflation?
You should have been our age, trading their terms
For something less than half a treachery . . .

Defective realist, poor loyal sod,
Old silly doctor in a palace on your own,
Knowing the odds were up—
Why do you hurt our hearts?

Poetic, Latin man! You do not fall within
Our frames of reference. Transfixed by promises
Pledged to the poor in the high Andean pastures;

The crowd in Santiago; the clasped hand of the metal-worker;
The earnest village schoolmistress, searching your face:
These brought their treaties. You signed them with your life

Which you trade now into myth's ageless reference:
Bolivar, Guevara, Allende. Generous continent!
Accusing hemisphere! But not our kind of men.
As we, back in our prosing beds, stir in our myths,
Recalling such men once . . . and at Philippi one
Who, having fought and failed, took on a Roman end.

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