

This week's theme is WATCHING CHILDREN SLEEPING.

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- * Miklos Radnoti (Hungary, 1909-1944)
 'Sick Girl In Bed'.
 - * J.M. Barrie (England, 1860-1937)
 from 'The Little White Bird'.
 - * Lawrence Durrell (England, 1912-1990)
 'To Ping-Ku, Asleep'.
 - * Morrissey (England, born 1959)
 'The Hand That Rocks The Cradle'.
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J.M. Barrie was the boy-loving creator of Peter Pan - 'The Little White Bird' is a prototype of the Peter Pan stories, and concerns the account of a middle-aged bachelor's fascination with a small boy. It garnered rave reviews when it first appeared, which tells you something about how attitudes have changed during the last hundred years ! (I know it's not a poem, but it fits the theme too well to leave out...).
Durrell was the author of the highly regarded 'Alexandria Quartet' series of novels, and a travel writer. A recent biography claims he had an incestuous relationship with his daughter, but this poem seems to be about another girl - possibly an oriental girl, given the title.
Morrissey was the lead singer of the most acclaimed pop band of the 1980s, The Smiths. Radnoti I don't know a lot about, and so would welcome more details.

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#### SICK GIRL IN BED

Beautiful, feverish young girl ...  
- oh wonderful it would be to hug her now -  
between pillows and soft quilts,  
her lips half parted.  
Her body in a chemise, uncovered,  
her eyes open up to me, surprised  
- immodestly but unintended -  
as does an opening moist flower  
to some strange winter mist.  
She is surprised and motionless,  
and yet she moves;  
her body's kiss-singing concavities wait for a kiss:  
a thousand hills, valleys, velvety down.  
Her blue-veined two hands are pale,  
and because I brought a few flowers  
her eyes gaze at me, surprised, once again.  
Now she recognises me and thanks me for them  
(her little lips are peaked and trembling)  
- oh to hug her would be so fine -  
but I am kissing only her feverish little mouth,

and yet she sighs because  
- oh fever! ... -  
Her small breasts swell  
and her clingy silky shirt's  
modest band snaps,  
and her hand rummages in my hair.

Miklos Radnoti.

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from 'THE LITTLE WHITE BIRD'

...I knew by intuition the he expected me to take off his boots.  
I took them off with all the coolness of an old hand, and then  
I placed him on my knee and removed his blouse. This was a  
delightful experience, but I think I remained wonderfully calm until  
I came somewhat too suddenly to his little braces, which agitated me  
profoundly. I cannot proceed in public with the disrobing of David...

"Why, David," said I, sitting up, "do you want to come into my bed ?"  
"Mother said I wasn't to want it unless you wanted it first," he squeaked.  
"It is what I have been wanting all the time," said I, and without more  
ado the little figure arose and flung himself at me. For the rest of the  
night he lay on me and across me, and sometimes his feet were at the bottom  
of the bed and sometimes on the pillow, but he always retained possession  
of my finger... I lay thinking of this little boy, who, in the midst of his  
play while I undressed him, had suddenly buried his head on my knees... Of  
David's dripping little form in the bath, and how I essayed to catch him as  
he slipped from my arms like a trout. Of how I had stood at the open door  
listening to his sweet breathing, had stood so long I forgot his name...

J.M. Barrie.

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TO PING-KU, ASLEEP

You sleeping child asleep, away  
Between the confusing world of forms,  
The lamplight and the day; you lie  
And the pause flows through you like glass,  
Asleep in the body of the nautilus.

Between comparison and sleep,  
lips that move in quotation;  
The turning of a small blind mind  
Like a plant everywhere ascending.  
Now our love has become a beanstalk.

Invent a language where the terms  
Are smiles; someone in the house now  
Only understands warmth and cherish,  
still twig-bound, learning to fly.

This hand exploring the world makes  
The diver's deep-sea fingers on the sills  
Of underwater windows; all the wrecks  
Of our world where the sad blood leads back  
Through memory and sense like divers working.

Sleep, my dear, I won't disturb  
You, lying in the zones of sleep.  
The four walls symbolise love put about  
To hold in silence which so soon brims  
Over into sadness: it's still dark.

Sleep and rise a lady with a flower  
Between your teeth and a cypress  
Between your thighs: surely you won't ever  
Be puzzled by a poem or disturbed by a poem  
Made like fire by the rubbing of two sticks ?

Lawrence Durrell

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#### THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE

Please don't cry.  
The ghost and the storm outside  
will not invade this sacred shrine,  
nor infiltrate your mind.  
My life down I shall lie  
if the bogey-man should try  
to play tricks on your sacred mind,  
to tease torment and tantalise.  
Wavering shadows loom,  
a piano plays in an empty room,  
there'll be blood on the cleaver tonight.

When darkness lifts and the room is bright  
I'll be by your side,  
for you are all that matters  
and I'll love you 'till the day I die.  
There never need be longing in your eyes  
as long as the hand that rocks the cradle is mine.

Ceiling shadows shimmy by  
and when the wardrobe towers like a beast of prey,  
there's sadness in your beautiful eyes, your  
untouched, unsoiled, wondrous eyes.  
My life down I shall lie  
should restless spirits try

to play tricks on your sacred mind.

I once held a child, and it saved my life  
but I never even asked a name,  
I just looked into his wonderous eyes  
and said 'never never never again',  
but all too soon I did return  
just like a moth to a flame;  
so rattle my bones all over the stones  
because I'm only a beggarman who nobody owns.

Oh see how words as old as sin  
fit me like a glove.

I'm here and here I'll stay.  
Together we lie, together we pray  
there never need be longing in your eyes  
as long as the hand that rocks the cradle is mine.

Climb upon my knee, Sonny Boy, although you're only three,  
Sonny Boy, oh be mine... And your mother - she just never knew,  
And your mother... As long as there's love...  
Oh, I did my best for her. As long as there's love,  
as long as there's love...

Morrissey.

[Note - this song can be heard on the awesome 1984 debut  
album: 'THE SMITHS' - London, Rough Trade Records; Rough C61.]

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Bonus poem (again!)

[It's not really fair to put Morrissey back-to-back
with W.H. Auden - although I'm sure Moz would be thrilled -
but for those who missed it some weeks ago, here's Auden's
LULLABY again; because it relates to this week's theme, and
certainly bears repeating...]

LULLABY

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithless arm;
Time and fevers burn away
Individual beauty from
Thoughtful children, and the grave
Proves the child ephemeral:
But in my arms till break of day
Let the living creature lie,
Mortal, guilty, but to me
The entirely beautiful.

Soul and body have no bounds;
To lovers as they lie upon
Her tolerant enchanted slope
In their ordinary swoon,
Grave the vision Venus sends
Of supernatural sympathy,
Universal love and hope;
While an abstract insight wakes
Among the glaciers and the rocks
The hermit's sensual ecstasy.

Certainty, fidelity
On the stroke of midnight pass
Like vibrations of a bell
And fashionable madmen raise
Their pedantic boring cry;
Every farthing of the cost,
All the dreaded cards foretell,
Shall be paid, but from this night
Not a whisper, not a thought,
Not a kiss nor look be lost.

Beauty, midnight, vision dies:
Let the winds of dawn that blow
Softly round your dreaming head
Such a day of sweetness show
Eye and knocking heart may bless,
Find the mortal world enough;
Noons of dryness see you fed
By the involuntary powers,
Nights of insult let you pass
watched by every human love.

W. H. Auden.

For more information about J.M. Barrie's 'Little White Bird', and about his paedophilia, see:

Morris, Fraser. The Death Of Narcissus. London.
Secker and Warburg, 1976. (245 pages)

For a dazzling explication of the child-loving desire inherent in the Peter Pan story, see the section near the end of:

Kincaid, J. R. Child-loving - the erotic child and Victorian culture. London and New York. Routledge, 1993.

For more information about the UK press outrage about the song-lyrics of The Smiths, see:

Rogan, Johnny. Morrissey and Marr - the severed alliance. London. Omnibus Press, 1992. (352 pages)

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"I read the NAMBLA [Bulletin] fairly regularly and I think it is one of the most intelligent discussions of sexuality I've ever found. I think before you start judging what NAMBLA is about, expose yourself to it and see what it is really about. What the issues they are really talking about, and deal with what's really there rather than this demonized notion of guys running about trying to screw little boys. I would have been so much happier as an adolescent if NAMBLA had been around when I was 9, 10, 11, 12, 13."

SAMUEL DELANY, leading award-winning science-fiction writer; speaking at the 'Queer Desires Forum', New York City, on 25th June 1994.

[Note: NAMBLA is the North American Man-Boy Love Association - see 13th July post by aristoff for details of recent hysteria against NAMBLA.]

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