

John Millett

THE PLYMOUTH FIRE

Luftwaffe bombing, Plymouth 1941
Witness F/L Donnelly. 10 Squadron RAAF

The distance is weeping tonight—
for there is the story of a man
burning in the Plymouth bombing,
said to be alive while the fire itched—
and for half an hour stood,
flames covering him from head to foot—
and he blazed there in a rage
against a world gone wrong,
blazed with a fierce equality to fire—
and he said nothing while the city burned
and the German bombers turned east
from the malice of the searchlights
and walls that were falling down,
not knowing he wanted them back to witness
the fury and the bite of their fire.

There is a wonder now that it's over—
and his anger has been covered by a
distance farther than thought can reach,
prayed for with inadequate words—
and he is still there with his head alight,
tears of fire on his cheeks,
rage the fuel igniting his blood
as it flamed out once
until the landscape he lived in
drew back its lips of steel
and snarled at the buckled streets
while they gave way to weeping.

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