





THE DRAMATIC MOUNTAIN AND OTHER POEMS

AN ANTHOLOGY

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IN MEMORIAM

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INTRODUCTION

When Whakaari, the volcano of White Island, erupted in the early afternoon of December 9, 2019, some fifty tourists were visiting its crater. Most of them had come to the island by boat, and their cruising ship, the *Ovation of the Seas*, would be waiting for them in vain.

What had happened that afternoon, was to be the prelude to a more pressing trend of events. At the time of the blast it was still unknown that a lethal virus was on its way to strike the world as a whole starting with passenger ships cruising in the southern oceans. The *Ovation of the Seas* did not suffer any damage by the eruption but could not gather her passengers, who had set out for a trip to White Island.

Later on other cruising ships would seek refuge in Southern Sea ports, when the virus struck passengers on board. Quarantines were ordered both for ships and travelers, whereas a pandemic quickly evolved, as the virus spread worldwide at an unheard-of speed. Almost no country was excluded from catching the disease. Despite effective mea-

asures to contain casualties, the number of contagions rose and rose without a break bringing forth unresolved social issues and inevitable political events.

Climate change, too, had its part: Heatwaves, wildfires, thunderstorms and typhoons, heavy rain and landslides sharpened people's anxiety, already raised by the pandemic. By then it was time to remedy the long-lasting infection by introducing new vaccines that would hold the virus at bay. No further gathering of people was allowed, no "Fridays for Future" could be held reminding us of climate change and ongoing destruction of the environment, now exacerbated by the pandemic as well. Public spirit and responsibility were required of everyone to overcome the crisis. But even so contagions continued for a long time to come.

There was no way out but living everyday life as normally as people were able to. As Cesare Pavese, the late Italian poet and writer, had put it:

The only joy in life is starting over again,
Life is beautiful as living
Is starting anew, always,
Any time.

PROLOGUE

Now time has come
To get things in perspective,
No more delay in inoculation,
No more delay in providing relief
To people in distress,
No further waiting.

Wildfires are burning,
Fires are sweeping refugee camps,
Black lives are under fire,
Capitol Hill is under siege,
Proud Boys are marching
In the streets.

Now time has come
To get things in perspective,
No more delay in keeping
The virus at bay,
No more delay in delivering
Democracy under siege.

Life has become a funeral:
People are dying of virulent disease,
Fire is burning their homes and skin,
Landslides and tempests
Are taking their toll,
Climate is prone to change.

Now time has come
To get things in perspective,
No more waiting
For better days to come,
Life is only one and you have
To restart it over and over again.

IN THE BEGINNING



Cruising in the Southern Seas

There was a time
When people went on board
Awaiting a cruise of adventure
Taking them to the Southern Seas.

Alas, the tour went by
In a hurry,
No time to enjoy
The wonders of nature.

Now the death bell rings,
No harbor is available
To dock
The vessel in danger.

The expedition to Antarctica
In the footsteps of Ernest Shackleton¹
Comes to an end
Off the coast of South America.²

The virus spreads
Through the ship³

(1) Ernest Henry Shackleton (1874-1922), explorer leading three British expeditions to the Antarctic. He died of a heart attack in South Georgia Island, where he was buried.

(2) The ship's route was from Ushuaia (Argentina) to the Antarctic Peninsula and to South Georgia Island (canceled) and on the way back to Montevideo (Uruguay) for quarantine.

(3) MS Greg Mortimer, cruising liner of Aurora Expeditions equipped for polar voyages.

In quarantine,
No one may exit nor enter.

No way
For Aussies and Kiwis
To get home
To see their loved ones again.

“Rest assured”,
Says the Ministry of Health,
We will keep an eye on you
And help you further”.

Time is drawing close:
Someone is taken to hospital,
Someone is taken
On board a plane

Sent by the shipping line
To bring people back to Australia,
But for all the others
Waiting will take a long time.