A Tale of Three Cities

Gold…the barbarous relic.

--John Maynard Keynes

Johannesburg, Baku, Manaus: boom towns all,
All with a boom town’s mercenary siren call

From gold, petroleum, or rubber in the wild.
Exact contemporaries, where frauds self-exiled,

Crooks, second sons of third rate nobles, trust to luck
Or finding wide loopholes in any bargains struck.

Attracted always to the newest venues, sets
Up shop the old profession. And though Europe frets

It also funds White Slavers. Taking anthracite
To new Newcastles, but the crucial word is ‘White’.

The most a “civilizing mission” can provide
May be low tech: mosquito nets, insecticide.

Teatro Amazonas and the Rand Club, ranks
Of derricks in the Caspian, now brighten blanks

On surveys past and stay to say the worst of times
May be the best if it can overlook the crimes.

John Maynard Keynes, Ploesti, and Malaya dawn;
The tight gold standard, tight monopolies are gone.

Now, fossil fuel is our relic barbarous,
And gold a source financing windmill farms for us.

In furthering safe sex synthetic rubber works;
In far rain forests its frail counterpart still lurks.

Cities that have the shortest past have unique roles:
Prove history is bunk, and nature full of holes.