

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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PERMIT US VOYAGE

O Lost Swimmer who does not complain,
 Caught by coral, wrapped in greenest shroud,
 Deep adrift become your final destiny,
 O Crane, what shifting sands now groan aloud
 Beneath your bright, suspended shape?

Where is the heart, the tidal metaphor
 To flood the parched and bleached apostasy
 You willed to bridge? Is that heart dead? Your bone's
 white shore

Is clear annunciation of the sea
 That marks all turning no escape.

But do the waters round you whirled undo
 Their waves, bare their love to that desire
 So deeply found at last? We could believe and view
 Those cold depths bright with a final fire,
 All flames drowned in one,

Save your life, in waves like death bells, tolls
 For us on the closing waters, not to sound
 Those rich and spendthrift dives for impossible gold
 But fathom love by beating hearts to end
 One with the sheltering sea's dark sun.

Anthony Ostroff

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THE DEVIL SAVED

"The Devil saved!" The words flapped round stunned
Heaven,
Light-lovely beings blazed with the sudden sight
Of Satan come to make a final peace;
Hosannas faltered, dying in midflight,
Saints and doctors wrestled the consequence
Of vacant Hell, of unbedeviled earth
And, baffled, stood before their silent God,
Unthinking Christ, the Ghost, the Virgin Birth,
Even themselves back to the flawless hour
When Lucifer still shone and earth was fresh,
When the well-dividing voice of God sang out
One song that gave infinity a flesh.

It was Michael who cried out as Satan's troop
Wheeled by like smoldering bats up to the Throne:
"After all this, O Lord, the wicked win,
And every loyal dog gets tossed a bone."

So much said, the mansion seemed to quake.
Angels, before they fled, gave one shocked glance
Expecting Michael to be smitten down
Or blown to nought for his great impudence,
But God replied instead, "What servant serves
Me badly who serves least? Satan's with us;
My will is done despite unalterable law—
The father of lies has served to prove Me thus."

Angels, saints, and doctors melted away.
Useless and dim, they wandered off like ghosts;
Old muttering partisans who talked revolt
Were indistinct in Heaven's fading Hosts.

Leonard Nathan

COLONUS

He was only old Ed, waiting to die
 in the garden. Nobody minded him;
 mindless, he was hopeless, hoping
 only for supper, sundown. Only she,
 the girl, stayed by him. Quite a pair, people
 pondered: the witless old blind man, toothless
 as children, and the withered child, ancient,
 despairing. Had he fathered her? Who could
 say? Could he sire anyone, strange as he was?
 Winter worried them little, hardship was
 known. Snow came and they slept in the church pews.
 In summer, all was forgotten.

No one,
 reviled them, no one mocked. Some few old folk
 remembered ancient gossip, worn-out talk:
 the pair were strangers, come from a distance,
 had suffered tragedy. Details were lost,
 though, and interest lacked. Only the children
 taunted sometimes, trying out epithets.
 "Wrecks," they jeered at the pair in the garden.
 "Wrecks," muttered Ed (almost pleased at the word,
 he was so simple now), giggling.

Somewhere,
 backward in mind, he remembered another
 garden with boughs bird-ridden, with lily
 and lotus, peacock and pigeon—royal things—
 and small gods smiling. And, too, a woman.
 Who had she been? She had been everything
 to him, it was hard to say. She once was
 beautiful enough. Perhaps he had been
 worth remembering too, he wondered, querulous?
 Or was he blind from birth? Had he suffered?

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Did it matter much?

Better not to find
his answers, better to unremember
feelings, faces, clues. He was almost safe,
almost beyond recalling. Caution, no
questions, and he might yet die easily.

Helen Webster

INSULATIONS

Today the stream beside my door
Has an almost imperceptible roar,
But the same old strangeness in its sound
Is like somebody being drowned.
I don't know why we settled here
Where the writhing river comes so near
The shore that the sound is all about
And never can really be shut out.
At first we tried to thicken the walls,
And when that failed we all wrapped shawls
About our ears; of recent date
We're wearing suits of armor plate.
Our neighbor, whose house we can barely see,
Suffered more from the sound than we.
He left his wife, ran out of doors,
And muffled his ears in the arms of whores.
The insulation on which he relied
Must have failed, because when he cried
It sounded just like the river din:
He stopped crying and jumped in.

Edward Hart

LATE PROMENADES

Now I am old you'll look to me for beauty;
 you'll want a metric close, a final turn
 to ground suspended cadences. I warn
 you, though: clear statement isn't clarity.
 I know now youth is vague anticipation.
 When young I wrote some twenty novels that
 concerned integrity of motive, but
 this had a vagueness, hollowness I shun
 today; so now, in verse, I won't protract
 the riddles I posed then. This is direct
 approach, no idealistic clutch for beauty;
 rather, a promenade in faces or
 red silk, black velvet, onyx and cinnabar
 creates my world . . . of sensitivity.

The old need not have wisdom; don't demand
 it; don't expect that youth have passion either.
 When I was twenty-five I didn't gather
 petals or pink clouds, I made a trend
 in letters. Aged now, my head still sound
 however, sickliness has taught me neither
 assume a principle or reason, rather
 accept the resonance and doubt the mind
 and know that sex is wholly something more
 than having it, that bald intrusion where
 the one accomplishment is finding no
 two of one species are compatible
 no matter what their habits: Meaningful
 conjunction would be that of trees with snow.

Significant contact is not in false
 and tentative union of hog on sow:
 homogenous engendering further fowl
 or further swine; it doesn't even pulse,

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for all their loveliness, when panthers mix.
Significant contact occurs with fly
and flower, combining both lust with style
and actual autonomy with sex.
An only slightly less beautiful junction
(marred only by its cruel progeny)
was that one Pasiphae enjoyed: the motion
of tragedy in this affair forgotten
for sheer ambition and for ecstasy
that huge, elusive, pure white stud had given.

This is sufficient pondering sensual
rapports, delineating what creates
from what binds nothing odd, only repeats
recurring kind and individual;
my age should draw the metaphysical
and show man as the full receptor species.
World bounded by skin, bounded by iris,
he needn't stay a passive thing at all,
an eye for shadow, passive, turning out
to vague extremity, vapor, deceit;
he may, yes actively invert to core
that is the real external; or, to put
it otherwise, can leap, a Fünklein, at
the source nearby, up to that whole grand Fire.

This isn't saying that arcana equals
beauty, the deepest is all charm . . . except
regards treaties of spirit. I'll adopt
the opposite, in fact, for fleshly levels:
that what is always bare identifies
and has the purest charm, that faces, hands
have personality as real as trends
of character, are real identities.
These open things as open so are pure,
the beauty uncombined like melody

so rich it needs no backdrop; faces are,
hands are what eyes not, never shoulders nor
breasts are, these requiring harmony
the total's counterpoint must echo for.

This beauty that is naked, open, is
the physical resemblance essence has:
essential wholeness, being; beauty as
familiar conscience of identities.

And maybe persons may be, being whole,
be beauty: just as hands, as faces will
be character, so people sometimes fill
out vagueness of abstractions. Beautiful,
essential, and entire are odium
in evil days: the soundness, nakedness
must be destroyed as people. See how Rome
acknowledged this, in Cicero, whose head
and hands displayed then by Antonius
could prove that all the Cicero was dead.

Now I am old I face like times, the dun
days, reign of grey insensitivity;
to these days I oppose my world as beauty,
late promenades through clarities to win
for your ghost, Friend in youth, a noble grave.
As you were beautiful, were whole, not one
persisting in a vague anticipation,
as you were sensitive, were pure, above
contrivance, not a mimicry, your light
was stifled: wind at treetops, noon dim as night.
There was no crime alleged: idealists stilled you,
not for expression but for being so
much hands and face, so much clear statement. No
beauty you saw the beauty you were killed you.

Richard Emil Braun

8

A TALE

Oon mornyng as I wende throughe the wode,
Hardely the dawne was come, the crickets stode
Entranced with the soun of new-broke lyght,
And al the constellaciouns of the nyght
Tucked in hir imaginarie lines, for slepe,
I passed a lake that semed not verray depe,
Outespred with water-lilyes balancyng
The courrent—where smalle spiders clinge—
Pale were the petales in the lakes reflexioun,
But scarlet the stamenes, and the brode leaves were green.
And as I gazed on the sondry floures
It semed as if the erly mornyng houres
Hadde witchcraft in hir sonds, or ellis unknown
To me, I swevenid on the banke alon,
For in thatte lake on a water-lilye pad
I saugh a sparowe, broken-wynged and sad,
Who spak to me thus: Vysitor of the mornyng miste,
Ye stare in swich amazement as I wiste
Ye want som explanacioun I shold make,
For wondre of a sparowe in a lake.
Two nyghts agoon, I flewe like ony byrde
Thatte evere teased the trees, or evere herde
The wilde and distant moanyng where wynds die,
And rudderlesse clouds drift endelessly,
Whanne on a suddene, a rore, somthyng ygrazed
My wyng, and a-doun throughe the starres I fell amazed.
This is al I know. I wold have drowned
Hadde not the water-lilye ben my ground.
And now, in slow starvacioun, I see
Anothre death (stire not, it is too late for me);
I am prepared, my sparowe strengthe is sapt,
Bet for byrde to die in beauty wrapt.

Thus quod the tendre beste, and I arose
 To walk an othre direcioun, thoghe myn herte froze,
 And I wondred, lemman, since thatte loud cracke
 Of knowyng ye cold not love me threwe me backe,
 Since I did not droun, how now, with this byrdes last crie,
 In youre water-lilyed armes I slowly die.

Edward Locke

DUST SONG

Because dust clings there like spittle
 and unred baby lips suckle red-tinted teats
 in dusty bedrooms waiting
 tomorrow;

because, in fact,
 there is dust on the naked feet
 of numerous arabs endlessly
 kneeling;
 and thousand-eyed spiders
 climb forgotten kitchen walls without
 a web;

and because there are young men
 rolling marbles in stick drawn rings
 who have never seen the dead,

I am thinking of white skinned women
 in nothing wardrobes (a cellular structure—
 shape without motion)
 and singing a dust song through dirt brown hair.

Robert Vaughan

10

EXTREME UNCTION

I An Act of Charity

Go hiely from me ambsace-children that ramble
of an ageless goal. Keep from me constantly.
Your credo minds me of the shawms that lie beneath
swarded civilizations. Your holy-house is but a soapbox
from which a howl-monkey screeches of love
to his loving dust. There is nothing
worthwhile in your warship save the guns
of prayer. But nothing can ream these weapons.
and they are abutting obsolescence as their puny
projectiles are aimed at selfish targets.

II An Act of Love

Although I have not lived
Although I have not lived a full life
Although I have not lived a full life I must die.
Now I should be afraid.
But I care not.
No, I dare not.

Yet I shall try to make the way before I go.
I will try once more to find the thing I lost,
even though I do not accede to its existence.

We adore Thee Oh Christ and bless Thee.
Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.
It was no more Pilate.
It was I that killed Thee.

Our Father who art in . . .
Hail Mary full of grace . . .
Glory be to the Father and to . . .

I have built the cross You carry oh beloved Saviour.
 It was my work.
 And now You bear it.
 And I beg forgiveness.

Our Father who art in . . .
 Hail Mary full of grace . . .
 Glory be to the Father and to . . .

My beloved Jesus, the weight of the cross
 is caused by my sins. I made You fall.
 I threw you down.
 You suffered at my selfish hands.

Our Father who art in . . .
 Hail Mary full of grace . . .
 Glory be to the Father and to . . .

Most loving Saviour grant me the grace
 of a truly devoted love for Thy . . . most
 Holy Mother. And thou my Queen . . . who
 was over . . . whelmed . . . with sorrow . . . when . . . ah
 . . . aah . . . ihh.

—What's wrong with him?
 —Is he dead?
 —Call the inhalator!

III Delirium

Terrycloth robes tight and gripping—grating skates and
 the
 monstrous music of a star. Generations of racoons sneak
 their worth while the grating ceases slowly
 and the world goes on.

Here is the worth of all the years of planning and panting.

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We are no further than before. But we will cheer because usury and slavery are vanished. Ha.

Oh those rank Jews. Those hitler-hated Jews that fret singularly for the dry light of wealth. Usura. Usure. Jewish remoras. And slavery. We are all servus to environment.

To carnal pleasures. To our diety.

Let us wait. And stay waiting longer than the time drag of Anselm, until the clement rabble ruler used his holy batteries. Is the realpresence a real thing or only the figment of a group-celibate prayer? Was the man Glaucon as absurd as Socrates? Errors may be committed in the dark

to show the further point of human incapability, but why should they come in the sun's blinding rays? Flush full of straights, but remember that the prince must be a fox as well as a lion. Is that why parlor magic does nothing here? Why does teething come but once a smug-time?

Why

should a bride's costume be white? What is manicheism? What is bibliomancy? What is a tarot card?

Leave me then, Crito. Go and let me follow the ritual of my dark ancestors. God.

D'Holbach and his un-supernaturalism must be the answer.

But what is the question?

Are griefs then to be loved?

Or is the oven-love of mistress better?

I think I see a faint fant of sea that moves to hamlet me and ghost me like it had a tale to spin.

Tell me!

Speak, image.

—I begin with the music of a thoustriped organs that

float into a rhythmic coition. These limbs must be deferred to some more potent measure, greater than mere pleasure. I pant for you that lies there pantless. Honor and copulation. Flesh is what makes the organic world go right and wrong. Do not wonder. Die.

Why do you leave? Return! Tern, don't fly!

Die? But why?

Yes I have roamed in the manifolds that counsel backwards.

Sic transit gloria mundi.

So what?

Is there a reason to stoop and cheer blandly for some mystic and his hansom grinadears who dain to doon a new frivolity? Why stoop?

Give us some virtues on this thy deading day dear lord of all who sing. Our booze lord.

Ha. They still believe.

And are still afraid.

But I am not afraid. Why should I be?

No god can make me cringe-crawl.

I am above such meagre display.

I am not afraid of a muted diety who lies in fields uncovered.

How can I fear something that isn't there?

Leucaspis and the Tyrrhene seas be damned.

And the testament of Jimmy King still stands solidly undaunted by the authorized visions.

The hero passeth away as the firmament leaves for the spirit that faced the darkness.

Let there be lighted lint and phosphorescence on the features of the deep sleeplessness.

—Et ne nos inducas in tentationem,

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sed libera nos a malo.

But the prayer has brought nothing.

No one has heard it.

Nothing can ever come of it.

And there is only one thing left.

The truth.

Man is pregnancy in an endless riddle of hatred.

IV The Final Act

Night into morning—the air redeems itself.

Morning into aftermath of days—the sun glazes

on to splay its light; its slight blanch soon begirds

the sparkling eyes of day; its calefaction felt

in every pulse, in every earthly squirm.

I see my coffin, still and picayunish, receiving a requiem
and blessed burial. There is only debility

in these actions. What good is all this sheepish devotion?

While I lived I never cared for the poultry rituals of

this palled elevation. Prayers for the dead—what trivia.

These fools are in a brume of ignorance.

They waste their semi-precious time,

while I have found a purposiveness for mine.

Thadius Pizarski

STILL : LIFE

floated in a static sea
 of perfect ambiguity : being
 tide to first one meaning back : was
 flowed the other forth : to be
 the balance swiftly swing
 to bind them each to each
 in heart's constraint and tense
 a poem's self : contained in motion
 timeless yet still clocked
 continuum : is

Robert Meredith

**AND THERE WILL BE NO MOANING
OF THE BAR ASSOCIATION**

hats off! our liberties are passing
 with color guard of another is legion
 by no means foreign
 let them go at large in the land one if by
 sea two if by air if by
 burn the belfry down to save bats in:
 preventive hate's an antidote to love
 above all
 revere retaliation
 and early warning system
 when unfamiliar forces threaten
 the old north church (con)spire
 against our freedom

16

is a high fenced public plot that's grazed
by pedigreed home-grown asses only
o raise the torch delighting diogenes
and searching spirits ranging up and down the earth at
large
errant emissaries of love without the law impound
blind national trust alone is worthy of our in god we
send packing two by two to save their kind:
exalt the sacred ark of liberty
raise it high and dry
dock:
timbers shrink for launching new
in fortunate continent intervening seas send off:
o we are bound to let the ark go free
may flower elsewhere
whence it freely came
free lovers sail
go under overseas
keep
on continental shelf

Robert Meredith

DERIVATIVE DIRGE

figures created are : forever
 dead to use embalmer's art of egypt
 preserved : the voice's pitch
 unearthed is : not created
 cadaver : to museum case
 referred to : not realized
 incantation cannot :
 sing alive sing alive-o
 o-breughel-snow
 o-gainsborough-lasses
 o-titian-glow : through cold molasses :
 not phidias marble nor the gilded tropes
 of poets shall outlive their first born time
 is : marlowe's mighty line eternally spent . . .
 prick men : in mind
 beauty barely skin and bones
 time gnaws the graceful out of joint
 turns well-versed visage gaunt
 blow-fly blotched cosmetic corpse
 mummy : fied
 is desiccated karnak's queen
 bear lightly on her
 she generates : but dust

Robert Meredith

18

PURPOSE

Take now the Australopith
ape-man as good a man as you
to stalk gazelles
or bash a baboon's cranium with
a hippo's ulna to
extract the savory cortex cells

As good as you I'd say
to walk your way
upright and righteous
detouring dung and little stones
among the bones
to swat some kin
no more outrageous
no more sin

Why stalk the roaring canyons
dawn to dark
to scalp your paper stock
when wise Cro-Magnons
were slicker, quicker with
a paleolith?

The soul foresees and these
ape-men and men
picked haws from ancient trees
stopped now and then
in mild surprise their eyes

projected down a glen
of prophesy
as reverently
with utmost pains
they picked a tick from tangled hair
grew more aware
of savory brains

Richard Ashman

ANIMAL ACT

The rat chewed my skin;
I suffered him.
I chuckled as he moved his chin.
He could not harm me tearing at a limb.

The snake wound round my belly;
he strove in convulsion that I might not be.
I knew damned well he
could never tear the stuffing out of me.

The tiger ripped my breast,
wanting flesh for feast.
I thought it best
smiling to part with what I needed least.

The worm inside me turned,
seeking a safer knoll.
A little while it struggled, then it burned,
went crisp upon the pavement of my soul.

Knute Skinner

20

10

Juno saw him bulllike below through mist,
broad back and narrow buttocks so dew wet
he gleamed, head propped on massive fist,
marble-white along the grass, and it
was (she sighed) to be expected—last
time Callisto and who next? The river glass

reflected, now obscurity was clear, a cow
not far from where her handsome husband lay,
too white to be believed, with a lyrical low
(surely such creature had not been shaped by hay)
looking at herself in mirrored blue
like one who often gazed so, not as now

but likelier some naked river nymph
he had been playing with and changed to this
impossible heifer, to keep her from Juno's glimpse.
Juno descended, gave him kiss for wily kiss
while the animal pretending not to notice,
swinging a silken tail, noticed nevertheless

with more than bovine eyes. "Darling Jupiter,"
said Juno, "what a symmetrical heifer, did
you imagine, my immense one, I wouldn't eye her,
that marvelous creations can be hid?
Not since Minerva, lovely from your head
oh clever, clever god, god of godly beard

(stroking it) "may I have her?" He said yes
to this spider-subtle spinning. What god wouldn't
who knew the brevity of tenderness,
married forever to an immortal wife? He couldn't
say "You can't" and, stammering, confess
the cow contained white lo and his bliss.

Io looked longingly at her treacherous lover,
with luminous large eyes that could not cry,
lowered her snout, immaculate in clover,
and only bellowed when she tried to sigh.
Juno patted her, then pinching, whispered, "I
know those hairy hooves, that forelock, lie—

whoever you are, however, you shall stay
always a cow," and gave her to Argus whose
hundred eyes watched her night and day.
At night he tied her with a dirty noose,
every dew gemmed morning let her loose
to wander under olive trees and graze.

She went to the river that Inachus, rivergod—
her father—lived by, and to feel his hand
pet her, feeding her tufts of grass was odd,
like a stray dog a stranger might befriend.
Again she tried to speak, despite her cud,
could only lick his hand and sadly nod.

She thought how fortunate her name was simple,
even a cow could spell it in the sand,
and drew it at an edge of water ripple
using her detested hoof as hand.
Inachus, seeing, said, "I understand—"
crying, kissed her. "O Io, Io found

lost in this beast, what can I do, my daughter,
how can I let you out?" Then Argus came
and drove her lowing away from her tearful father.
Jupiter, himself a father, watched the scene—
(although his gifted children were now grown)
he turned Inachus' tears to pearl and stone,

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diamonds and emeralds dropped from the old man's eyes;

but it was not enough. Still he sobbed, and Io's sisters splashing in rainbow sprays of waterfalls and fountains, hearing, stopped, dripped jewels of water as they ran with grace to comfort their father, kiss his crying face.

Jupiter called to one of his marvelous sons famous for swift invention and slow song. Mercury arrived, wonderfully at once, promised he would take his pipes and lulling wand to visit Argus in a wry disguise as simple shepherd, piping among lambs.

He did. At colored evening, Io lying tied to a dimming tree, he came in dullest wool, climbed the high rock where Argus eyeing the landscape on all sides, bluegreen and cool, asked him to sit a while, Mercury replying, "Never to sleep entirely must be tiring."

He blew his instrument and told boring stories, the most soporific histories that he knew, but though Argus closed ninety eight of his eyes he always kept open at least two, urging, "Go on, play on your plaintive pipes, if eyes were ears I could listen to your lips

a hundred times at once. You play like Mercury." "A nymph named Syrinx," Mercury began, "sings in the pipes. Hunting deer one day she happened to be seen by passing Pan—devoted as Diana to the chase, no one had touched her, neither god nor man.

If he had been a marble shouldered youth
 perhaps he could persuade her to a glade,
 but he was hairy, goatlegged and uncouth;
 she ran on terror toes through checkered shade,
 crying to river nymphs who (to tell the truth)
 he had once outrun when equally afraid

they shrieked but soon subsided. Most of them
 were heavy with his hurt. Pan grabbed
 Syrinx as she stepped into the stream.
 Instead of screaming as if a dagger stabbed
 she was stiff reeds against his ardent arm.
 The pregnant nymphs laughed to see him robbed

of one brief ecstasy at least. He took
 the reeds and cut them as you see—" Every lid
 of Argus drooped. Not one eye glittered in the dark.
 lo, a white spot below, lowed amid
 the greyer sheep. A far dog barked.
 And Mercury sliced off Argus' head.

Juno, enraged, railed at Jupiter
 (classic husband and wife, what daily vase
 or ideal speech could chronicle as clear
 as these old myths from Rome and Greece
 how different and how similar we are?)
 Sometimes she changed her rival to a bear

and now, before proceeding with her plan,
 the breathing eyes of Argus, blue and green,
 she placed in a bird's tail, the peacock's fan,
 who, plain before, began to strut and preen
 exactly like a woman or a man
 whose grey quills iridesce with sudden fame.

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Not satisfied by this, she sent to torture Io
a ghastly gadfly, black winged and bulbous eyed,
buzzing in her ears, biting her flanks of snow,
and no matter how much she twitched and tried
by switching her tail, scratching on low
branches, still she itched, and had to go

all over the world followed by the fly.
She swam a sea named after her Ionian,
bellowing on banks, thinking she would die;
across a strait called cowford afterward, and then
ended in Egypt where wise scribes saw
she was a goddess and wrote her in the law.

No one knew her as she really was—
a cow to some, distorted daughter to her father,
pictured in pyramids and painted on walls
with lyre-like horns; mistress to Jupiter,
heifer to other heifers stupid in warm stalls,
and Mercury was no hero though horrible Argus fell.

Juno had seen some slim Endymion
or other mortal youth—her loves weren't publicized
like Jupiter's; she never changed to a swan
or as a golden shower spectacularly surprised,
asleep in his tower, a godshaped man.
Her private motto was: be discreeter than.

However it happened, she no longer cared
if Io were goddess, nymph, animal or woman.
Careful that Jupiter (who continually roared)
promised if she changed her back to human
he would forget her, she at once restored
Io's true beauty to the cow he had adored.

At first, as her snout shortened into nose,
her foamwhite sides melted like a foam,
hooves divided to fingers and to toes,
though her tail shrank, she felt the same,
afraid her voice would bellow, her words be lows.
Often it is so. A lying mirror shows

a goddess' statue when a cow looks in,
or a cow grimacing though a goddess smiled.
Nothing was left of the heifer she had been
except her whiteness. The breasts that had beguiled,
the excellent neck, the chin, the hair's sheen,
her pointed eyes, large, luminous and brown

(these suggested the discarded beast)
reflected as before, a lovely nymph.

But she is never satisfied to be
flattered by fauns and satyrs, heaped in triumph
with tears turned into jewels. While new gods kiss
she slyly thinks: there's more to me than this.

Harold Witt

26

LEISURE

My work is finished for the day.
Neither of my children wept
at table or at bed-time.
In the moonlight, their crisp sheets,
on which they gravely curled their nests of warmth,
were pearl-gray treasure in my hands.
By the window, my shirt grows cool at the shoulders,
and I hear the grasses fill with rustling life.
I hear the sturdy sweep of the leaves,
and, from far away, the castanets of silverware.
Heartlessly, I wish the time were always now.

Before me, a vertical brown twig
falls miraculously up the glittering screen
in a soundless fury of blading orange wings.
I am surprised to see so small a thing alive,
even a moment, in the feeding night.
On what can this gentle creature feed?
The most delicate thread
or thinnest vein of leaf
would gag its mouth like a cord.
It could skate on my fingernail.
I almost believe my fancy:
that the bacteria, swarming upon my body,
are its only proper food;
that it rises to dip into the school.
Slowly I hold my finger toward the screen,
hoping that the little orange wings will rest,
that it will nuzzle and graze on my flesh.

But my finger, like a pillar,
 blocks the light. Frantically
 its beautiful fans blade from my sight,
 leaving me lonely in the light.

Don Geiger

SEVEN GRACES BEFORE MEAT

Around my bed in sprightly dance
 the Seven Deadly Sins embrace
 the Seven Blessed Sacraments,
 each bliss a Botticellian grace.

Male devils stitched in skin-tight hose
 lead out the pregnant female graces,
 each of whom gladly matches toes
 with him who smashed her virgin stasis.

"Joyfully," the ladies sing,
 "we have sacked our maiden virtue.
 Come join us in a tighter ring,
 where we will heavenishly hurt you."

They sang, and gave the devils eye,
 and my own eyeballs felt the beam;
 upstarting from the mattress, I
 leaped bodily into my dream.

Lyle Glazier

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LOT

And Lot went out . . . and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked. . .

Genesis 19:14

When Lot, strangely vindictive, cursed the town
And with fiery eye flung wide the gate,
The cloud of God enveloped the harlot's crown.

Naked, the priests trembled, but stood their ground.
In the markets, some, secret lovers of fate
(when Lot, strangely vindictive, cursed the town)

Ran to the roofs to cry the lightning down.
The leper blinked. Old women spat in the grate.
The cloud of God enveloped the harlot's crown

Who lay, thoughtful, hearing the riot-sound,
And mocked her client as he rose in haste.
When Lot, strangely vindictive, cursed the town

Over and over, an idiot child swung down
From the eaves, hissing, "Will Sodom then not wait?
The cloud of God envelopes the harlot's crown
What are ye then, if not what ye avouch!"

But crowds hurtled like stones through the dancing gate.
When Lot strangely vindictive, cursed the town,
The cloud of God enveloped the harlot's crown.

David Galler

**HOW HOBBS, READING SOME VERSES OF COWLEY,
ANSWERS THE VOICES OF IMMATERIAL SUBSTANCES
WHICH HE CANNOT HEAR**

"The Fields which answer'd well the Ancients Plow,
Spent and out-worn return no Harvest now,"

says Cowley to me, posturing in his cell,
the windy oracle who blows out dooms
he does not understand—and says,

"We break up Tombs with Sacrilegious hands;
Old Rubbish we remove;
To walk in Ruines, like vain Ghosts, we love."

the moon above is not so pale in conquest
as we old men with wenches in our pay.
Hal I cackle too in the poetic way:

"Tho' I am now past ninety, and too old
T'expect preferment in the court of Cupid
And many winters made mee ev'n so cold
I am become almost all over stupid . . ."

(So stupid dangle, wit all spent
and running down the thighs of Lent,
your wisdom lost in hairy tangle
with those who dared to see that will
was free, and that the circle was not squared.
We love you, Hobbes, our mangy bear

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chained in the pit, with thinning hair
and thinning wit; but you have said
yourself that when the motions cease
the man is dead.)

Old men are drowned; the moisture gathers where
there is no struggling: feet and legs will swell
that once were sound, and water loosens flesh
around the waist and all around. The mind
remains; on skulls the flesh is thin; and still
it gathers numbers in . . . then tells
with withered tongue.

My mind has never fumbled
like my ancient hands: platonic hands, too old
for loving, blurring the gesture, frightening her
who loves me in the sunlight when I talk—
we walk our walk; she stands all dumb with life
while I am turning, deep in water toiling,
head alive with trim moustaches, points
of fire beneath my bushy head of ashes,
then puts away my hand as though it were
a wisp of hair that brushed her cheek, distraction
in a maiden's summer morning. Our last years
we hold the young ones by the ears; we want
too much—that they should listen to our talk
and bear our palsied touch.

(**Observe** the arid spout of the Leviathan and
find
how matter rises pure as wraith from purer
mind
or how your words may stroke a cheek more
softly
than your hand, or why a lady may be kind.)

I pay her, true, for writing down my spite.
 If she could only draw! you know, without
 my drawings I can hardly think: I need
 the solid demonstration, solid line;
 and now am left with algebra like broth
 sustaining toothless age. By God, Descartes,
 with broken compass, folded paper rule,
 could ring me now with vortices! His heart
 and he are now in separate tombs.

I lock

the door at night against the thieves and sing
 and play a prick-song on my lute—for health—
 and say that this may add a year or two.
 The stealth is what I fear: to think and not
 to hear them coming on, too soon, and silent
 through the rooms as though they were ideals—
 formlessly turning, timeful, fearful wheels—
 and though a year or so my voice withstands,
 soon it must rasp to a stop with inner sands,
 feeling a friction time can never feel.
 Time whispers now beyond discerning, turns,
 rolling us under like a wave or wheel—
 and only time and only turning, turning.

(Our old bear is afraid when the dogs are dead
 of the barking which echoes around his head,
 of forgotten truths and returning boasts:
 the feminine bear is afraid of ghosts!)

"The year of the Armada, doubtful year,
 my mother brought forth twins, myself and fear,"

and we have taught each other how to live
 to ninety-two. My fear has made me Christian,

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or made me seek, at any rate, salvation,
revealed that rulers, when they speak
want us to turn the other cheek,
that life is granted to the meek,
that strength comes from evasion and submission.
But spirits bore me.

I flushed them from the bed
of Selden when he died; I laughed at Mersenne
who would save my soul; one need not hide
from ghosts, but only thieves and things that are.
I run, quite true, but not so far I cannot
spin in the light, put out my chin and dare,
and run again. Timidity improves
one's logic and his skill at standing
quite close to ghosts and even thieves. I parry
Wallis with compass needle, stab him when
he weaves; Charles I wheedle; Bramhall falls
to counter-accusation. Christ and fear
have saved my reputation.

(But time is unawed; fraud
no more than a locked door
can baffle decay. Pray,
cringe,
subvert all your flesh love
devote your malign core
and squander your sense
for God's recompense
for the long love and the dry.)

My appearance is misleading;
look, my tallow palms are bleeding.
What I was, I did not mean;
what I seemed, I never was.

Do farmers know whom they are feeding?

(The lock will crumble: Cromwell died, and
 shapes
 reformed: authorities, you found in youth,
 are no more permanent than truth, and kings
 are fallible and whores diseased and day
 smoulders through the night and darkness
 hangs
 above the light. Now faced with time you say
 you never meant, when making men of matter,
 never meant to leave them subject to decay.)

Judson Jerome

BOYS AND BEARS

II Kings 2:23

Forty-two hoodlums near Bethel
 Met a funny old man in skins.

God damn, said the holy Elisha.

Forty-two nagging boys at him yelled:
 "Baldy! You're bald as sin!"

God damn, said the holy Elisha.

A passel of she-bears rough in the muzzle
 Romped out of the wood near Bethel
 And gobbled the forty-two jaunty boys
 At the feet of the ragged bald man.

Thank God, said the woolly Elisha.

E. G. Burrows

A WIFE'S LAMENT

1. Three April weeks had washed Manhattan clean when I was born. Craw-stuffed, the gulls paddled placid on the East River brack, the cats snoozed on brownstone sills, snuffing begonias, contented peasant nations lulled at night on that shore of slums. My father watched stars flare from rivet pots to sky scaffolds; through my mother's breast I heard faint mandolins, cries of lovers, ponies' hooves drum across Magyar plains. A mild generous spring.
2. My hair sprung thick, black and long, my brows arched in the high Romany cast over a hooked nose; they shaped late, my small soft breasts; my round belly and my firm sides, my deep waist, long back, and heavy pear of buttocks are fleshed lightest olive, darker than cream; full thighs and straight, fleet in shin, ankle, foot, a tall thin girl with the proud Czardas head; and since my youth is proud I dream no dreams, my eyes change with the seasons, as earth's light.
3. My parents were simple lovers, chaste, good. I knew nothing of life. My first friend died a soldier in that dark erupting time when the armored winds shuddered overhead and flung down in our laps the torn naked parts of young men. What more was to be known? I saw common crowds of sterile men;

I walked among millions in steel gardens
of the torrid town, among faces
of glass, of stone, waiting. Others went mad.

4. Then I married a man of restless dreams,
full of words, all truth, all lies, who because
born under November's ashen rains
can never forgive that season's wrack.
He is doomed not to be mine: he cannot see
time confounds even the subtle music
of the flesh which in its choosings marks us
heroes with love's sad beauty, will not know
that sons of the cannibal earth, eating
and eaten, are fruitful and multiply.

5. Though men tie and sunder with the hot breath
of killing joy in the open woman,
the best worst, raping what she can not give,
the great golden knot which binds her
drabbest elements, the heart of her pride, the sense
of her love, mere ignorant conquerors
of a land they never know, the power
to storm is theirs: we must hear, wait, bear them,
for men make music when the wind has blown,
and we lie in the savage arms of men.

Jascha Kessler