

Blaze VOX 2k9

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Off With Their Heads

And now it's up to us
to choose. To say which one survives
the cut and which does not. To shoot
the snub-nosed bullet, sacrifice the first

born, fortify the no-fly zone. And those
we spare, like pigs who belly through
a break in the fence and leave
the others squealing in the barnyard.

Watch the juror's appetite for mercy
wane as, labeled, each ingredient
is offered into evidence. The shirk,
the shrink, the shrug. And yes, the grunts

that nod or not, whose nodding matters
lots or not at all across the crash course
of carousing gauntlets. We, the arbiters
of the win-some middle: mortified

with losing tickets. Either way
the stone's turned over.

Not Knit

"Man is the more vulnerable to self-destruction
the more he is detached from any collectivity."

– *Emile Durkheim, 1972*

The book of contracts comes unbound,
its Sundered pages left to founder

on a ruthless sea, where none remain
afloat (and so they sink).

There's suicide in this,
the sociologist explains (and anarchy).

Beyond the social weave of tit for tat,
what's left but undressed need?

The plundered yield
of cultures severed at the roots,

a suckling calf that cries out for an udder,

while a raft devoid of oar
or rudder, dithers on a vagrant tide.

No pronouns to connect the restless
whim to peopled ground,

no sin spelled out to dictate what or how
we should not do, indeed

no chaptered verse, no form or meter.

Once iambs offered us
some *where* to put our feet, but now

the traffic lights are gone. Non-sequiturs
collide without apology.

Uncurbed, a road goes anywhere,
in fact is not a road

(no lines to cross, no rows to hoe);

unfurrowed fields, left unheeded,
languish in the clamoring weeds.

Incident Report from Nepal

— for Jim Traverso, lost on the Sun Kosi River, 1999

The rescue team returns
with nothing but backpack and pictures.

Sun glinting on a swirling river. A soggy lunch.
It could happen to anybody.

We devour the remains. Goat's bell
and prayer flag, a foam festoon.

So much splendor, so much thirst. Ink bleeds,
a page is torn out. The blanks are there

to be filled in. Mad eddy.
Wilderness guide. A cracked canoe.

Now, a tree sucks its meager portion from the wind-
scrubbed earth, a rugged tree grown knotty with eyes.

A world away, the fatherless Sherpa is nearly
through college and burnished by love.

As the peak of Annapurna shoulders through
the clouds. As eggshell breaks,

And yolk sprouts wings. Notifications
have been made. Questions asked.

No matter what the songbirds say, the smells
of algae, rock and sweat stick to their stories.

No single road goes far enough. After years,
home is a distant cry, a foreign coin.

As miles go by, the seat beside
the widow whistles empty harmonies.

Eventually, she buys a smaller car.
Then it's *a capella* the rest of the way.

Serial (how it falls out)

Pickering, why can't a woman be more like a man?

– *Henry Higgins, My Fair Lady*

We start over.
With somebody new. Each craving:
The taste of the other. Or should I say
Each craving the taste of each
Other. Respectively.
We wake.
Sheets still bearing the creases.
It's about which side
The crease falls on. Which side you.
It's about the line
Break. The creases
Still borne. We turn
And turn. Our own words
In our own mouths.
The trouble with woman is she isn't more.
Like a man. The trouble with man is
He isn't. More like a woman.
The problem is generalizations
In general. This is a problem.
Corn beef and rye.
Thick and thin. Tower or trench.
The trouble is there
Are always creases. The trouble is
The line breaks.
It's a matter of a pause.
A space. A dot in space.
Period. Alone
Each learns to walk. Again.
And then again. Each learns
To walk alone.

*After Pablum Leaks Into
the Ground Water, Apathy
Crops Up In the Marketplace*

Drudgery, drollery, grueling cajolery.
Pull over. Palaver ahead.