

Robert Wexelblatt

FREE FLOATING

She was christened one November day.
A bitter widow smashed a bottle
of absinthe on the quay,
anathematized her grip,
grandchildren, the dismal
drizzle, then the ship.
At length she ground down the ways
with a kind of constipated
ripping, reluctant to be hugged
by the sea; her shuddering surprised
the men who hollered as she sloshed
obliquely, tipped, damn near capsized.

No topsail or tiller;
no motor or mooring;
black ballast below,
ten tons of turbid tar

wallowing waywardly;
huge empty hulk heaving
on the deep, just drifting
in godforsaken gray.

Her sailing conjured no crowds, bands, banners;
stevedores rubbed their brows with oily wrists
while the pilot clambered nervously to
the bridge. One inebriated salt cast
a wintry eye, declared her ugly as
a spinster's goiter. Sure enough, that
maiden voyage never closed; she's yet
to find a port without portent, fixed haven
or a straitened berth. For her there's been
no wedding night, no coupling with a land
of husbandmen. Where is her lading, her
Zuflucht? Ages have passed. Who can make sense
of life without anchorage or purchase?

We glimpsed her at three bells
there, rolling in the swells.
On bad nights she's still spied
pitching on black tides.
Our horizon's haunted
by this ghost, unwanted.
What became of her crew
nobody ever knew.

Patet Atri Janua

Now's she's gone and got cancer. Cancer.

Through these years apart, and all the ones
before, I liked to imagine her coming
to visit me in my final illness,
warily opening the steel door, her
breath just catching at the sight of my
state, taking reluctant steps across the
linoleum, how the starched hospital
sheets would sigh beneath her as she sat
tentatively, sideways, the way people
do, four fingers stroking my mottled
hand to console me, her still, silent face
saying everything I'd ever longed to hear.

I thought that would be terrible enough.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY DAY

You will never
most probably never
become the grandee you mixed
up in your haunted
humid hippodrome
you too will settle
bake cakes of joy
a matzoh contentment
flattened by three
tsps of resignation
you will steadily adapt
to your planet its televisions
flesh of its creatures
seeds of its rape
come to lean on routine
love pain indignation
panic ennui rage
despair over doorknobs
bored by three meals
and one roof if
only you can get them
entertained by the evening news
by the diurnal deranged
nonplussed by the nocturnal
lose touch with noumena

hush before well turned limbs

catch trolleys cold cancer

and bodily betrayed

turn a pendulum

damning blessing

Musing At The Outdoor Early Music Festival

To be the Bach-begetting race
long after we and earth are dead
we shot his preludes into space—
bragging, as Lewis Thomas said.

Music is math plus mystery,
organized improvisation,
its source beyond both history
and Euterpe's inspiration

in misery, collaboration,
a hundred mouths, a single brain
too dead to hear an ovation,
brightness of trumpets, plash of rain.

Whatever we feel we can sing and by
that singing cause others to feel; our art's
a looping feedback of joy and despair,
stateliness and laughter, ample harvests in
soothed pain, rowdy glee, agreeable shocks
of scintillation. Shamed by so many
of our acts, we're always proud of our stories,
our joyful noises, the ways we crank up
the mute rainbows of our lives by dreaming

plots, harmonies, at once ephemeral
and permanent like extinct creatures sealed
in the amber of dark vanished forests.

One Consolation

As we grow older so the world grows
more complex, and more forgetful too,
as if wisdom and ignorance joined hands,
pressed cheeks, and staggered through a clumsy dance
to time's swift jigs and slow sarabandes.

Life's banal days and undistinguished nights
must not be despised since they're all we can
return to from our odysseys, our flights
through exotic latitudes, from our dreams.

Though quotidian tunes weary our ears
with routine rhythms punctuating years,
such music's always sweeter than it seems.