

Eric Basso

Vision Quest

shaman creeps into the niche
on a ledge in the cliff face
the flame from his oil lamp
gutters under blood blots
dancing off the stone where
they've slept a generation
dreaming of shaman's return

or this is the dream the scent
of ash and wormwood as
embers blink behind a paw

shaman blown back from
the far side of eternity after
years that are a single day
to the tribal elders lying
stunned in the brush below

June 19, 2007

Blurm

this is the variable beast
the thing you come back as
in the life after the one
that takes place now
and it's never the same twice
because the former gives spawn
to the latter and so on down
fleshly corridors of hope and fear
to the hour of mass extinction

the gods savor a humor
that will never allow us to
believe in their existence

each incarnation they devise
is just for the sport of
seeing saint become sinner
turning victim into torturer
and criminal to executioner

last life's derelict wears
a crown without memory
and we are all one
with the variable beast

March 28, 2008

Gleeth

the shark was rotting in my trunk
I'd have to get rid of it fast before
the stench became noticeable but there
wasn't time to think about that now

the lizard had already stopped crawling
up my leg I couldn't find any trace of it
and didn't even try to calculate how
much time would be wasted in a search

the chimp sitting to my right bought
the next round of drinks and I settled
into what was hoped could pass in
a place like this for a meditative state

maybe I was still in the grip of paralysis
no one had told me what to expect when
the bellboy unlocked the door to my room
and we saw the gleeth crouched on the rug

over the years its sallow eyes have come to
haunt me with a sense of exile I can't shake
though we slammed and locked that door
and no one ever entered Room 209 again

May 11, 2008

Desert

streets of volcanic ash
clad with fissured marble
then the long caravan
miles of sand a white sun
scorching the canopy
that drooped over its
single human cargo

crushed by the moneybelt
pockets bursting with
coins of silver and gold

in fever I kept my vow
better than a monk
because more was at stake

days and nights of silence
menaced specters nested
in a swatch of lace
their blooded eyes
peering through the loops

May 5, 2014

Phrigidians

everywhere you find traces
of a Phrigidian presence

the carved wood face on
the masthead of a ghost ship
the green smoke pouring
through the toxic wards

that unnamable thing
still lurking in the creepers

inside the oldest houses
crusts of blood smeared
with oil on every wall

stare at them long enough
they writhe and pulse then
settle into hideous landscapes
where you sit alone
listening for the whispers
of the vast army that
moves in the grass

August 28, 2014