

Mark DeCarteret

### Page Play

Return to the spot you put your double to sleep,  
then try to draw them with their hyphened eyes, pouts.  
But do not read into their spasms. Or any area radiant, rose-lit.  
And please don't peel off their most unfashionable  
wardrobe and make them feel silly, worse, lifelike,  
follow some urge to tug phantoms from out  
where their fingers have stiffened past fists,  
their toes, tired of tallying your ever-lateness.  
It's all well beyond righting. This moment is not a gift.  
In fact. you're figuring in it less with each selling point.  
Yes, you may listen to their grunts, hard-won stillness.  
And rouse them enough so they say something funny.  
Though not enough where they stop, their mouths  
summing up the soured prayer of their breath.  
Just be sure to try topping their output. Not boring any of us.  
There's no need to see if they remember the song  
you sang seeing to everything in their sunless nursery.  
It might only rub them more deadpan, indifferent.  
Best you bury the remote, seal them off behind memory.  
More new leases not to burn but to sign on more fire.

## My Medium and I

One rap on the coffee table  
and I'm sparring with the earth again,

what had started with ape-swings  
now overpowered by the ablest of bleats,

two, and there are more details of the lake  
we had come to call "Side Note" or "On Said Desire"

depending on the slant of the editor's pen  
or the part in the cameraman's hair.

I've never seen myself as Russian.  
Or even myself with any surety.

But, the "X"s on this bottle have been scored so deep  
not even the ascetic next door is safe from its posturing.

My interior's off-limits, still in its flinty, uninterpretable stage.  
Here, my late translator has it as "The Din in the Mind

as Unintended for Others." There, "The Gate."  
(Note to reader: You've been duped by one's far more reputable.)

I'm not so much haunted by the golden calf's  
stare as its unfounded criticism of us, tics.

And I'm still sick from reading its epic.  
The clips of our love-making. The kissing alone.

Was it just another lifetime of nothing to be footnoted?  
Thousands more like it to be opted by execs, texted endlessly?

But O how the sparrow arranging a nest on my new brain  
luckily bears a striking resemblance to my old skull.

Up above it a cluster of stars reputed to be dead.  
And a space station plundered of all of its log-keeping.

From now until the bottom of the page--SAVE ON MANDELSTAM!  
This tomb-silence as seen on TV. By all but the damned.

## In Defense of Thomas Bernhard's Soul

1453 could've been the day before yesterday  
and let's say oblivion the day before that.  
With that in mind, the wind sure feels pleasant.

I hold off swallowing the olive because  
it strikes me as the right thing to do,  
almost Christ-like in the right light.

What risk is there filing one's life under sleep?  
Or to sleep like the pulse-less, kissed-off?  
*The sleeper is at home in heaven and hell.*

Lead me to those most pliable of memories  
or if you wish just the moon—the shined-up  
side one can only see when standing here.

The best of lines come like a door-stopper.  
When lashed to no one god's mast the seas  
are not so much open as unfazed, bluest-blue.

I was lent ten times this in your happiness.  
I fattened-up, grew ever-mightier, on happiness.  
Nothing looks dafter on the page than happiness.

Ever since I put out the new mat I've been  
kept up all night by its ceaseless pleading.  
May it be washed of my sins and the sins of my friends.

Please, tell me I haven't lost you. Are we not  
so much made, wrestling free from damnation,  
as forever dreamt-up, taking one for the team?

A creak in the board swears if I tripped it would not let me fall.  
All well and good but will I have the words for it?  
No, the best of lines come like the prettiest of swords.

## Hide Out

Remodeled even more (it only lacked  
for a collar or cufflinks) and now edit-mad--  
not an ode (see: sun killed-off, what hasn't once  
been like that damn ocean) never mind sonnet—

what was merely trying to remind me (o rolodexed  
whim!) some love I'd volunteered lab samples, ballistic info,  
(and at least tide me over till the fall and its half-ton of leaf)  
but ended in a kind of war, our shadows cringing

from our bodies, these frail figures marked down  
by the grocer's gun, his exceptionally fixed prices  
(our lips raw from the lies and slipped *others*)--  
little of our past not strapped in for this air-ride,

left undocumented or decoded by those plastic rings  
we won tossing (or shooting up) hot diamonds  
into that marriage of darkness to light (nope, it's a type  
of smudged mishap ever-at-odds with this white).

## What to Take from Founders Cottage

There is the light in which the gull looks less  
the white of Beckett's book about being at best,  
than the black of the turned cabbage, potato  
in which I'm killing time like this mightiest of lakes,  
calling out to the cat's toys, the talc-colored sky—  
“This cast on my leg can't come off quick enough!”  
and looks less the tub-caulking white of the showroom  
then the black of the undermined tooth of my childhood,  
(so while sleeping tonight I won't age, let my lungs pal with language)  
and much less the white of some cooled star still looking ticked off  
or the tag I've torn out of my lab coat because it itched  
than the black that butts up against where all space is stubbed out—  
a hue that the locals dubbed “Our Lord God's Guile” or “Butcher Shop”  
and less the white of both the fun-rationed, underfed  
than the black of the bomb-deafened mob or the bargain store strobe  
(so while sleeping tonight I'll age double but sing in the bloodiest of notes)  
because the voice of the gull is both the voice of the cove  
and the voice of the tales it's slugged down across centuries—  
one's face given to fits, another stiffening to the wind, a catastrophe,  
and much less the white of the spittle sprayed during one's dawning  
than the black of the air raid, the tipped car, or train wreck  
(for what lasts of the portrait on the wall is the wall  
when all it stands for has been shoved through as law)  
and less the white of my six year old scalp the comb tells on  
than the black of the grab bag, its long-ago swallowing up  
(and why I'm given to fits, stiffening into the wind, a catastrophe  
I haven't a clue, as if it's like luck, a dead uncle I've summoned by knuckle  
from that world we'll row out to in mist or be led to by hand,  
the one we've known only at-wonder, when rocked or held close  
or when ad-libbing in front of a class or stiff-arming a wand  
though the bubble's still clung on, rainbowed and a-wobble,  
or when knelt at a drawer faring worse than its ghost-written will  
and we gleaned the gull's laughter, lugged it up like a salty skinned angel  
to the shore, its song Theremin-stretched to sci-fi-ish affect--  
a letting-go, less arguably gray, than a graying, more telling than light).