

Ross Robbins

Bird, Violence, Bird

Drugged and dragging limbs:
a broken-winged swallow
pecking a malt liquor puddle.

There are worse things than flapping
to reach no sky. To shiver,
sunk gutterward, rain-thrust stream

pushes your limpness towards a culvert.
Weakly flail against this force,
so, so fucked: Dolly Parton v. Tyson.

(Imagine the way her tits would ripple
in the sheer bomb-blast of his uppercut.
Her lipstick stains his knuckle.)

The icy-twatted feminist bares a canine:
“This so-called humor can only result
in a multitude of black-eyed wives.”

Shaking off this vision I crash
from the bus to the boil
of the sidewalk where

dirty syringes and candy bar wrappers
are shuffled by sneakers...
A gasping pigeon scrabbles from concrete

To die in the dirt for want of a drink.

Diagnosis

As a cathartic strikes the bowel
the word “reactive” whacked my tear ducts.

Renamed myself “Catastro”
when my t-cell count read “AIDS.”

Retroviral murk. A black balloon.
Lymphocytes pule and shudder.

I am Christ in the cenacle,
Judas smirks behind my back.

Amphigory? More like a hymn:
“We shall now sing the song of my undoing...”

Crouched down naked at the end of the world
shavin’ my face with a sharpened old chicken bone.

This is not the end of man.
This is just a Tuesday.

Phlebotomist: my Pontius.
HIV: my Judas.

Tercio de Muerte

Torero enters the ring.
Bull snorts,
Sun shrieks.
Attendees shift on their wooden seats,
bleachers worn smooth
from the shuffling of buttocks—
feet crackle in sticky cola.

Cries of the revelers,
bellows of the bull.
Bitter, blinded, bastard thing—
the matador reigns triumphant.

Having worn down this beast
he hoists his muleta.
Toro, enraged, ignores the bait.
He plants his horn
like a tulip bulb
in the fertile loam
of the young man's guts.

Petals blossom red on cotton
He sinks: a coin tossed into a lake.
Soils his knees on the arena's floor,
Bull staggers off to bleed.

Crowd falls silent.
This is more blood than sport.
The young man flops from his knees to his face.
White-clad screamers rush the arena.
Camera pulls back
The death scene fades
into legos and tinkertoys and ants.

False Starts, Bits and Bits

May the hand of the most holy
Caress and bless this book I hold
And endow upon its wood pulp pages
Inspiration, inspiration.
May I find within its wealth of blank lines
not the toiling of a poetic Sisyphus
but a workshop where my stone crests every hill.

May it free me from the prison of iambs,
the rise and fall of stress and flat no longer
so so-so.

May the days and weeks to come bring a torrent
of verse and rhymes not blunt as spoons
Nor crumpled like the classifieds,
every word suspended in amber,
May I bless my hours with beauty and sight.

AMEN.

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And a time came when we all decided to be childlike, but then we couldn't stop getting hit by cars.
I guess we did it too well.

*

My t-cells slain and laid out in a fleshy sepulcher
funereal lymphocyte, sarcophagus wherein lies my past,
my present, and what future might once have been.

*

Preternatural ease with which time lubricatedly slides
through fingers like marbles dipped in motor oil

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The green of the tree is contained
in the spiral of my iris,
the way you fall into the sight of me,
and Hell, I couldn't resist, either.
The birds' exertions swirl a tornado,

the *whoosh* of a golf club powers a cyclone,
tumble dry the ebb tide, better pray for rain.

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I have claimed a vaster realm of experience than I am privy to—forgive me, I have longed to make an ocean of my voice.

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Even the rain seemed set on avoiding me, steam curling up from my skin
as a bubble of waterless space seemed to grow around my blazing form.

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Daylight now, the warmth of summer growing in magnitude
like the rising Richter of the Earth shaken to its bones.

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Yesterday's ebbing tide leaves in its wake
a holocaust of desiccated skeletons
the frameworks of what should have been
tomorrow. What promise once held, washed out
to sea. With what time is left to reach
skyward (so dramatic) and wail,
"Oh where has my tomorrow gone?"
Well, sweetheart, today was and is
always here, eternally reemerging from the grey
haze you draw down over the unfolding
events becoming: the future: only real
once it becomes present: and at once:
the history of who we: became—
 Becoming: Becomes: Became.

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This urge to flock together
birds of an abscessed feather
Informing a future that never was
of our presence, the light on our hair.
Enduring moment: glint of a candle
 on the white of bicuspid
and gleam of an eye. You and I
we are the present and the becoming.

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Silver stop sign backsides. Razor wire. Minivans and yarmulkes. Riding the #4 down outer Division, an unleashed Rottweiler picks his way through the tall grasses of an empty lot. Sober. Pure of blood. The joy to be found in days not mashed like an abandoned cassette, tape unwinding and casing crushed by a Camry: “Use Your Illusion”—biting into a bouncy ball, give of the rubber, grit on incisors. “Specificity is the enemy of the poem. Trim that adjectival fat.” The snake persists in the meal of its own tail. This page persists in its pursuit of meaning, continues to come up –lessness. You know the talking to yourself is a problem when you blurt, “I want to suck your cock”—and there you are on the bus, a little old Asian gasps her disgust. “I mean it. I do.” She moves away.

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I feel my way through the darkened halls of unknowing by pawing at the rough walls. Vertigo, north becomes east, having come this far on (mostly) sight—there may come a time when feeling trumps my eyes. As such, I tape my eyelids and I spread forth my palms for a clue.

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I used to have a wooden bottle that held my great grandmother’s perfume. Her memory faded, the perfume faded, the bottle stolen, and now even that as if it never was.

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“Stygian” – the kind of word a sad sack wants to force into a poem, as if to say

“I may be depressed, but I’m smart enough
to justify behaving like a teenage goth girl’s
diary, vomiting gloom & black eyeshadow
all over your welcome mat.”

*

Keening wail from the mouth of God
paresis down the right side of this hirsute young man’s pectoral,
Quivering of his bearded neckflesh as my tongue runs up his thigh.

Tell me, my delectation, eructing and smacking your bacon-slick lips,
fingering a lock of shorn beard—what Atlas will shoulder your world
when the usual suspects flake? Pell-mell accusations, not enough fingers
for all this pointing. Scapegoat or Billy Goat, “Baa Baa!” says Black Sheep.

*

The dead reach up hooked claws
to grope for the pennies in their eyes
and open those sunken vestiges of sight

having blindly stumbled this far.
But the ferryman is only accepting bills,
points to a sign that says as much.
“No paper, no ride; you should have learned by now.”

These unlucky masses, the cashstrapped decedents,
re queuing up en masse along the banks of River Styx—
 “This stygian customer service
 is simply shameful, mark my words:
 a day will come when everyone
 will go elsewhere for their afterlife needs.”

*

Left reaching for you like a kid holding up a Roman candle
uncertain whether the last shot has discharged.
Just waiting for the next fizzle...Pop! Bang!

Instead there is only me, alone,
as the smoke of you falters and fades...

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The pain of losing you was an ill-fitting shoe,
so that with every hobble I felt your absence
 in that presence.

*

There I am in that same old dream city, it is part Portland, part Missoula, part Helena, and a dash of Paris. Heroin dealers lurk in abandoned train tunnels, balloons swell their cheeks like chipmunks. I keep coming back here where the river splits the city. It is the Willamette rushing with the speed of the Clark Fork, but its arched bridges span the Seine. A street urchin à la Dickens rushes at me clutching a tarnished silver teapot. “Your cup is emptied of blood.” Tilting the decanter, a fine black mist envelops my mouth and nose. The smell of a spoiled steak rotting in the sun, the taste of metal and saffron. In that jump-cut logic of dreams I am next standing before the throne and see a petulant child wearing a crown with jewels on her fingers the size of marbles. “You are not who you think you are.” I wake to the wrath of sweat and scattered thoughts.

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Belly all sunk like a vengeful God’s opening salvos of famine...

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