

Allan Johnston

Woman in White

after Sylvia Plath

Where the intermittent
zealot warning light blinked
its insistent beacon,

sleepy and cat yellow,
over the dark, pimply
hazard sign and leaning

perilous tenement,
near collapse, simply
waiting to be destroyed,

one tree covered its bland
black branches and betrayed
crown against the wall, and

you were there. You came in
with your long white coat and
white hat, as if just found

by the light, a bright fang
or comet, and, laughing,
lit on everything.

Revolutionary Letters

Dear Che--heat hits Chicago
like a slap in the face. You might ask
where the delights of Haymarket Square
have gone--into futures, the hedge funds
linking risks to fixed-priced
derivatives forecasting values
controlled by chains of finance.
This is the time of the continuous;
after a while, the old order
overthrows the new. The body
whittles down to its clichés
and complacencies. Before
it tries even to formulate
complexities of elements
unmoleculed, undressed, the lie
of the earth comes and stays.
The revolution is complete.
The new order overthrows
the old in the season where
someone finds the artifice
of letters in remains. The words
are shot with paradox.
Readers go by with interpretative
Acts tucked under arms. Some line up
at the wall, hang their heads.
Some curse the book. Some know the words
Tell the end. Some find solace;
some find war. The revolution
of letters comes down
like a big fat naught, revolving
planet bit around the bone
of self-discovery
in others. Che, the words mean,
but what, but what? The words
are the Word. What the words mean.
But the words. What words? But more
than words. The words mean more
Than words, more words. Words are a means.

Falling Asleep Watching *Perry Mason*

The TV flicks its silver dominion
across the room; as night lengthens,
sleep descends, and the dreamer enters
the court case in a strange trial
of truth and fantasy, and recalls:
Our forefathers brought forth on this continent—
why fourth? Why not third,
or thirst? After the natives,
Vikings and Spanish, brought forth what?
How is leaning in to specifics
a successful prosecution
or defense when the real killer sings
in the courtroom, alienating
rules, walls? Our forefathers
brought forth a wall of laws. So,
reversing the obvious evidence
with inductions of innuendo,
reruns of the rehearsed recall
the sting. Then Della Street brings her elegant
funk name in to mask such sordid
prostitutions or prosecutions
as give aid to the bourgeoisie,
just like that Paul Drake pirate
whose eponym once sailed the Angeles
waters for the English queen,
or, finally, the Masonic
code of stone, *le Père Pierre*.
Was it insight or intrigue
that caused that smile at a brief?
Ham Burger is cooked. The guilty party
lets the cat out of the bag,
tells all, getting the murdered narration
to blossom from the TV box
when blasting commercials declare the new world.