

William Huhn

## **Devil Mirror**

Time without looks broken  
without what never was.

The surface calls for  
disinterest, vanishing points.  
You gaze, aloof to statuesque,  
not with hope, just affixing  
your guard with shadow nobility,  
all saintlier than, even odds,  
even thou, thy soulmate.

What's not heartless,  
neither were you the you  
you seek. Catch sportive  
light play off depths  
measured in baby hairs,  
which you have none of  
and nothing else.

Too deep in the silver...  
you surface for air...  
Somewhere's shoreline  
shows us how lost we  
get, unseen. Snaking  
by along a sly ridge,  
miles of tank cars—  
looks like flammables—

spark up an ice storm,  
sublime despite the death  
trap. Spectator throngs  
gather under sweet sky.  
Yet the glass still wins  
by numbers alone. There's  
just no way: you'd have  
to fork out your jellies  
just to draw.

...there, the caboose! I  
caught it. It's weighty,  
but so was Eden. Only  
the earth-prayers lie,  
or did, if not about all,  
enough. Trust but alarm,  
no bending. The graven  
truths fibbed the most—  
without meaning to, I  
give you that. Step away  
now, Gilgamesh. Please—  
run before the clouds.

## **First Love of the Sun King**

*Je demandais la mort à tous moments,  
comme l'unique rède à mes maux.*

*—Marie Mancini*

### *The Pearls of Eden*

While the empty fervor  
of the heart stormed  
in lands hard ruled,

good St. Elmo  
fell to his  
endeavors in  
idle shells  
of forgotten  
depths of sea,

allaying  
little hurts with  
pearls that gathered  
from darkness ghostly  
shapes, none like the  
next, but once some  
sun-lined skipper,

alighting,  
sang of the two  
prettiest milk-fires  
ever to fill his hold,  
twin teardrop stones  
of a kind never seen  
in the world of thirst.  
Once polished and set  
as would befit

a lady's  
earlobes, they came  
to grace the boundless  
troves of the House  
of Medici,

triumphed amid  
the regal circles  
of Paris, and fell  
through the fingers of  
a lovesick king.

A Louis  
whose splendor  
equaled the Sun's  
had once aspired to  
reach only as high as  
his Marie's native  
Italian sang

French. Nothing  
in all the days  
he lived outshone  
their nights.

These milk-pyres  
fell into Marie's  
open palm after  
he kissed her  
never again.

\*

Her family saw  
fit to give whom  
they called Maria  
time for grace  
to come of her  
sorrow—

until a  
Roman blueblood  
agreed to wed  
her that same  
dew-pearled spring.

Marie's diary tells  
of a journey back  
to her birth country.  
The horses draw the  
couple through Milan,  
Parma... Out the dust  
flap of her canopy  
the new bride sees  
the Tuscan winter  
wheat sprouting.

And though she walked  
some years these streets  
to the ends of Rome  
with her spouse, her  
secret kept like a  
wish, untold save  
by a silence,

no love  
between them took,  
not while the age  
of him her heart  
beat for lasted,

a reign that proved  
the longest of all in  
the onion-skin annals  
of Europe's kings.

PULVES ET CINIS<sup>1</sup>  
at last tell of her  
flesh of flesh composed,

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<sup>1</sup> "Dust and ashes"—Marie Mancini's tomb is at *La Chiesa del Santo Sepolchro* in Pisa.

the epitaph carved under  
her name on a segment  
of church floor

With every foot that walks  
across them, the chiseled  
letters, less deep,

fade until some  
year a last foot-  
step will into the  
inscription sink  
and leave no trace

of her the *Roi Soleil*  
loved true.

\*

Came Marie yet though  
face to face with King

Louis—  
the beauty of sorrow  
that heartbreak bestows  
had grown faint, the king  
less and less haunted—  
till no one was more.

He lay abed inside  
the perfumed chamber  
of their reunion, the  
upshot of the countless  
flowers gathered to mask  
the smell of a leg marbled  
black with gangrene

which, without the ghost  
of a wince in her expression,  
drew her closer than

the others would go,  
and she had otherwise  
gone. Her eyes catching  
the candlelight awakened  
him to summer's chill.  
*"Quand j'étais roi..."*<sup>2</sup>  
said the King still he  
toward bliss.

No diary says whether she  
ever wore the pearls—no  
wife or mistress of any count  
or marquis is known to have  
remarked on the snowdrop  
fires dangling from Marie's  
earlobes, but plainly this  
dark occasion called for  
no such gauds.

And the King went with  
empty hands this time,  
just after day broke,  
now not to leave her,  
her vigil breaking as  
the sunlight caught  
anew on the dewfall  
across the gardens  
of Versailles.

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<sup>2</sup> "When I was king..."—these are said to be among the last words of Louis XIV.