

THE RUBAIYAT OF HAZMAT



by Ed Taylor

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PLAYOFFS

The burned match that looks like an ant, what about it? No one
takes interest in philosophy's problems on a night such as this
(ojalá que se mejore pronto)
How do I look in this restraining order, does it make me fat?
Only from behind
on the way to the hoop, your hoop skirt like a bumbershoot, yes
but don't take it personal-
like. It's only a sign of growing impatience, how long must I wait?
If I were that big I'd be even
bigger, given my yen for alter egos. I'd be a team unownable
an unmowed lawn with a mind of its own
Can New Jersey ever win? See, it's like clover
that can't grow in shade. For once
can the Armada not wash up, the British gulp their tea and leave
with the sun sunk
day trailing night, a crown in the balance and the score
like a corpse's shoe untied forever

JOURNALISM 101

Meet my sportswriter covered in grass, she's a doe with headlights. These manufacturing reports, those bullets of sugar, them mounds dem bones; our Ruhr under fire. Dispatch a shuttle mission into the inner ear. A vote for concealed weapons and wine, dear wine, AND I don't care, says Chinese nation to the evil within, give me hydroelectric dams of love. What evolves out of electricity: this is not the first you've heard of it SURELY. May I suggest hunger before takeoff makes whites whiter and you can save this child or you can not, just don't spoil the epidemic (world takes a wait and see attitude). Going nowhere? Can I get a lift?

SLUR EXERCISES

More poppin' fresh biscuits for the rinpoche? How warm, at an early hour awakening to throat-singing dogs trained by Robin Hood; no, that's an ex-pilot waiting out a humility lesson with a studio fret man. Around the compound skulls park on wood, selfcontained camping units gearing up for eternity outdoors. Some thrash when the equipment doesn't fit the space available. Well, I'm glad you asked me that—enlightenment does not involve alternating current. The Rake of God leans against the wall, smoking: soon enough gravel requires discipline, and as the egg of sun cracks, Duke Ellington appears in air and leads everyone in calisthenics. Outside the gate, like shadows prodigals perform a limbo, loosening up for the concert and barbecue at which they must sing for the chance to be offered new worlds to ignore.

FEVERISH NUN

lately I have been crazy
won't chew & come out but many questions from side to side
not from the front

all sirens all the time & your favor hits ice again
that bird spark does not make it spread like pliers
you know the all in all in the hot pizza box
what are your measurements totally

& candy
what is that wait for me it's a hopeful shimmer
all belled up and stung by a bee doll
not the same thing not the same thing at all
sleep is a magnet for loss

& you are awful
what do you want for nothing a metal
answer me shiny christ

SHOOTING MEMO 41

Try the religious angle. A pope impersonator collects checks in a steam room, the soaked executives ready for anything. The Last Supper as a board retreat. A girl's basketball team entertains with intricate dribbling. Jesus fondles a cheerleader, while an arms dealer scratches a cat. Kids make too much noise, fat drips from the sizzling lamb. Somebody makes a deal: Jesus cops a feel. Something like that.

Play it all like an organ. Light, heat, character, the blood of saints, speed, hand-to-hand combat, electronic marvels, guards, seasons, Sunday. Build a new god like a linebacker, and a new church. It won't be empty.

JUUU

on Shinnecock a lone trapper
mailing address for mind-body correspondence
discretion from creatures without mouthpieces
no miracles after all, just this world of grease
for Jesus
electricity like balm to spiked ears
snakes and ladders
batter for cake and wife
the option-encrusted throne o'god
bracing for dust

BURNING BUSH

I am a sleeping machine. He she it is hyena in high heels. Why is my car not red? It is blue black as the night bruise.

I killed this brick for you but honor or jokes should be my first name for we deliver faster pasture.

A spear wand over dinner's hubcap. After all Africa, so accept crib light in the dark.

For a drum solo with equal cheese, hurricane loose in my palms and hair—l'acheiem!

Oil that voice; otherwise, the dog. Opera opera opera opera. Save the box you came with; play in it.

Can or button the milk, spoil reportedly (over & over), repeat and serve.

Firecracker hot cheerleader mayhem, yes, can bring onset of labyrinth.

Early or late, wake up, frost the cake or it is naked, baby. Stop. Love, god.

CHINESE LETTER

(year of the dragon)

wednesday wednesday wednesday wednesday
clap at the temple—scare away the rats
this street is closed with cars but soon will open

and then
the coast will be clear for time's winged chariot & the recycling truck
I salute you & the dear residents of this exclusive bunker
preparing to traverse the falls—I wish I had your money
my cursor's getting worser & the president has fleas
if you haven't figured it out by now listen to the end of the millenium
it is the sound of insects eating
sincerely,
an armadillo en amarillo

IMPROMPTU SHOES/4th QUARTER

this is the music of every day

an emanation from earth like radon or news in space they take it black there is this nonsense of syllables a wilderness of dearth without mercy there is just hospital food never mind the sex honey pass the what big pistols you have grandma hand over manners and heart over fist you will need a healthy uncle a fiddle an Indian maid to bat cleanup the tanks of a grateful nation extended to you a limited engagement and world premiere *gracias* my phone is naturally curly and why not the best drilled like the rest at the armory the stock replies do you read me over and lout pounds a woman by the sound lonely days and yard gnomes leave me alone or I'll shoot don't forget to pick up the milk or else you are high and wide right?

DEPRESSION

in spite of the weather you say it's your birthday
but rain in all corners of the universe
I do not believe in the helping strategy
or reading aloud to the elderly
don't trust them don't trust them they leak like the *Times*
however eiderdown's in my book a myth
(the ducks have a different story)
it remains cold here in rationed sunlight
all the emeralds in christendom don't add up
to a wobbly stop sign in snow
slick streets feature in my dream
the one about Rhenish kings at scratch golf
it's a virulent mix of today and yesterday
layered in mud and hay, like cake
so I woke and wrote your postcard on the boulevard,
an unfortunate place where it's all explained—
the coast is clear, let's hear the studio tour
and get the dope on blood and tears
and fear as Tonto, I notice, is frantic
they call that the ghost dance
there's never a canary or coal mine when you need one
and now all at once we're orphans, sore
as the bus driver shot on the top step
or having a possible coffee
what's the diff, between death and refreshments—
nothing stays warm for long
we pay up and go
by the busload to bed

SLEEP DEPRIVATION 66

Well pard, guess I'll mojo myself back to Project Mohole, snacks and certificates in my holster. Don't seem much reward in remaining upright, when the world hurls centripetal curses with the accuracy of a Dalmatian sniper. It was a long ride, and paid for, clean and broken even among the whores and molecular biologists who reviewed each other under glass using an international table of daily currency values. Seems like the roof of the world needs attention, and the leaks fill everything from ear canals to the vet's ampules with a pure jelly of clear and inevitable origin—the coagulated sweat of the Brazilian gold miners who sat up all night injecting Coca Cola and laughing around the hissing lanterns at the thought that in the capital the president swung his bulk off his sweating mistress to answer a letter from a forest tribe anxious for more Sadé. Meanwhile at the wild remnant fire sale, a senator stocks up on knickknacks for his anthropologically accurate prayer garden, hoping for a matched set of Yamomami to appease the tax man. Later, he'll set off on safari, America's ambassador to unknown worlds and corporate picnics. In the dark in the paddock, a mute boy strokes a scorched axe, dreaming of the day when a tree falls in the forest and kills the philosophers gathered to answer the question: is this the promised land?

CENTURION TWO ZERO YANKEE

business class 10/31/02

when you're a jet you're on top of the world but
in a Crip's pickup you can't see past Lisas
without even seatbelts to call their own
and even the croutons need croutons
so sir you are in good
with in-box and out goes the bad air
under your wing
the egret like jetsam a drifting bet, just slips over water because
there is an ocean and that's it, that's all of it except
for the other parts
(the sea, endless series of sneering lips
is chapped with sand and seed pearls that hatch as
male whores in mall stores)
and here's the story from this lofty vantage
bird meets boy and goes to work
for church broadcaster, he just scratches & pitches
no-hitter
this he's rehearsed his whole frigging life and dig
she's too Lutheran to come or even to know there's a game
anyway
heroes not possible at these high prices
that altitude's too steep
leaves you alone with a Roman candle and believe me
if this is the golden age of illumination
no wonder my salad's Italian and plastic
now
there's a flaming sun at the drag show of horizon
and I'm overly aerodynamic
If I close my eyes I disappear
but have no fear
our copilot's here
some call him Hank, and he'll give you the biggest little tour
it's like death
with a better view
trick or treat?

SLEEP DEPRIVATION 67

Make me an offer, said the spider to the fly, and we can hoist a few jars while we negotiate. Their deliberate results resuscitated a moribund Bundestag, so the cab drivers say, offering semaphore opinions intimate as carbon chains between airport and massage parlor, delivering senator and wife to a crusade. Hold the pickles, you're smearing my bible pages so badly I've lost control of my life—how do you operate this thing in the absence of valid touchdown threats? Can't put fear into a defense without hostages or at least semiautomatic cutting remarks. Isn't that Faust over in Notions, handling a staplegun with nonchalance and deflecting criticism from schoolchildren? Maybe not, but it seems that everywhere you peep, there's somebody who bought high and sold cheap. Don't our divinity schools understand the dogma of demand and command? Hoarding doth not qualify as one of the seven deadly investment principles. Meanwhile, I am left by the roadside, watching the energy roar past bundled in metal, waiting with patients commuting to get on with their lives. How do I tell them this is express only, no healing? Guess some lumberjack better climb the problem and cut it into toothpicks, leave them in a box by the cash register for those on their way out.

OFF THE WALL

Excreting the news, clowns offer tissues as the national flower and sacred text—who are we to believe, the night or the limousines? Under rose light from stained sheets villagers celebrate a hole to drive a tank through, wading for a savior, trolling, actually, on the continental shelf where the future runs aground and children brown and limbless flop, pretending they're precious cargo held at gunpoint by televisions on fire.

POEMNING

Cul de sac empowerment, weber flames over the channel. Meat shops for notions, modulation commuting in toto. Oleaginous locksmiths ruin faith. Spit into THIS and why not a flag.

Free country, Jack, take your hill back.

TROLL FOR BLUES

can you fish that way all bent & numb
cast your fate to the Wynns Ed & Early
on a ball the facts of how winds act dramatic
you can flip witches then can your flavor in rust
& tuck you in jungle by the C-section
as you enter this world allow me to show you out
your cold shower never mind a missile or gavel
just swim for life the pirates play for keeps
eat earned interest & burn bridges like nobody's
business

SHOOTING MEMO 23

Play ball with me on this. We need more teeth, more skin, more danger. We need canines, character, and a man with big ears. And a vegetable king for the Egyptologists, even though they're hopelessly outdated. "Clouds of razors lifting off from a refuge of leather, and out from Brussels comes Nash." Our audience knows, and they want that skeleton wrapped in celluloid. "And the waves curl in like dirty blankets." This will conclude the art part. Then we can eat.

Who's left at the end to tell the story? We need skiiers by the dozen. Have the caterers whip up snow creme. Now enough with the sonnets. Rumba. De Ville. More flowers. How was Shakespeare's backhand? Get me?

MANHATTAN SUTRA

I'm having this thought about place
paradise for a day's the deal
of a lifetime as a matador locks
the park behind him (beret *olé*)

now

some guy is bringing my car
but can keep it I've had it & *basta*
get me kabul with krispy kreme
a large with milk (yes milk)
diamonds and elk in the drink

& ask if we have a reservation—
honey, you bet & are on it
my goal now return with less time
I'll show you where poets go
to die in the museum of the city

of New York

he rose from the bar with a diaper

dusting the dust—

same again with a twist?

UP TO THE MINUTE COVERAGE

Judge Judy's a man's man with a bottled tan
but my reality show's been cancelled
outside the blacktop's still too hot to eat
but you can lick the beaters
today's the 600 millionth birthday of the Cretaceous Period
we celebrate with elections, send fossils to Washington
just this once, pleads the president's wife
can I choose the music
conventional wisdom gets conventions whiter
and grays grayer, layer after layer
just like a Devonian forest or a closed library
waiting to be burned for warmth
unicycle bicycle tricycle, Darwin argues
eohippus to Seabiscuit in 10 easy lessons
don't get depressed I'll lend you 20
just enough to give you spine and stories for the grandkids
o the time you had
when you had the time

Ed Taylor Bio

Ed Taylor's fiction and poetry have appeared in Fiction International, The Quarterly, Another Chicago Magazine, Exquisite Corpse, River Styx, Radical Society, 5_Trope, and other journals. He is a former astronaut.

