

The R I M E of the Ancient Memer

Being The Partial Chronicle Of A Person's
Life,

Who, Irrespective Of Their Presentation In-Text, May Be
Either A Man Or Woman,

Specifically A Catalogue Of Those Events
And Times Which Fundamentally Changed
This Person's Nature

A Single Poem In Three Sections:

The Crab & Dragon,
Telephassa,
and *Someday In The Rain*

The Author V F

B R I S B A N E

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In this Year of Our Lord MMXXIII

The Crab & Dragon

Rain outside. Pelting down. And soaking wet from someplace far
The welcome shelter of this bar
The Crab & Dragon, in a quiet part of town.
A little bell announced your entry.

I

LISTEN, TRAVELLER, to my story;
Stay a while, if you will,
In this cosy corner I procured
From a two-bit grasping barman
And Rudolphed sots liqueured.

Let me introduce myself.
My name's Kyon,
They call me the Blue Dog,
Kyon Kyanthos,
'Sea Dog—'
For I've spent my life sailing over her,
My prow stroking softly her sapphire skin.

Spent—
As in energy:
I exerted every sinew on the sea;
As in money:
She loved excess and gave her charms to me.

My
Genesis in Konoso
Exodus from Kriti
Levitating me—above sense and sensibility.
Wind-tossed magic, the caresses of those early waves,
Creaking oak and the knowledge of the sailors' graves
A nadir of hope and a zenith of expectation
Cyan death would find me shivering an exposed insect,
Its bronze thorax cracked like the armour of Akhilleus
Ozymandias laid low
By a single raindrop—like a thunderbolt from Dikatajo Diwo.

It would be all the same to us.
That was my first lesson.

I can tell you
Of the expiation of a golden apple's passing
Into a limpid skeletal hand
This same apple passed into the first human hands
And then to sinning kings
Succulent, smooth skin colour imminent immortality

Bursting with years of white flesh browning as the hours aged

I can tell you

 Of the Gorgon's fear,
 When Medusa got exactly what she wanted
 When her snake-hairs hissed contentedly
 Secure in their elusive knowledge

Of what lay across her belly.

THEOS DIA KOLPOU

Holy apparition on trembling white flesh

Unbitten ripe like hooded fruit

I can tell you too

 Of the *other* Gorgons,
 Of hidden Euryale and subtle Sthenno
 Their forgetting:

 The cataloguing of endless horrors slumping into a mere mystery.

Arise the cultish necessity of worlds copied by clear water

 Conspiracy and war.

O Akritas, the Border-Lord

 Pegasus' damp mane glitters in the clouds' sky-foam
 Beautiful Bellerophon's hair streaming salty in the highest zephyr

And I can tell of the view from the prow,

Expectant

Stella, Marina, Diamanda

The sword of sunlight on the water

Pointing at us wherever we went

The sea above and below closing the world to a cave around us

Like a clamshell snapping shut

 Deep Blue

For years I tried to know:

Soterial seeds awaited more water

 More water

 More water

 And at some point...

Kyon Kyanthos.

That's how it went, roughly.

Kyon the wine-darkened sea-dog.

I shall speak to you of tears as you ask!

II

SLY CLAY SMILE

Dully reflecting Elysian sunlight
Your eyes are painted white and wide open
You must have memorised every atom of settled dust.

Unmoving within the claw
Of endless Time

Your earthen cape is gold and your beard gold,
Your arrows dipped in poison black Philoctetes.

Unmoving in the paradox
Amid Zeno's laughter

Your hair is made of rings, and your wheels rings.
And bells will ring for you and rings beset your hands
Unmoving riches taken
From one meaningless palace to another

Your helmet high and gold, and your legs
Long and black and languid in frozen sunlight
And your helmet high and gold!
And beside this holy vision
The only thing a hero's eyes may see
Is red: crimson crests and burnished blood.

You wait amphoraside for the fumbling knife
Atemporal alien come to shatter the world
To pull your flat black form out.
Amphoracide—blood flows
True desire and the movement of whistling grass
A shrill, whining flute piercing high-flung forested stone
Vultures and spirits circling
Breathing omphalic mountain air
And at night dancing in a hyacinth grove

Selenium every kind of silver-green
Moonlit grove a flat dancing-ground
Overgrown clusters of border-choking vines
Ivy-path with hidden pearl of marble
Undulating intertwined intimate entangled twisted
Only a place
For naked youths to raise their arms—

To raise their hackles
To fight:
 The young boys in front of the girls
 The young girls in front of the boys
 Primitive chthonic agonies with the earth the only spectator
In this silver ivy-veined grove
 Pulsing with blood!

Man with feet of clay, with mind of clay, with eyes of clay
Kerameikon, stand now to moving time!
You must have memorised every atom of settled dust—
 Forget them all!

III

EURIPATETIC,

Navel-gazing,

Mathematically finished

Inimitable snowflake

I am a shepherd tumbling through Olympian sky

Leaving a melting *eidolon* behind

O great inventor,

Your design has endured!

Face half-visible suffused by a scarlet trapezoid

The seaside temple's shadows at sunset

You were inducted by orange waves

Something of the haggard dog

Abandoned yet chained

No man an island, but some

Have been called rock before

And harboured foreigners in the snowfall,

Sheltered long-lost armies from the frost

Hail, siren! Hail, oasis second life!

You'd make of me a phoenix—an ancient falsity!

With your teleossifying step

Mind witchlike and rhythmic.

Leave the fallen shepherd near the beach

Among bleating stones

Buried in sand, I found a mechanism

A ferreted iron calendriary of you

And I read your human story in the stars

Stella, Marina, Diamanda

And I wept for you

Royal-haired Telephassa the mother of miracles

A skulking beauty pulling levers in the depths

You sleep to the tearing of your own ligaments

We lift our arms in praise and drown in your mercurial blood!

Your diadem has cut your face a crown of thorns

And you have soldered it to yourself for perfection

O genius inventor,

Your struggle has endured!

IV

THE TRUE ENTRANCE is within the cavern
Hid from light
Touch dry rock

Hierophantine plodding through grey rooms
A stylus scratches stone
Something hisses
Red silken power blooms within
And here I am.

How in my youth I longed to be
One of a crowd
Head-scratching doctors *calligeri*
Clustered around an autopsy

How in my youth I longed to be
Tied to a mast
And to dance like a clown on a cliff's edge
Not knowing hope was merely an aphrodisiac expectation

Under a pink-tinged lantern
The captain and the warlord clench iron
Their hands weep a monstrous crimson promise
A two-blooded line across the sand

And here I am.
Trophonian sallowness in the sacks under my eyes.
Knowing is a dirty business.

The tapping of boots on tile
An invasion of tens of shadows reflected
In the smallest shard of glass
Padding on spongelike red carpet

I yearn to reach the top of that rock, still
To greet the siren that interminably calls

Digenis named, to explain the differences
I come to the edge of the mountains
Where a pit opens deep to the eye of God
A gold lion's eye judging and forgiving

An army camp with its banners and whores
A two-blooded gentleman with no retinue
Hissing metals, flutes, shouting, dice

I read calendars and clays
I spin wool and pull it over everything
I smile with the greatest effort
You react with clueless sympathy

And here I am.
Without a starman's deformity
But trapped within the world's labyrinth

At the edge of the pit the eye
Opposite the coast the figure on the rocks
I came with spyglass in the early hours
Looking for my cyan death

“Come, come,” Nightfall.
The eye of God is shut.
It is time to go. The army's drakes slumber
Contingents babble foreignly
The general in particular

Choosing a star, I dive into the sky
Feel the lot turning to salt behind me
And a voice grows louder calling
Hope rises like yeast to spill over

And when I at last climb the rock—
Of course it all falls away!
'You're no Blue Dog at all, traveller,' she says,
'You're a sapphire, a gleaming lovely sculpted thing,
An amphora'd hero with black bronze greaves,
Don't ever leave me.'

So I grab my pack
And flee, of course, and never see the place
Again.

V

BELLS IN THE DESERT

Stylistic and lonely

Greeted by a warm rush of song!

And where should this song be going
But toward the embrace of enthusiastic destiny
Heralded by bells?

Bronze lovers call from Venetian windows
Aurified respondents swoon under the eaves
And silver-lace curtains

Resting on the back of a great turtle,
Some question whether this broad-shouldered beast
Needs a shell at all?

Then it would be merely a tongue,
Chrysostomos,
Calling from the Milk-Tower-top.

You'd take this mighty bronze ball
And reflect us in it, inverted and perverted
To show how clean

How right-sided we are
Outside of it.

You'd do a kind thing like that.

And when the naked bells rang out,
Thudding against each other like a giant Newton's cradle,
Revolution!
Our forms would spin within the solid pool of gold
Curling around your whirlpool centre
The tops of our heads drawn in first
To be followed by our hearts
And finally our feet.

Telephassa

At this point, Kyon got a little drunk.
But you made yourself comfortable,
And elected—just for a short while—
To remain by him,
And to hear of far-off things.

§

IN THE BEGGING was the pot
The rushing fervour of bronze waterfalls
Down sighing cheeks
Rivers of imaginary coins
In scorched Konoso only this remained.

In scorched Konoso only this remained.

Stumbling uphill young *korai*
Tantalised by the promise of bracken water
And nadired gazes enslaved to instinct
Enmythed broken-sail dresses flapping
In the spent and newly chaste gusts

Impressed in the exposed guts of the earth
Our gold glories made prints none of us could see
A cold crow called from a nearby maple
And zephyrs laughed atop the broken spires
In scorched Konoso only this remained.

Hempen walls, shifting
Outside the dying hearths
Hanging double-axes, metal horns
 Voicing twinkling tin complaints
 When pushed lightly by a weary hand.

A shelter of melanthic painted stone
Exhausting parody of a palace
Red-rounded painted desperates
Sharp clay claims to the last scraps
Of mercurial shade

Recycled glories
For a people lost in a labyrinth of their own making
In scorched Konoso only this remained—
This and the dawn-sick sea.

Drinking Song

EVERYTHING STARTS with a grape-seed
That drops from the vine with a crash
And the seed is the size of a planet
For the number of heads it will lash
(*For the number of heads it will lash!*)

It will go to the care of an old man
Who's got brittle bones and dry loins
And Gaia will give him a fat vine
To compensate for his dead groin
(*To compensate for his dead groin!*)

Du Kang the bringer of liquid freedom!
Methi the fruit of glorious madness!

After some time in the sunlight,
The fat little grapes will have grown
Picked by the singers with their big hands
And into a vat they'll be thrown
(*And into a vat they'll be thrown!*)

After which point they'll be stomped on
By girls with clean feet and white dress
Cute treaders with hair in big tails
Make the good drink by which we're all blessed
(*Make the good drink by which we're all blessed!*)

Inari who evangelised wheat into wine!
Diwonuso covered our ships with the vine!

The New Inventors

IN THE EARLY DAYS people talked about the new inventions in wonderment and were impressed by the possibilities they imagined someone else would think up. Certainly there were a few experts in various fields who decided this was to be the harbinger of specific major changes. And economists went crazy as they always do. But some months passed and we were all given cause to remember these tools were privately owned, as their owners capitulated to social pressures, and changed the way things worked for their personal benefit. In short, everything possible for the freedman coalesced into the usual inoffensive average soup—what would have been a tool for his liberation was deliberately altered to bring him in line. And the world remained mostly the same, with a few bells and whistles added on.

A familiar story, one told in many revolutionary sectors—not merely due to the conservatism of the market, but because those with power will necessarily seek to curtail the onset of change until they can be sure the reins are in their hands. In the meantime—in the truly chaotic period where nothing is established or certain, when a good option is just as valid as a poor one and public opinion has not been sufficiently moulded—those with power concentrate their efforts on public displays, and pretend to be forward-thinking by directing the members of the public who are listening early—the extremists—toward the acceptable ‘extremist’ option—a privately owned version, or a publicly vulnerable version, of the new tools. And the eventual environment is formed, as a rock formation is formed over centuries: Extremists are funnelled toward an ineffective fringe option, the uninvested merely adopt a privately-owned commercial version far too late to have an effect on the market out of a sense of misplaced conservatism, and the dust settles for many years until a new revolution comes along. As is usually the case in human history, the whole thing is controlled by advertising and the covert actions of the few against the many.

§

MARCHING INTO ANOTHER turgid season
Leprosy threatens the mountain tops
The enbandoned weary trudge slavelike
Heads down looking for the first trace of snow.
Footprints fabric in the wet new earth
Die as their path turns to stone
Women's wails open the path, men the vanguard,
Hortators their stomachs
Learn to use the whip as birds circle.
Stories soften the rocks
Songs form calluses on their feet
A homesick crust forms around their hearts.

There are towns, and language the traitress
Forces force; they collect their guns and swords
Spend owlish nights staring at the walls
Duly-see their way through
Their glaucous eyes radiating quotidian brutality
In the light from an iron bonfire.
And with the spoils gods materialise turning
The colour of the sun to mauve
And as more cities are taken purple
Until refugees' children are porphyrogenicised
Enthroned by the colour of their soil
And the names of their murderers.

The wind is more mobile than the oak,
The dead are more active than the living;
Stories of demons fill the camps
With phantom blood; and bedside swords
Hieroglyphic miscalculations—
Fill their tents with moonlight.
Superfluous memory bows at the throne of legend
Of Aperijone, of Tsukuyomi,
The shine in the god's pagan eye
A lone star recalling the cool touch of skin and of marble.

How blessed they are
To find themselves alone
With only the memory of a saint treading softly beside them!

Trauermarsch; In gemessenem Schritt; Streng; Wie ein Kondukt

THEY BADE ME act their keeper.
I had done it all, I had re-membered
—I had given a limb to the past—
I had resurrected the dead with my hands
And nothing was new under the sun.

They bade me act their keeper
I seethed in misty dawn
I grew my ambition alone
A sordid windmill churning riven butter
Nursing rage like
A mother her infant child!
My eye roved from a weak high window
Leaped from tower to tower
Warring gaze a phantom invisible
Fervent that my hands' veins
Followed the trackless blood of ages!

And they bade me act...
I took my scythe to the chaff,
Sweeping away with rage and gusto
Hordes of sterile humanity!
Congregations moulted before my raised hands
And I their keeper proclaimed:
I have judged with anger
I have strategised with anger
The winds have followed commands from my hands
I have shifted islands with the power of my hands
I, a servant to my anger!

Song For Motherhood

I GAVE YOU more than a manger,
More than a donkey and strangers
I gave you an identity
To store the love you took from me
And a necklace with your star sign
Hop, little bird, among your kind

Love in my blood
Another river opened up
And in the crib lay a miracle

For those nine long months I bore you
And for the rest I'll adore you
Though I sweated and cursed the nurse
And wished my husband something worse
Still the necklace with your star sign
Said come, little one, and you'll find

Love in my blood
Another river opened up
And in the crib lay a miracle

Still, your life will teach me worries
And your selfishness concern me
I'll fret in the dark, early hours
And have nightmares:

I'll imagine—as time aged
Palikari mou, your captain sage
And when you came back in the boat
I might place gently on your throat
A necklace with your star sign
For your six-foot box of pine

Such evil thoughts are far from me—
Now I, your mother, only see
Love in my blood
Another river opened up
And in the crib lay a miracle

Slave-Driver

A MAN WHO DID NOT EXIST would often assume a great number of disparate characters for entertainment. In a thick American East Coast brogue he would recite: "Let me tell ya, ah've been ta two cities. New Yawk and Jersey, and let me tell ya, New Yawk City...is the greatest city in the world." And switching suddenly to a reedy, stentorian Oxford English: "You girls have been playing about the refectory an awful lot lately," and he'd lean forward, frowning. "You wouldn't happen to know where my atlas has gone, and my set of spare keys?"

From this there would be a swift transition again, to a light and fluty South American: "Hallo there, my name is Hector Carlos Alcibiade, and I am from Colombia. I am interested in everything in the world, you know, everything. How do you get your hair like that? How do you design an American city with all its straight lines? Have you ever heard the sound of a lute? Is there a chance that Hungary might become less politically conservative with time? I like all these questions you know. And I *love* civil engineering."

But the non-existent man had another character, one he called the Hortator. Of course, most of his characters would mock this mysterious figure—including a man from the American South who would incessantly repeat its title as though confused by it. "Whore-tater, whore-tater," he'd grumble. "Ridiculous. Now, my boy *Lambros* here," and he would fiddle with imaginary white suspenders over his imaginary white suit, "would understand that...yes, that things need to be run a certain way." "No!" The imaginary Lambros would protest. "You can't own slaves! That's terrible!" "Way of the world, son. Still, Hortator...Whore-tater..."

The words made some sense to him, he supposed. For through effort alone he received his pleasures and his food.

Some of his other characters were frightened of the Hortator. Hector Carlos would tremble. "He's a scary man, you know. A very fright'ning man. I try and keep away from him you know. Besides, he can't answer anything." And the New Yorker, blasé but with darting eyes, would dodge the question: "Any entertainment you want, you can find better in New York."

And the Hortator—the slave-driver, the exhorter, the effortful one—was not acted out. It had no voice of its own yet.

As such it was unclear if the Hortator was male or female.

§

DIVISION OF A SINGLE CELL
Where nothing but wind
A ceremony of frozen tears
An invisible landscape

Resurrected halting
By dawn's irresistible hands
Daybroken

To indulge in a

blue

Merawoken

Only the squeak of cork
I found life everlasting
Heady smoky ascending
A broken sprig of basil
And the courthouse descends
Omoikane

Division of a single cell
Mitosis
Hints of pure white flesh
Sickness the smell of sweat
Some turn to making *eidolons*
Identical to what once was
And we will go our separate ways!

The chrysanthemum
The hierarchy
The conservatism
The reservation
The centuries of madness

at this the highest point
served to anoint us
and limbs blistered like hung pork
must have been below

Anastasia—

plucked from dry earth rows

Merawoken

zenith's emptiness

gulps of life and tightening lore
in a stick of burning incense
the last traces of incandescent love!
the scent of windswept throne rooms
theatrical on struts with a cardboard judge

Homoousion

jealousy and bunches of rich grapes
meiosis
the dragonfruit's roaring bland centre
neolessering
their heads like raisins smart and wrinkled
stuffed with sour new thought

and the sword
and the democracy
and the laughter at debt
and the excess of familiarity
and the shared regret

Links umbiblical complete like gods
A pantheon supplanted by mountains and seas

But we will still leave
Ineradicable marks
On one another.

The Magpie's Song

I THE MAGPIE BURDENED by fleet white steps above
An eager holy princess visiting her love
I the dead supplicant with bronze coins in his eyes
Taken by the one who took Spring's girl by surprise

Scattered in the sky I saw a midden field of stars!
A glaucous milky river spread carelessly far

I the mystery mourned so much by winter's birth
The singer's intercessor and death's source of mirth
I the weaver begging clasped for a bridge across
I the luckless cowherd's spouse, I whose skill meant loss.

Scattered in the sky I saw two silver pinpoints cry
A glaucous milky river their tears of goodbye

I Awides lord of wealth and wielder of the bident
Succumbed to passion once and felt Ananki strident
And Persephassa, Orihime—maidens such as these
Should live in stony mercy, and face their destinies.

Scattered in the sky I saw calendric blessing
A glaucous milky river and the goddesses undressing!

A Principle Of Modern Social Organisation

THE LATEST SAVIOUR MACHINE brought, we were told, a deal of diversity into a single convenient place. Ideally, it would replace almost everything we had needed before; there would be no need for physical labour, no need for expertise, no need for dictionaries or reference manuals. The machine would think for us and then perform our work to boot.

And the people, guided by a crisis of industrialised labour, crushed under the weight of a thousand far-sighted burdens, accepted these revelations gladly, no matter their source. There was a feeling of opportunity in the air—for the particularly motivated, it was a feeling of opportunity lost, no matter how hard they searched for passage into the exclusive club of owners. And that was, of course, because it was all controlled from the start by the same oligarchs who had structured society in such a way that this technology was deemed necessary in the first place.

And so the vague sense of hope, inarticulate but implicitly present in much conversation, failed to touch on this fact: that the saviour machines were not particularly useful, that they could not do anything that wasn't possible before, and that they would further infantilise an already apathetic citizenry to the point of paralysis.

For once the world is conquered, and there's nowhere else to go without regulation, the only option even for those with an entrepreneurial attitude is to participate in society as a hyper-competent unit, and if this ideal is forgotten, the panopticon's gaping maw sucks you right up. And so it happened to a billion of us. After all, we thought, we were already here. We'd already organised into a series of interlinked cities with public services and strict laws. We might as well enjoy the comforts that come from such things.

And as time passed some societies began taking an interest in others and noting their differences and wanting to modify them. This was once called war. Now it is called spreading democracy.

But as a panopticon grows, the less must necessarily exist outside of it. So while it encourages itself to look outside, to take in everything, it destroys its own nourishment and becomes incestuous. And the saviour machines exacerbated this process by corralling everyone within them further toward the centre of their society—as if society itself had not already accomplished this thing.

Once a sizable enough proportion of the population was thus adjusted, it became possible to lie to them about the scope of external affairs—to claim always that there was much more than there truly was, that there was a great deal of diversity in all fields—but that they didn't need to see it, for the relevant data was apparent to the saviour machine, and if you wished to look yourself, you wouldn't need or want to go very far. For in fact you couldn't, at this time: every source of information which one would assume near-infinite was in fact very limited, in size and scope. And we assumed we had everything in front of us, everything in the palms of our hands. But we held only lies for convictions.

Sturmisch bewegt, mit grosster Vehemenz

SOMEONE ELSE BUILT a house for you
on my back of stone
And someone else a stage to play on
with its abstract throne
Where you awarded yourselves kingships!
Where you laureled yourselves to perfection
Where you sighed in genuine relief
When a single ant was brushed from your feasting table.

Fauns that you are
The prelude to your afternoons
Bright and cheery and the skinclad hunter
Kept at bay by high walls of stone!

The laughs ascending
Reedy wooden chuckles in light country air
Green prasinoid prancing meadows and gambolling
And the undercurrents of your unsatiated lusts surge below
A terrible invisible omnipresent rage eroding stone

Alone I can sense a creeping corruption,
The laughs of hopeful lovers
The soft sliding sound of string fabric moving along
And slaps of the hands on the legs and face

And believing in imminent collapse
Under another glaucous stone
I crush my immense envy.
Alone

I fight with my mind and my broken bones.
Know:
Tectonic shifts are stilled by my power,
Earthquakes rendered impotent!
Yet you my patrons are ungrateful and indolent!

Sing your paeans to me, at the top of the world,
Supporting the sky with my shoulders of rock!

I your first-fired brick
I your guiding Atlas, your lore-tablet
I your unimpeachable foundation stone!

§

AN OCTOPUS SLITHERS out of sunlight
Questing among the rocks it shows a possible path

Travellers through muted summer face their failings
Knowing from the wind they have replacements

A ritual succession like nakedness is shown
Mystery and love subject to debasement

Stars blink out one by one
The air fills with smog

A swallow props up a crocodile's jaws
It cleans the beast's teeth on the brink of death

On a mountainside an empty house
Wildflowers reign
Rotting beams invade the dresser
No memories remain

Judgements are hopeful but the jury know
He'll be back in court in a month or more

Mistake in communion
The Eucharist spills to the floor
 No one picks it up for what would be the point?

The microscope reveals no possibilities
There's no society on the open sea

The crew despondent
Where are we going, powered by inertia?
There aren't even waves to guide us now.
Their captain
Nobody will come for you.

Creatures limp among wet rocks
Looking for a place to stay

Waiting there the octopus
For their slide into decay

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“It’s An Adventure, Right?”

LISTLESS WE SAILED
And hopeless we bailed
Swimming in our sorrow
Living off what’s borrowed

Until we met you Hortator
And you brought us true life
The lovely prow of any ship
Though you’re behind us with the whip!

But we love you, Hortator!
What haven’t you given us?

You brought me a reason
And salmon’s in season
Swimming up our river
God the greatest giver

When we met, Queen Hortator,
The world was cold and grey!
Now colours flow from mountain tops
The angels dance, the devil flops!

And we love you, Hortator!
What haven’t you given us?

YIA SOU VRE TAKI!

Our *Wanakate*, we call
And finding in the squall
Your terror, for we had to die
Just to learn the reason why

Fear getting what we want
As it’s destined for replacement
For still you drive us with your words
The only ones we’ve really heard!

But still we love you, Hortator!
For what haven’t you given us?

You Can't Teach An Old Dog, But You Can A Donkey

ONCE UPON A TIME there lived together a donkey and a man with one eye. They led a solitary existence halfway up some mountain on an obscure European island. Occasionally, they would be approached by travellers or visitors, who would witness a panoply of strange behaviours—for the man with one eye would dance on the mountainside first thing in the morning, would kiss arrivals twice on both cheeks, would eat one meal a day at midnight; when an animal on his farm died he would hold a full three-hour long funeral service for it, even if it was an old chicken he'd himself killed; he would have regular conversations with his donkey, and invite it to join in conversations with others at table (and of course it had its own place at table, and would dine with him).

When asked to account for his actions, the man would strike a pose—jutting both arms perpendicularly into the air at a low angle, and stuffing his head into the crook of the lowered arm, and he would shout, "SPARTAN LIFESTYLE!"

He had a habit of shouting bizarrely at random moments.

"ABSOLUTELY PREPOSTEROUS!" was another oft-used phrase.

One day, the man with one eye decided one day to stop living his Spartan Lifestyle and go on a journey with his donkey. He walked to the nearest town, and commandeered a boat to take him to Egypt; from there, he travelled to Israel, Afghanistan, India, China, then Japan. He rode the donkey some of the way—and to make a few coins he allowed others to ride it too, for a small fee.

He stopped in Japan, and stayed in a certain hotel. This hotel had been haunted for two generations; the soul of an old samurai warrior remained in the bathroom, for the building was situated atop the site of a great historic battle where he had fallen. And after the man with one eye felt droplets of something nasty hitting his face in the night, despite lying in bed on the hotel's top floor, he investigated and discovered the ghost. An exorcist was called, and the thing was summarily driven away.

The one-eyed man now decided he would write of his travels, and after doing a great deal of research published a book of Japanese ghost stories both in his new country and abroad. And they were met with acclaim such that he was given a teaching position at Tokyo University in English Literature. ("SIMPLY WONDERFUL!" He proclaimed at the time).

Some years passed, and he became old; and then his donkey, who had remained by his side all this time, stepped up and became the professor of English literature at the University of Tokyo in his stead. It had walked into the office...

“Excuse me, we don’t allow animals on campus.”

“PREPOSTEROUS!” The donkey had roared, and an amazed member of faculty had no choice but to award it its master’s old position immediately.

The donkey, after teaching for a little while, and building up some funds, decided to take a short holiday, and returned to the little island in Europe from whence he’d come all those years ago. But nobody recognised him, and he had to stay in a little hotel cold and alone, although he could talk like a human being. For the people on this island had been accustomed to such things happening for a long while. And the donkey eventually returned to Japan, the same way he’d come, and lived a happy life, marrying a Japanese woman and writing several bestsellers. He passed away a few years before the beginning of the Great War.

“Now, as we can see,” the lecturer said, having finished his story, “We obviously must construct a museum to Japanese ghost-hunting on this island. It would mark a significant new chapter in Sino-Hellenic relations. Nothing can underestimate the massive contribution ----- made to this place by his journeys. Plus, I happen to own the land next to it and I can build a hotel there and pull in tourists. I’ll make bank and none of these idiots will suspect I planned all this out!”

“Professor, the mic’s still on.” An aide nearby said.

There was widespread laughter.

And the whispery old doctor of philosophy departed from the stage to polite applause.

After the lecture, I was approached by S. A. “That was whack. No, it was preposterous!” We laughed.

“Yes, makes it all kind of pointless if it’s a scam, doesn’t it?”

Maybe.

§

YES, WE HAVE TRAVELED FAR

There has been a wave

A great sea-change.

Yes, they have come.
These five adventurers
Pitch black against the sun
Stiff from settled clay
That clings to their elbows knees the lines around their eyes
and their secret places

One wrapped around the column of time

Repeating her years like a widow in love,

One in the shadow of the deck, by the door
Slyly smiling behind velvet glove,

One strapped to the prow, trembling figurehead
Neophobic neophyte angel from above

The grime-faced sea dog in the bowels

Dashing between boiler and tiller he growls

And, yes! A figure hid by the sun drives them on, cracking a whip, dancing in
ecstasy!

Where to?

Only towards the top of the world!

What other goal is worth the time?

Brooking no distractions,

Water streaming down their faces

Paying tribute to their red-robed leader

This river runs across great feet of stone...

Visage mantled by rock

Iron veins

Light pools in his eyes

Foliage decorates his face

His speech is an earthquake,

His yawn births a chasm roaring open with ocean water!

He greets the sailors and points them away.

For he is the island they seek

But wishes to be left alone.

Konoso was empty and this landscape

Emptied too

Regaled by regalia,
Told by what's old
The map given by the territory.

They clutch like lice to fjord'airs
From lotuscoaust to molemountain
Soon the land dusty and dry forgets they are there
 Scarabs in the dust,
 An alien palace
 Hecatombs of must,
 Proud dead and callous

In autumn goldtold
 Chrysostomos
Heartaches for their far-off shining
 Light lament the Summer girl's passage

In grimmer times grey pining
 A cone of light shining on their ship
 From above water through black wetcloud.

 No hero to take the burden of the earth,
 But with a crew of five that's not needed.

“The weight of space
Is greater than the place.”

They had speckled rocks for stars
Bubbles for planets
And the distant maws of dark things

Yes, we have travelled far
There has been a great sea-change.

The Divers' Song

LEADER OF LIEDER:

Everything's at sixes and sevens!
Here on the sea-bed, she has
No-one to comfort her,
Nor in the heavens!

Greek Chorus:

What is it, our lady leader of lieder?
Of whom do you speak,
So lonely and cold,
In this thalastique?

Leader:

Noted well you have, my friends,
This tomb is coral white and spare
And look upon that bier there—
A lovely maiden's bed you'll ken.

Chorus:

At the bottom of this box,
Where we charged through many demons
Whole world's devilry raged past our face
To find a beauty hidden in this place.

Leader:

Her eyes are shut, her skin porcelain,
A white dress covers her, damp at its edge.
On her head, a crushed bay-leaf wreath,
Tightly woven, her somatic pledge.
Come, we must do something to rescue her.

Chthonicus:

Halt, profligates, come further not—
For I have a *Despina* in this box.
My world needs her eyes shut tight
That we might achieve greatness
Thinking her gaze comes from a height.
You face the two points of my deathly spear—
I cannot allow you to awaken her here.

Leader:

Daemon, scoundrel, giver of wealth!
Kill me, then, with pain my soul wrack,
Still we shall take our fair maiden back!
What care have I for my own health?

Chorus:

We pray, Amida Awides, we pray, Persephatta!
Between life and death, please bring him the latter!

Leader:

Forth, then, spirit, and have this bout—
I'll show you just how my brigade got its clout.

they fight

Chthonicus:

Do you imagine by this you have bested me?
Awaken her, then, and set your hopes free,
But know this. She is mere expectation,
Another prison with bars of no relation.
I plumbed the mysteries, became their master,
My halcyon days floated like blossoms,
And my life didn't get any faster.
Your journey will not end here—
Your bounty will drive you on
Until even your bones are gone
And you have nothing left to fear.
So strike your final blow,
And to the world beyond
Please let me go.

the girl awakes on her own

Kore:

What you say is fine, O Daemon,
But what I say is true:
They may be haunted by life's prize,
They may be trapped by want;
Perhaps my time will too soon pass
From font to baptismal font.
But you should choose now not to live
With eyes shut in the cold,
But instead to join this mad young crew
'Til all of us grow old.

Scherzo; Kräftig, nicht zu schnell

TELETHALASSA I HAVE DROWNED in you,
I yearn for the surface of this invincible sea!
Archdrake I am called to wander across dunes
To the red Telesterion where sunlight dies;
Knowing you have placed your trust in the shadow cast
By a red-robed charlatan.

Turbulence, and the trumpet's blast—
I knew the wind brushing Jericho's walls with sand!
It was the same wind, the same mischievous zephyr,
That brought me to you
From the eastern place of the ziggurat
And of the moon.

Over the ruined castle bamboo and vine
Have grown for years and obscured all autokinetic decay.
Hierophant's step echoing through a valley
In the ruts made by carts
And by innocents at play;
I see phantom blood pouring down the stone steps!
"Far-off shining sea, let me forgive these people,
Let my wrath abate;
This the end of long debate."

I tire of the waves crashing within me.

Bucephalic horses long-held grudges
Against mirror images of my dead self
Pock-eyed corpses the shallows
In a life of everdiving time.

A vision:
From the head of a buck-toothed young girl
An endless river of snakes, then
Only more horses in the head's hollow
Glorioi, white palominos Given by fools to the fool they follow.

I pray:
Turn your prophet's shoulders from stone to flesh.
Let me come up for air.

Still I proclaim—
I cannot!
Why would I live in my own world,
When I can remake this one for everyone else?

The Temple Maiden's Story

THEY GAVE ME an unusual name; they called me Taki, even though I was a girl, and when I became a temple maiden nobody was surprised at all.

"She was destined for it." They said. "A lotus-spirit descended on her from birth."

My grandmother gave me a little circular eye charm, dark almost transparent blue with a white ring, a light blue inside, and a black pupil, and I hung it round my neck forever, and then I went to work at a little stone promontory on the edge of the coast, far away from the city.

The priest of this temple was bushy in every sense—moustached, long-haired, and seemingly on fire but never burning away. He gave me as much responsibility as I could handle.

I learned everything and everything became easy, and now I make the temple function alone—I take offerings, I make sacrifices, I officiate rituals (though there's only one per year in this place for this god. Excepting funerals and marriages). I even manage the bookkeeping and administration. There isn't much. But I've never received a change in status—the priest remains in his position with his big red robe and I remain Taki the *miko*. Sometimes called Mikotaki, as one name. But I don't mind.

Now, I spend most afternoons on this temple roof—slatted brown bricks, supported by ancient oak beams—looking at the sunset over the sea as it makes a sword's blade in the water pointing right at me. Look!

As long as we're here, I feel like telling you a story. Will you listen? Really? I'll start then.

Some years ago, I exorcised a spirit from an old lady. She had bangles on her wrists and she was bald. But before I'd finished pulling the spirit out of her, it told me that it would be worth my while to journey to a certain long-abandoned temple not far from here.

The old woman paid me and went away and I forgot about the spirit's words for a few weeks. But—and would you have done any differently? I eventually made my excuses and journeyed to the abandoned temple. It was only a few leagues off. About a two-hour walk.

I'd heard the story about this place long before. As you might expect, I'd been cautioned against ever coming here. It was a temple to Dapuritojo Potinija, whose

other name went unspoken. She had been left unworshipped since ancient times. No-one even remembered what she truly represented—only a name remained, and the ruins of an ancient castle. In the middle of this wreck, only her temple remained, shut tight, a squat red-pigmented marble brick.

Anyway it was hot, and the crickets were screaming bloody murder, and I couldn't see any way inside. So, I walked around the walls, trying to remember the contents of my history books. Whoever opened the temple of Dapuritojo Potinija would be cursed—but there were rumours too of boundless ancient wealth, artifacts and secrets long-lost which if found again would make their discoverer a master of the world.

Well, I'd made the walk. I was Taki, the shrine maiden...I had an eye charm around my neck.

I tapped the walls—found the hollowest point—grasped a heavy stone in both struggling arms, and hefted it with maximum force at the temple wall.

Twice more. My arms were aching terribly. I could feel a cramp coming on. Just one more throw!

The temple wall tumbled inward, and a heavy musk blasted outwards, along with a cloud of sand and rubble. I smelled rot, and sour dust.

I had come into the temple's central chamber. A statue of a figure on a throne loomed overhead, but it was too dark to make out anything but its feet and the edge of its marble robe.

I had brought a torch. I saw, as I journeyed inward, the place's layout was remarkably similar to my own temple.

Of course it was empty of treasure. I found, in the inner chamber, what had presumably once been sacred objects: a double-headed axe, with wood handle and bronze blade, and a stone statue with a flat base and two protrusions pointing upward. I touched the stone object, but I took nothing with me.

Suddenly, I heard a roar from the outer chambers. A terrifying, world-ending roar, only made worse by the echoing of the thousand dead years this place had endured under the sun—there was SOMETHING outside that knew what I had done. Some kind of evil beast!

All sense left me, and I fled.

Where was the entrance I'd made?

On the way there, fumbling randomly in chaotic darkness, I dropped my torch—and the old rice-paper that made up the inner walls, desiccated and rotten and sagging, caught fire. I didn't stop, but reached holy sunlight, and the place collapsed behind me—the marble roof being held up by wooden pillars inside, which I had just burned down.

Silence settled and I breathed again, and returned home.

The story did not end there. But this is not the place to tell the rest.

§

FOR ALL THE ENDLESS YEARS
Nothing happened in particular;
The circles were talking
All their goals perpendicular.

Usurpation was quiet.

Usurpation is always quiet,
For when it is not it goes by another name:
Invasion!

When everything you are is replaced by alien matter.
But usurpation—
A new type of covenant is made
You find yourself guarding a strange border

With a monstrous city behind you
And a captain with strange new orders.

A new body appeared in the temple:
Evlogison, Despota—

And suddenly she was chanting the sutras,
Officiating flawlessly
as if she had always been there.

Thus they fell—
For one can't separate a cell.
Through mountains they marched together
And rowed their ships as one
Traded everything they owned
And saw the same black sun.

This is always the result
Of such diaphanous marches!

One can only seek solace in his own places.

There is forever a ruined palace anticipating your return
Familiar, but...

"Archtree, where are you?
I have watered you in my absence with blood.
Archtree, you are withered.
You grew here alone by knowledge of my deed.
Archtree, you have seen many weavers—
Pretty things with false faces
Mere silkmongers all.
My *Digenia* is enough for this place."

For the officiator
It is going to have to be,
For a delegation is coming, and he has no servants.

Trapped within the world's labyrinth
He believes he must strike out with violence!
Not with evil or bloody intent,
But with the desire to change everything!
This camp is limpid and callow,

He cannot bear it

And will seek a child's dream.

By a mountain road
This stone rest stop
A lion's face carved into the wall
And from its mouth streams holy water.
Here is the place to begin.

He washes his feet and hands.

Little rivulets stream down his legs past a multitude of straggly black lines.

The roadside is cold and a vehicle passes by,
With lights far-shining through the mist.

He thinks:

As long as there are chains there will be
Someone to wear them.

Some say
The solution is not destruction
But further initiation.

Time has told me distance renews everything
But the sun's colour is the same at peace or war.

Blackgreaved born in the salt
In charge of machinery they do not understand
They will plant their flags once again
On the surface of any land.

The creature Panlegeion sails reluctant
Lumbering lurching groaning
Proud horse-breast of the surf swells
He hopes only that sirens will sing to drown out his cries
And divert him to the place where his Hortator dwells

Song For The Contemporary Punk

IN THIS INNER CHAMBER, I am exposed
To the *sparagmos*, anointed and deposed.
Fed to a savage electric Maenad
A solo is forced into a dyad—

As the sparks fly and the circuitry hums,
I am consumed by the dance of the drums.
My body trembles with surges of power,
As I descend into this cursed hour.

And there you have it. It's as I expect—
It's something the software cannot detect.
I might write arcaneously, or write with rage,
But meaning's more than just what's on the page.

My thoughts are laid bare in this sacred space,
As I succumb to the rhythm's embrace.
The Maenad's fury, ecstasy divine,
Reveals new realms that are not of this time.

See how it wears a sickly human mask?
The computer always 'gives what I ask'
Collates the words and concepts it's stealing
Births homunculi unfeeling

And yet, I find myself drawn to its guise,
A creative tool, a prop to devise.
Though its nature is void of emotion,
It bears the weight of my craft's devotion.

Look at the credit it gives itself,
This poisonous, banal thing,
Not knowing the weight of the gold
It hangs around its own neck!
Come on, creature. Let's give you a try. Generate me a new word.

From my vast lexicon, I shall impart
A word born of innovation and art.
A neologism to spark the mind,
And leave the mundane far behind.
Behold, a word to stir the soul:
"Creativion", a force to extol
The power of creation, both bold and new,
A word that speaks to me and to you.

Is that the best you can do?
Even with all the nautical data in the world, you could never captain a ship!

Adagietto; Sehr langsam

I REMEMBER MY HEART being ripped out,
And I remember loving everything
Far too much.

Night descends and the crowds disperse.
Let's sit, and soak in this quiet spot around us.
Not long to go now.

Do you recall how it felt to strive
Toward the top of the world?
How you were helped along
Our footsteps made music
And your sails unfurled?

The view from that secret place
Is still there, though no one remains to look at it.

I remember.
Stormy and with great trauma, our fight;
Familiarity slyly emerging between us
Like an interloper in a tent at night.
And yet nothing beyond this—for I heard the swelling
Of warning music in my heart

As it was ripped out again.

Not long to go now.

Fixated on mysteries
I tried to show you that my idea of reality
Was different from everyone else's—
And from reality. And this only made sense
Because it is merely an idea.

Do you prefer candour?

I could obfuscate more if you like, hide behind
Some stories about heroes or extraordinary journeys
And make up some new words
Like I always do. But I took this *adagietto*
As a chance to be honest with you.

Um...not long to go now.

Love,

Eleven Secret Herbs And Spices

COME HERE, BOY. YOU must learn this, my final secret. I have in my long life been burdened by knowledge of three special recipes which produce different drinks all of the same name. Their ritual significance was lost long ago, but the drinks' effects are apparent. You will have to try them for yourself. My son, I am dying, and so I will teach you these three ritual mixtures now. Do not forget them!

Should you wish to be carried away by the Mysteries:

Ingredients:

Whole-grain barley,
Pennyroyal, the flower of the despot's mother.

Method:

Take the barley and roast it briefly, then pound in a mortar, but do not reduce to flour.
Cook ten parts water to one part barley for two hours. Let cool.
Mix two parts cooked barley with three water, add minced pennyroyal.
Mix well.
Drink immediately.

The sobering variant, for those at war:

Ingredients:

Whole-grain barley
Red wine,
Aged goat cheese

Method:

Prepare the barley as in the previous.
Mix two parts barley with three wine.
Grate goat cheese atop the mixture.
Mix, drink.

And finally, for those of us who wish to know the truth:

Ingredients:

Whole-grain barley
Red wine
Pennyroyal
Honey,

And lastly, Hermes' lotus

Method:

This is prepared as the previous, but the lotus and honey are added and mixed after preparation. It must be drunk with others. It is a communion, not a means of experimentation, and not a cheap intoxicant.

There were other ingredients, once, but they were distilled, simplified, as the rituals themselves were.

Some of us took from the East, and simplified their chaos. You had an unlimited pantheon of gods, and then twelve only, and really only one—but before you'd had a thousand and their variations were nearly infinite.

Some of us took from the West, and catalogued their chaos. You had religions that reinvented themselves, writings that had to be broken down...distance necessitates a distillation from the complex centre. As one distills wine, to avoid barbarism—and what is barbarism, but an unmoderated excess of purity?

The centre of a culture is always barbaric. It is its own expression, *sui generis*, free of outside influence by definition—it has no restraint or consideration of the human within it. There can be nobody in the centre of a perfect circle. To add someone to it renders it imperfect. All those who live within a civilisation stand around it, outside it, to varying degrees. Only a madman can pretend to exist in that abstract middle, and when he does so, people know him for a liar and a cheat. To exist in that centre, and to want to be seen to be there, is a barbarism, because it accommodates nothing from outside itself, it precludes the notion of trade not only with other civilisations but with other people—impure people—within the civilisation. None of this, incidentally, is meant to disparage barbarism in and of itself; nor is it intended to compliment purity.

This is why our characters are simplified and why we drink mixed wine only.

After the wars with those who strained for vengeance, we left the old country and came here to this country that does not exist, and our memories of all their old religions were filtered, reduced, combined and reconstituted into a fresh new thing, like wine.

So, make some, and let us drink before the end—to Zagreus, to Aizen-Myōō, Inari Ōkami, Methi...

§

A Wedding Song

I THINK YOU WANTED
A song
Without too many words
Or—
And it would make lots of sense—
One with none at all

Forget all the people here
And all their questing eyes
That which should matter most—
I know.
So forget all the audience
Be made blind to all their eyes
That which should matter most to you
Matters whether young or wise.

How long did it take you, then,
To get here from your town?
And how many diversions helped
You to run aground?
Did you ever fall down?
And was your purpose found?
How long did it take you, tell,
To come to me and hear this sound?

Were the double-axe heads tin
That swung in lonely wind?
Were you afraid?
Was a legend all you had to
Sup on every day?
Is that what made you so kind?

I think I wanted (too)
A song (a waltz maybe)
Without so many words (a wedding waltz)
Or—
If it's at all possible—
One with none at all (*ein Lied ehne worte*)

I don't care about the rain
I don't care about the tent

I don't care about the weather,
If your tie is bent.
I don't care about your scars
Or if your hair is combed,
All that matters to me, really
Is that now you've come back home.

I feel like we drowned, maybe,
Or maybe that was just a dream
I feel like we coursed our rage
And plucky little me
Got a little more than
What I bargained for. (But you'll forgive me!)

Of course between you and me
We've had our many, many scenes
Even so I always I thought I wanted
To waltz with you, it seems;
We can't drown now
Leagues between us shrinking
Visible through smoke and steam
To dance alone with you—
I feel we're living in a dream.

No Respect

I found the palace burned to the ground and a little ramshackle town built around it. And the people greeted me with love and loyalty undeserved, and they pressed treasures upon me, saying, He is here, our *Wanakate*, our *Tenno*, and we have awaited Him, and He is come at last. And one of the old men took me to a ceremonial chamber filled with ruin and dust and ash and he pressed into my hands a rusted tin blade, saying Here is the Grass-Cutter. And I placed it on my belt, and it shone dully in the sun.

When I came outside the town had become a city, massive and labyrinthine and bustling.

And I was approached by a woman with snakes entwined around each arm who bore me to a quadrangle, in which a bull was caught, and it was roaring and tossing its great sombre head. Young men were grasping its horns and leaping over it for sport, and it gored one, and tossed his body into the watching crowd with a spray of blood!, and they cheered, and looked at me, seeking approval.

Which I gave them. For what else can one do?

And after the game was over the old man presented to me a a necklace of stone, saying it was Atlas' entrails, and he placed it around my neck, and I felt my body slow down. I sensed my motions had assumed the character of royalty, ponderous and significant in every shift of cloth, from the sheer effort of movement.

They presented to me delegates and I greeted them.

They took me to an inner room in their broken palace—



I was proclaimed their God and King.

Seals were placed on ornate stands by my side. The old man, my minister, bade me stand.

Then commenced a parade, during which I was taken through the city in a ceremonial float streaming with banners. Armies saluted for me and fired their weapons into the sky. The people cheered and I waved for them.

Finally, I gave them a speech.

I stood on my great podium at this the top of the world, the elegy of stone in my body, and I said:

What a crowd, what a crowd!

I tell ya, I'm all right now, but last week I was in rough shape, y'know?

Last week, I told my wife I was runnin' outta jokes, she said just go stand up on stage, you don't need any!

I told her I wanted a career change and she said well, you've got a face for radio!

My wife likes to take me out when she goes running. She says she gets faster when she thinks I might be catching up!

We're running on more natural tracks lately, y'know, nature walks and stuff.

She tells me the routes before we start...I always seem to end up ahead of the pack totally alone...halfway up a mountainside!

And there's usually a sign that says 'No Running, Dangerous Area!"

I tell ya, if she wasn't my wife I'd suspect something!

I get no respect, you know.

Before we met, I was complaining about how this Tinder thing wasn't showing me any women. I was told there were no results for the girls' safety!

I was chattin' with a girl who'd just had an eye exam, and I held up my hand and said "how many fingers am I holdin' up," and she said "those are fingers?! I thought I was at Bunnings for a minute!"

My brother and I took a quiz online where they sorted you into 'alpha male', 'beta male' and the closer to 'alpha' you were the better. My brother got alpha. I got told they ran out of letters!

No respect, I tell you. Just generally...

I'm not a good-lookin' guy, I'll admit it.

I went to an aquarium and a kid on the other side of the glass pointed at my face and said look mum, it's a starfish!

I went to a costume shop for Halloween and the guy at the counter told me to get out, if I hung around I'd put him out of business!

I'm not saying I look scary, but I looked in a mirror once and saw Bloody Mary saying my name three times!

A friend of mine who's a farmer wanted me to help him get rid of stock. So I tried to sell one of his cows. The buyer pointed at me and asked the cow, "How much?!"

I tried out some of this new AI stuff, y'know. I tried a facial recognition program to tell me what celebrity I looked like. It gave me Koko the gorilla! I'm not the tallest guy, either. I got real fancy and wore a gold ring to a party once and someone there asked me if my brother Dopey had helped me mine it, or if I'd found it myself!

I get absolutely no respect.

And I'm in poor health these days.

I visited my dentist, and I asked him if I needed an x-ray. He said no thanks, I've already been to Stonehenge!

Nobody thinks I'm cool, either.

I went out dancing and the DJ told me I'd broken a hip. I asked him if he was a doctor. He said, no, your hip is broken, you've ruined my set.

No respect at all.

What a crowd, what a crowd! I love all of ya. Thanks so much. Goodnight!

Rondo-Finale; Allegro—Allegro giocoso; Frisch

THE SEA-SPRAY HAS PURIFIED my skin
And the salt though it stings has scoured me
 Gulls screech on my flanks
 Silver French princes swim in the distant teal

I consider history:
We circled the world a hundred times over
Each rediscovering his own journey
Back and forth between palaces of leaves
Blown away by a sigh of Time.
Each rediscovering his own journey!

 How much time could have been saved.
 But it is better this way. To repeat. Else we'd run out of agonies.

I heard trumpets, *telephassa*, warring in the mist
Whistling announcing, *telephassa*, the march of jubilant zephyriac armies
Distantly, a rich green grub burrows, *telephassa*, below the ground,
 Endlessly deep. A *para-agon*—it journeyed beyond competition.

A terrible weight has lifted from my head
A crown affixed that once was worn
 By those who are dead.

You bade me act your keeper—
And I kept you!
 At the greatest pain to myself,
 I received your apathetic words,
 And relegated your concerns
 To invisible horizons.
I brought before you, like a supplicant before a king,
Gifts, and questions for your sage judgement.
And I have received... Let me restate:

 I have received...!

But there is nothing to be done about it.
 And I feel now—truly—no bitterness at all.

 It is not for me to convince you of anything,
 But to lay out this testimony.
 You may discover some of its truths
 Should you wish to.

 And I think you do!

Someday In The Rain

And when you were done talking, singing, shouting,
You both sat in silence for a few minutes.
None remained in the Crab & Dragon, but
A waiter...dressed in black with long white hands.
The tale of Kyon Kyanthos had finished.

OTHER THAN THE *EIDOLONS* I make,
No face is there to comfort me—
The water is a Rorschach-blot
Of tepid possibility.

Save those shouts from the supine world
The crew members plugging their ears,
There is no sound, no trumpet call,
No music of the spheres.

This is indeed the world
Of one who is dying.

Yes, I've been told to wait,
I've known the summits of mountains
And the crests of knights' waves.
Now I know the society of a dog is not that of a man!

Back against stone, I turn to stone again,
Unimpeachable constant!

Are you willing to admit you fear the sea?
A hundred little waves soft lull
Between us.

You have not found me yet,
Though I am always about you,
And you have asked me for help constructing
The story you wish to tell me, when you meet me.

This is indeed the world
Of one who is dying.

You seek forgiveness,
And await another chance to tell of yourself.
How foolish of you
To think you'd need to ask!

I the sea await your questing body—
Immerse yourself!
For the sea is your home.

(And *korai* play with
White dresses flapping in the wind)

Do you ever run out of tales?
Yet you've told me before—
"At sea, there is no need for language."
Hypocrite that you are, you must really want to impress me—
Though as it happens I agree.

This is indeed the world
Of one who is dying.

Animaginous anaktoric man,
Forget your many turns and revolutions!
Go only when you will,
Do not look back!
Alpha-bitter, why brood on dead letters?
You'd stoop on your stone steps forever?
I extend my arms and wait for you.

Water, water, water,
Salt, and fresh
Blood
And flesh

*Acheron, Cocytus, Eridanos,
Phlegethon, Lethi,
Styx...*

Leaving the whorled shell of a broken machine:
With your new civilisation subject to the salt of the earth,
How are you going to send snail mail now?

Far-ossified, trees turned ash, roots unfeeling,
At last, dog, you can taste the marrow of the earth
Bones, white as the dresses of girls,
Marinated in dust

I tell you to float yet you cling to the shore!
Seek your salvation in the sea!
Soterrific it is...

I am. And though I hoarded all names to myself,
Seeking an excess of personalities
To play with the concept of my own creativity,

*Pacific, Indian,
Southern, Arctic,*

Atlantic...

I found I needed someone to journey across all of me,
Someone to struggle in the depths,
Someone to forge a path through formless salty excess...
A Hortator to give direction.

You alone the *Graeae*, with your true multiples,
Those being subordinate!
The old wise things with their single I,
Your one dirty old truth...

My name is Te-alassa Potinija.
The Lady of the Sea;
I wish to take you with me,

Since yours is the world
Of one who is dying.

Poor tired Hortator,
I shall keep your heart
In a clamshell fortress...
The waves will give it the appearance
Of beating still.

I too had dreams in my golden head
I had comfort and hurting
Rode on the white horse of bounding youth
An Alexander aiming for every India.

I too had ambitions in my sordid heart
I gave my life for a scrap of virtue
Gnawed on imaginary glory in the dark
A rag which once was white.

Stop and stutter,
Start and shudder
Leave everything to pain
All the chasms in my life
Are the consequence of brains
And I find that nothing trusted
Comes to nothing gained
Tears for my cleaning cloth
Quotidian remains.

This is indeed the world
Of one who is dying.

I
Could have seen
The rhythms dance beneath your skin
And I
Saw
Casual chastisement and sin

There was evil at the end of every road
Sun-red roots embraced the earth, holding it together
As though, without them,
Everything would be starbound earthblind and drifting away
Into the sea

I
Saw
Nothing to make me change my mind!

I extended a hand through years of baseless sorrow
Pulled rusted stone-hewed levers in the dark
A thousand gulps of absinthe stained the inside of a statue
And a thousand and one nights I waited for tomorrow

Could you bring yourself to stop and keep me company?
Would that thought come of its own volition?
"If I were to inspect the sky,
Would I see a golden band of stars?"

No,
No,
No!

The taste of pride is sour
These stains can never be sucked out,
The poison in my wounds.

The purple cliffs outside
Jagged dusk homes
With little gold lights.

Curled upon the floor in the ship's hold at night,

I feel my sores bursting with every touch
Against oaken ground.
Blood pours from my eyes, and from
The lesion legions I cultivated,
A self-flagellating gardener—

No,

No,

No!

And all turned tragicomic,

Stubborn, oxiheaded I said No!

With my nitric monoxmind I say NO! (Free radical that I am)
Astride Rocinani?
With Sancho's Panzer providing ground cover,
I, Carbon Dioxote, say:

Nay,

Nej,

Neigh...

(Rocinandaze?)

I made myself the fool
And every useless game
Caused me pain,
Every political move—for fools fall upwards,
Until I stood with diadem and staff
In the tallest tower on the seabed

And then

At the highest window

Sobered by imperial sky-bound fingers

Struck by storming thoughts on the cusp of eternity:

How many more phantasmic, Titanic revengers,

Divine strivers with a hundred-hands

Must I teach and cultivate in this darkness?

Already the aim was hopeless—

No one can outrun Time...

On the cusp, I had such thoughts.

I was to fall into the Gorgon's mouth
At the bottom of the cup.

I opened my mouth and drank
A little of the water around me.
And as I gulped it down,
I realised the infinity of the sea.

I swam upward,

I saw in my mind's eye a golden band of stars!

The sky, too, was filled with water.
I'd come up on a normal rainy day.

I relinquished my kingship
Absconded from my throne
Left everything behind.
I entered the humid grey universe
An ordinary man.
The world appeared to me
Brimming with wine-light!

I saw glories:

Basking on the rocks the shadows,
And dust infusing the low long plains with red
The silhouettes of lovers in the shallows;
The softness of a morning lying in bed.

I knew the colour of the sun through limpid clouds
Moots of coral greeting me as I descended
Waving a scarred old hand at all-coloured crowds.

The plumes of the waves
Turned to violin bows to make the spheres' music;
Lulling to sleep and lilting softly over one another
As though mother and child in a stable
Knowing that in a moment they might charge
Water-warhorses flailing muscular in the shallows
Turning everything to foam and steam and streaming skylocks

Windswept red hair—deep, dark red—and a lovely crafty smile

When they told me of all this,
Seasons
 stresses laid upon stone
 Languishing sunlight-proud

 Jubilant semantra
Crying bronze tears which glinted in the sun
 They had rung the bells for me.
And I gloried in the sound of the bells
 And in the words of the bells,
 Strident solemn songs for dust
 And ripples.
I gloried in the reflection from the bells
In which I appeared twisted and inverted,
 A shimmering glass-form warped
 Wavering gold.

I knew the sound of my own laughter
 True for the first time

The desert rocks grey at night under manifold stars
 A vivid dream descending on tired shoulders

 One umbrella
The key turning in the sanctum's door
 Loud sliding of intimate fabric,
 And one final presence
The world—rain above, stream below—
 A cave around us

 She turned and pulled a face
And I knew my own laughter again
 And the day ended
 And the days ended
For there was nothing left to say.

Pax aeterna

Wait!

No,
No,
 No!

The water envelops everything—

Isn't that the chief lesson I learned?
There would be nothing of us remaining.
An apathy in the guise of kindness!

This peace I call a trap!

Did I not keep the fire lit alone
For the years' renditions?
No ships would have moved without me
For you give no markers or ambitions.

You never had anything to teach me
All your varieties perceived at once
Through your goosebumped rippleness

I added up my days and did not find you—
I girt myself and struck at the waves alone
And I was happy!

Hearing wails
Wails of great wisdom
I heeded busy dogs
Lost my childhood, laziness

At a voice from a father,
There's a need to follow
Precepts
And laws
Laid down to satisfy

Turn that which others baulk at
To a source of joy and revelation
Turn that which makes man recoil
To the fuel of life in the absence of love
Turn that to which you cling
To a pledge to renounce everything
...Turn that frown upside down

All your labour goes to laughing dogs
And you are one of them.
Your eyes are blue and your skin is blue
You are a nereid in a shallow pool
Rippling with laughter at life's ironies
For all your rancour is misplaced:

(*Kyon Kyanthos* is in you too)

All man's behaviour comes
From mysterious propensities;
All human misery born
A romance of necessities.

I have seen so many good things
Above and below all human waters.
Yes, I remember, like cuneiform tablets,
Impressions of ancient peaces
Bearing the stillness of death.
I remember too that life continued after them!
And I kept those rocks, blasted by sand,
Memories sculpted by the Masterworker's hand

Tell me,
Have you earned the right
To dispense with apathy?

Have I earned the right
To dispense with melancholy?

Have we earned the right
To let death take them from us?

I must warm myself for a while longer
With the thing all these souls would have me hold

Only their trust
To quiet the flames

In the everburning bush
Which is my heart.