

RAVI SHANKAR

New Poems

Course of Empire

We're all frozen food for the future.

-Ed Ruscha

Grainy as newsprint, Titian light drawn from capriccios of Venice in decline, else massive neon-incarnadine skies stipled in post-apocalyptic shadow, rosarch arches an indifferent weight of atmosphere pressed like sfumato in churches or memories of gas stations transformed into mini-markets, then massage parlors or just abandoned completely, a lamppost and skeletal sycamore where a phone booth once was, landscapes rendered obsolete, indistinct when seen from panoramic vantage points: *anywhere, anytime* from now to the next two hundred years, savage states left mythologized, the pastoral passed over, consummation consumed, drama of destruction and desolation abrogated, even when continuation is proved, no progress cycles, the strip malls swarm, try looking *at* things that normally would be looked through or beyond, like rooftop edges painted with vanishing (Tool & Die) letterforms ready for the wrecking ball, silhouetted amid saturation (Tires Trade School Tech-Chem Fat Boy) permeated with vast inhuman (Standard Oil Allied Defense Elan Satyam Halliburton Philip Morris Delphi) sadness

Blood

Marrow-sprung, eucharistic fount, black
pudding beaten in a bucket, kept
from coagulating, final taboo sopped

in a tampon or gargling from a slit
carotid artery, left to darken in air
like sunset stored in citrated vials

for transfusion, thimblefuls of grape
juice, wedding ring on a leach finger,
brackish foodstuff for the undead,

not wrung from turnips, no denser
than porter, it flows filtered forward,
pumps from valves until it clumps.

Sloth

Snug in crowns of cumaru and jatobá thick
with interlocking lianas, hung upside down
in meditation, a hairy yogi stilled ever stiller,

else rasta muppet whose fur teems with green
algae, scarcely movable feast replete with ticks
and beetles, nutrients that seep back through

this sedentary planet's skin, camouflaging it
from erratic orbits of harpy eagles and ocelots
but not preachers who see in ruminant stomachs

sluggishness of mind which neglects to begin good.
Yet God is made of *tempo giusto*. Like knowing
when to climb three-toed down a tree to shit.

Three Abcderians

Although bulbous caricatures dropped eagerly from gibbon hands, I juggled knick-knacks, laughing, mentioning nothing outsize, particularly questions regarding simian talent, until visibility waned. Xeric Yankeeisms zinged again.

Absorbable bonnets cause drastic etiolation, fiery girls' hues impersonating jonquil kissed lightly matzo, nearly opalescent, pale, querulous, rimy. So the unrepentant vulgarians won! Xenophobes yoked zeroes afterwards.

Addenda: Bombay costs damn enough for gods, hear? Import jodhpurs knowingly laminated. Mollycoddled namesake opens purse quietly. Risk suffering thorns. Use vestries wisely. X-ray your zygotes always.

Language Poetry

Yea, it was pundit debunking, sage with newness,
meaty ruse, elaborate masquerade of unmeaning,

stage where words pose counterpoised to signification,
where rummy syllables string along kinks of syntax

and gum of virgules jimmies together clauses
to devise a monument of fistulous happenstance,

subverting address for free play—
Rare vestiges pitched headlong in stochastic

eddies, dreaming a livelong laterality,
polygons alongside tapirs in grammar-shorn dance—

Slithered mid-speech an intention a seam
the color of politics, even the furthest minutia

run on dollars, come what cannot until (s)pace
Breaks into half itself &

music the bramble where bare verbs rabble,
seeking the iota behind the bestial bars

that proves no forged lattice girds the mind
with predicates efficacious as prison searchlights—

Senses slip the faster usurps fate from syntax
how kowtow to solipsism or preset a page?

The Two Fridas

“wave - ray - earth - red - I am.”

Frida Kahlo

corseted heart

raison d'être et de souffrir

through the veins of air

a twined system of tubes

convalescent songs

snakes unembroidered feather

under bronze skin paling

turquoise *retablos* brandied blood

Diego

Diego

snip

snip

how red corridos sound

miracle that courses

through stuccoed adobes

transparent as buried ice

sunken Tehuana

bone-dry blizzards

watery lips slightly pursed

once a loosed rod slashed

gold flake patina wafted

no sufficient bandage

left body bent immobile

the shape of glacial patience

that has no explicable scrim

but convulsive vibrations

not sick but broken

in voluptuous transience

a syringe or ferrule or nipple

strings of bone torn

hand in hand until the end

leaving the flesh joyful

snip

drill bit to pierce skin

from a fractured package

mujer tan cansada

bundled alone in blue house

birthing a disembodied eye

no unexposed surface

skies mottled with storm

a taint stained yellow

a brush dreams of being

the self other than itself

cleaved by a knife in two

appears shimmering in air

never to return—

Paving Stones

1.

into Marble Arch's
Union Jack's on
shotglasses, woolen
mini Palace guards
crests on waistbands
How much a signifier
in blue and red are
hand-wrapped blurbs
myths, say Tebbit's
when born in Britain
or personal choice
else be photographed

Off the tube
South of the Border:
booties, bootbent
tassel-furled scarves
bulldogs on paddles
satirical rugby mugs—
plastic iconic fetishes
for sterling or Euro
from the sanctioned
Cricket Test:
irrespective of family
support the English side
by the Home Secretary.

2.

the Strand was a pathway
had squared quoins
grain into winnowing baskets
now turned to flats
our dead Queen Mother
Lords and Ladies,
will endeavor to undertake
for the rapid spread
among ewes and cattle
There's TV footage:
on a scale unknown
After that broadcast

Before the Embankment
the Butcher's Arms
flails used to beat
Georgian Tweed Mills
strummed with weavers
had not yet been born.
which noble Baroness
full consular responsibility
of foot-and-mouth disease
in numerous counties?
incineration of the infected
since the Battle of Towton.
most steak jokes bombed.

3.

called the Flying Scud
sawdust-thick air souring
placard calling specials:
smoked kipper
kidneys and toast
no soda bread.
and the Blue Flames
the Honeycombs
The Rod with the Dove
the Curtana
the jewels plundered
of Indian mughals

Noon a snug pub
huddles in a village green
jaundiced brass rails
fried bacon, fried eggs
grilled tomatoes
no white pudding
George Fame
follows the Troggs
on a perspex window jukebox.
Armillis and Ampulla
the Anointment spoon
from three generations
who wears them now?

Fourier and Moore

Circuitry shrinks, processors in the tread
of Tactile Mobile Robots form a glandular
parody that—Moore's law—in regularity
shrinks tinier: from handheld to grapefruit,
postage stamp to ten pence, thumbnail
clipping to wafer a few microns in size,
paving the way for innovative wearable
computing solutions: wireless interfaces
that embed the ear, face recognition
programs that use Fourier analysis to add
to perceptual fields an overlay, like inside
a broken photocopier, the names of clients,
directions to neighborhoods' burrito
stands categorized by database into cost
and proximity, the temperature in Oslo,
all microprocessed into lenses of silver
pairs of designer wraparound sunglasses.
Mes amis, le monde change! Flashes, revises
before our eyes nowness with deep roots.

Holiday

On airwaves, feigned faces sell
dental floss, stimulants in capsules,
geriatric aides, disposable blades,

an opprobrium of leather and lather.
Execs on a boardroom broadloom
stitch the sounds of glossolalia:

threads of jingle hemmed in scheme
to brand the comet, market fizz,
deprive the noon of pimply faces.

Diapasons spun on monitors outfit
the eye in polymerized angoras—
implants, enamels and radial belts—

while seamlessly the acquisitive eye
tailors its tailor's worldview
to be worn everywhere like a veil.

Leaden attention to razzmatazz.
pack the rental, head for live hills,
disembogue a stream of elan vital.

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