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ZBIGNIEW HERBERT, TOBIN SORENSON, HORACE, AND BORIS PATERNAK

RELEVANT FRAGMENTS

“A test of what is real is that it is hard and rough. Joys are found in it, not pleasure. What is pleasant belongs to dreams.” -Simone Weil

I do not speak your language. My mother tongue came to me painted like a whore, debased, afflicted. I could not receive her. I had no place for her.

Possibly, life is not so earnest, and reality not so real, and perhaps a skeptic only misses out, but I am unfamiliar with whimsy and distrust imagination.

I am American, and define myself by what I am not. I measure my stature by the gravity of abysses.

We are familiar with the morality tales; I carried the rattlesnake next to my breast, knowing its venom. I cherished the reckless faith that filled me, buoyed me.

“There are ways of being wrong that are also necessarily right,” says Ed Abbey, and Thoreau: “Certain forms of disease prophecy forms of health.”

I met one in the Chicago winter, and we soared down Lake Shore Drive windows wide to headlight tracers, each and all profoundly devoid of meaning. We skipped into the climaxes of songs, and when the ride was over we relished our vertigo.

Vertigo is aborted metonymy; when the being whole identifies completely with motion, action or identity, the mind is a projectile into the formless void. Vertigo is also rebirth.

Ken Kesey says that you'll always know one who has looked over the edge. She'll peer through you, in ecstatic terror—like noble Tobin Sorenson, a climber without a rope: “Heroically dull, witlessly bold.”

Language is metaphor, so why indulge in artifice? Words are artifacts, so why dig? “The worm also digs,” writes Zbigniew Herbert, and also this: “Writing—and in this I disagree with everyone—must teach men soberness—to be awake.”

Sobriety is commitment to the self.

I believe in Captain Marvel, but I have not yet found the word that transforms. My folly to seek it...

Horace: "Heaven itself we seek in our folly."

She sat on the curb and I squatted, an enormous moment before she could ask me to join her. Our smiles met in the warm cloud of our exhalations; we were compatible, and ecstasy, our mutual discovery, fled before us.

And who wouldn't give chase?

Existential crises are the unique and sordid indulgence of idle students and over-wrought thinkers. I do not rejoice and I do not condemn. I do not blame society because society, like Marx's revolution, only exists in the imagination.

And dreamers are drunkards.

I once rode the subway all night, wrapped in its racket, breakfasted on tacos and beer in Queens, and met the cold, gradual grey dawn convinced that symbolism is fraudulent. The weather cares nothing for our sorrows and elations.

But I hadn't seen the sun for several lifetimes, and when it emerged that day, it found me in a golden cascade of Coco's hair, and flung exquisite filaments of oblivion into the corners of the too-white room of my silent awe.

Coco I invoke thee.

I rear my shaggy mane in defiance of Patriarchy.

I submit to Matriarchy.

Boris Pasternak: "It is a great adventure to be a woman./ To drive men mad is a heroic thing." In a bureaucratic state, madness offers release from domestication, but few are prepared for confrontation with beyond, with the holy compassion to unflinching encounter naked self.

Simone Weil: "Love is not consolation. It is light."

And times are dark.

BUT

"That which gives light must endure burning." -Pasternak