

Stephen Mead

LEARNING LATIN

Eyes, blue
Breeze, shirt
Unbuttoned, fingers,
A face, chest grazing
Sycamore down. Skin
Love blood. Origins
Respired to this
Wind-linked proximity.
Pungent rushes, such
A thrust, immemorial,
Gleaning death, history
Breathed, relearned,
Recollected latin
Root rich, e pluribus
Unum, de facto good
Human, the other
World this is



CLOUDY WATER

Thanks to Adam Mars-Jones

I prefer not being able to see the bottom
though often I can sense, feel I have been there,
exercise imagination.
These are starfish & this is marble infinitely
pounded, smooth, soft.
That's how my skin is, weathered, beaten down now
but
so much in the fluid it's
transparent for reflections:
plankton, the fine, skeletally-elegant plush of
fins.
What seal noses, otter tails, gull images I touch.
I never quite sought
being mellow, considering it an erosion,
the mush-minded sentiments of sun country
propaganda. Why meditate
on lotus unless you can make the thing
spring
on fire, invigorate it to the quick?
This element, however, has taught me deeper
sensuousness, a shivering which slumbers
to spread outward in ripples, concentric,
within.
It's a remission, such
slow hardly discernable swimming or to simply
lie back, buffered afloat, adrift.
Liquid fingers
do their business, scribbling some love letter
on a bare chest, a bare
back. Let the print
cover, caress the face, eyes, every inch
of flesh & water go over, running off ink.

That's why it's so cloudy here: fathoms
of language, whispers written for a place
pain knows will eddy out, absolved
at the bottom, that
endless,
the beginning-less zone
of lips finding lips in
health & sickness.



OTHER VERSIONS



Of me parade in my fears
Of what you might dream.
I have seen their photos & the magnified
Negatives. I have read their mash notes &
Only in print (illiterate, tedious), does
The resemblance disappear.

Baby, am I too the carbon copy of some
Long ago ghost's ache?
If so, bless the aggression of my jealousy
Working your clay flesh.

If only the soul were so malleable,
The mind, the heart.
All of mine is the Karma Sutra melting
In abandon beyond technique
In the creed of ironing your surgical scrubs:
Open aortas full in our look.

Are your other loves as aware of such need
In our time, the passing headlines death
Spectres of ink?

I put blindfolds on statues, red ribbons
On chests, black arm bands as custom
For the unseen purple hearted legions of regimes.
I take your seed & wonder if it's spit mixed
With the liquor of another.

I iron, darling, I iron our scrubs
Before we pass, doing duty, in the stalwart
Wards of so many who are us:
Wheeled pietas

Peeling.

GETTING CLEAN

The tub's big enough &
if not we can
stand face
to face back
to shoulders or
lower curl
round
round as a
shell of nothing
so much as flesh



what's this?
and these?

they stiffen but
move two bubbles with
small noses circle lick &
grooves of the ribs a harp
of warmth sense search
the tenderness wash steer
the rub dub-a-dub love
the pole grows in
our midst an ocean
& I, entering
the current
the whirlpool
the bullring of
suds, should
surf surge or present
water lilies in praise
a coronation You
peninsula I lie on
the shores of or
deck the ship christened
to voyage so voyage or
rest in the depths calm

here here is your mouth
your eyes my hands
not asleep but full with
the gentle gales
on the foam-lipped mast.

UNDER THE SKIN

You may recognize this sky,
Airy green from what the landscape gives,
Not mint, but just as pungent:
Earth, earth in ascension . . .

As it spreads, shades pass across Africa
& both remain whole
Worlds of equal mystery, mystery & combat.
Here's Beauty's continents sticking it out:
Now the cliffs of Peruvia, chickens, goats
Herded, impoverished people managing
Drops of sheer blue . . .

Culture, the valley's cracks, is not sutured
To the spirit:
The operations by flashlight, the exotic
Humble stew savored after the five hours
For electricity allotted.

No. Culture/Spirit, the ancient graft,
Has become a single skin, individuals, nerve
Endings, quilted beneath the map . . .

Under ours' too, ships traverse, coasting
For the calmer, the deeper interludes
Between the fear which escalates
Violence & the fear that stays, a hostage,
Out of whose letters sand pours, sand,
A small desert star cluster glistening

From the farthest waterless bank.
Shores, do you recognize these horizons?
Oars, do you recognize the ships?
An ocean can be named by tracing

Where shadows fall, their direction on the rocks
& the waves . . .

Abraham, water under, above, feeding the linked
Skin, rock us to your bosom, let our strong arms know,
Be the cradle's motion for growing, for growth,
Still & again



GRAND ADVENTURE



Which life is this?

Like stars, a little snow's drifting over: flakes, flakes.

From them I settle down, now in a jungle, suddenly some
freedom fighter. Pretty interesting liberation, for a woman.

For once I can do more than cook their gruel or apply a soothing
compress when fevers proliferate. Not that such things weren't
enough. I'd be doing them still if all the men in my family
hadn't been taken, and "for questioning." None returned.

So what is this cause, just some delusion to which I may,
like a voice have some small part? This gun feels like power.

The militia comes in. I make my mark.

My, how death comes in, undistinguished, too quick to be sharp.

Here is my next phase, transported, a gypsy, to some gymnasium
ballroom, a dollar a dance. It's not much, but it pays,
pays for my kid's lunches, helps Mama fight the roaches
and the landlord, like these guys, my "clients," rather
lost and a bit pesky. It's amazing though, how easily
a smile may be brought to their faces. Only twice has someone
wanted more. The first time I just let it happen. After
the second I developed instinct, took a course and now know
how eyes can be gouged, throats broken, noses bloodied. Quite
useful stuff I never hope to use. Instead, I dream of leaving,
work at not being a victim while, hovering above, some new
incarnation waits.

Often I think it'll be a comic fantasy. I'll be a crusader
wearing some big furry pink rabbit costume hopping down upon

armies or, more importantly, their Presidents.
Mostly though, I plan on flying, unbound, high and alone.
I'll keep clear of civilization.
I'll consort with angels,
a celestial primitive
with very deep
if weathered,
faith.