

On Between Worlds

Within sumptuous landscapes by mountains and seas,
an uncanny performance unsettles our ease.
From the field to the ocean, the children appear
as both shaman and beast or as animal-seer,
as if taking some venerable animal form
from the totems that legends and sagas inform
to the ominous border of ocean and land
or the forest or plain upon grasses and sand
into something momentous of great transformations
where children and elements build their relations
and nature evolves in its sacrosanct purity.
Here, between luminous shafts and obscurity
dramas unfold of a magical air
that explain what the children and animals share.

In a rolling and whispering hay-bearing field
an entirely anomalous sight is revealed:
there are three little pigs, bending forward and lithe
as they gather the hay with their gloves and a scythe.
As they handle the labour of harvesting men
they're no longer the beast of the trough and the pen.
They narrate in their dignified vaudeville gig
the exploited travails of both farmer and pig,
how their bodies are property, bred to prepare
and repatriate all that the market will bear.
Their existence depends on a sale that is fickle
which slices their life like the sway of the sickle;
and thus, between grunt and a theory and whine
they rehearse the perpetual sadness of swine.

But the livestock can also ascend on the chain
that delivers their bodies for capital gain.
In the furthest domains where developers push
through the dry and extensive colonial bush
we're surprised to behold in the scruffiest glade
where the patchiest canopy offers some shade
how a pastoralist contemplates all she can reap
in the form of a frilly and Rococo sheep.
Both the tenant and landowner, shepherd and stock,
this impassive buffoon reinvents the baroque,
where the language of laces and grooming and pearls

is abstracted from fleece in its natural curls
and the links between decorative border and lock
are subsumed in the style of the prosperous frock.
Yet she sheep as the lonesome colonial wife
has abandoned her former gregarious life,
is alone in the bush on an igneous rock
in the absence of having her comforting flock.

The material bounty abounds at her feet
like a gorgeous illusion that feeds her conceit.

By the surf-beaten rocks of a coastline at peace
where the wind and the waves have abated and cease,
a remarkable bear finds the quietest nook
to absorb the ideas in a scholarly book.
She examines the pages with patience and care
though philosophy isn't the gift of a bear.
Like a Japanese schoolgirl in sailor's attire,
she absorbs the conceptions that scholars acquire.
Her accomplishments, though, bring incongruous looks
to the civilized structure of erudite books
as her nature is hardly so patient and mild
but unspeakably bloodthirsty, vicious and wild.
Thus philosophy opens its civilized page
to the predatory forces of hunger and rage
and the hermitage cast at the northerly sea
is infused with a fierce dialectical glee.

But then beasts come along who are joyful and smart
and who share their delights with extraordinary art.
With their affable humour and winsome urbanity
dogs entertain us and rescue our sanity.
Cheerful and clever, they also extend
entertainments to dogs that they see as a friend
and beguile one another with gorgeous hilarity,
eager to clinch their extreme popularity.
Here, in a garden, the debutants play
and with gestures express more than language can say,
how the love and the zeal for a happy relation
arises when greeting another Dalmatian!
They curtsy and bow for an innocent snog
while transcending the borders of human and dog.
Our affections are shared; we are loyal and bound
irrespective of being a human or hound.
For expressing our fondness by nuzzle or smooch
we're the same in the clothing of human or pooch
and this delicate couple who court in the park
are exchanging their graces by handshake and bark.

How the souls of the beast and the human join forces!
Compassion can also be witnessed in horses,
who help one another with lofty emotion
and pledge their support with unbroken devotion.
They might condescend; they implore and beseech
with theatrically sharpened emotional reach

and rehearse sentimental convictions and spiel
between fantasy, fable and truth and the real.
As they offer their succor, they whinny and pray
between theatre, mythology, archetype, play.
They are strange institutional beasts of a kind
that our infantile magic affinities find
and yet noble, august and portentous and grave
such as humans and animals seldom behave.

At the edge of a space or an epochal end
where the multiplied borders of nature extend
further hybridized species explore the absurd
in the form of a tragic disconsolate bird.
How this sad cockatoo seems unhappily far
from her habits before in that forest of char!
How the bushfires have harrowed the resonant glade
that she lifelessly pokes at in holding the spade!
It appears that the task to regenerate hope
is beyond the ambitions with which she can cope,
so her actions are oddly subdued, at the most
with a presence and power possessed by a ghost.
Like the owl in the forest as night closes in
and the silence gives way to the terrors within,
where she sits on a bough like a swing or a ramp
for her imminent flight through the darkness and damp!
She is ghostly but vigorous, a sinister brute
who inspires us with fear by her vacuous hoot,
an unnerving nocturnal reveille that she sings
as she stretches her merciless predatory wings.

But these garrulous penguins have none of the ghost
as they plan their next move by the wind-battered coast.
You can hear them conversing with sensible talk
in a gentle but firm philosophical squawk.
They have come from afar with the case and the gown,
dialectical doctors who ponder and frown
and determine the destiny written in history,
judging the future and shaping its mystery.
Such is their embassy. Soon they will go
and the world will proceed by the plan that they know.

How their prudence is needed by others as well,
like the camel who thirsts in the deserts of hell!
His impossible march of unfeasible length
has deprived him of water and spirit and strength.
The terrain is so glary and hostile and hot.
He will die if he doesn't move on from this spot.
He is dapper but doesn't have shoes much less boots,
which would scorch even him, the most hardy of brutes.
How we're fragile, so quickly exhausted and weak
in the force that we have and the strength that we seek!
It's the fate of the rabbits who come to the sea
where there's also no house or protection or tree.
Geriatric and slow, they proceed with great care
lest a sudden disturbance unsettle the air.

Both conservative, anxious, uncertain and stiff
they take stock of the scene by the treacherous cliff,
but adorable, feeble and timid and sad
as they quietly ponder what once made them glad.

Overlooking the clouds, there's a reindeer in dress
more sublime than a poet could faintly express,
by a feeling beyond what our language bespeaks
to unfathomable heights of the skies and the peaks.
The romantic absorption of nature yields thrills
which the child, in returning to nature, fulfills:
to extrapolate nature, the child has become
part of nature herself, taken in, overcome;
with her animal aspect, she thoughtfully trysts
in absorbing the infinite spell of the mists;
she reverses yet clinches instinctual conceits
in transcending those alpine emotional feats
and serenely takes rest at the top of the climb
to inherit the heights of the bourgeois sublime.

Then a similar grandeur is painfully earned
in a forest revisited once it was burnt.
A gorilla sits down in the hope to repair
her redoubtable spirits consigned to despair.
In the bushfire, everything live was consumed
and her history, prospects and kinships were doomed.
With a tragic, heroic and petrified stare
she takes stock of her loss in an old wooden chair.
She surveys the environment, almost a tomb
that she piously visits with justified gloom.
Devastation and ruin are all that she sees.
All the locks have been melted that fitted her keys.
She's the caretaker, sadly deprived of her charge.
Her estate is no more and her losses are large.
Though the forested property wasn't her own
it was here that her past and religion were grown.
Though her labour belonged to the land-owning master
it's also succumbed to the abject disaster.
Like grass-trees, however, the child in the mask
is entitled to claim what she wanted to ask;
there is life after all in the layers of meaning
that offer our vision perpetual gleaning.

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