

Painting Daybreak

come, wake, I'm painting daybreak:
draping gauze on tufted hedges
sketching yellow hills, promises,
Chinese radicals, drawing silk-screens,
scribbling odes ('Rose-Licked Gardens',
'The Drowsy Tortoise') living, charged,
like the novel, *Monkey*, a demon-charmer,
speeding slowly, letting life go,
a scrolling ink-soaked masterwork —
over Eastern trees of the studio,
answering rejects with erotic wishes —
I try out these cinctured tones,
this palette's a bounty — predawn,
pink-fleck clouds, perpetual Easters,
here, alive means livid, Jean Genet,
in love with the white-gloved acrobats
mocking Colleges of Category-Maids,
embarrassing your assistant-managing
nothings-in-chief: dropping pages, sedatives
& special issues, reminders, remainders.

I accept the brush, there's no obedience
no careful stillness, no staid insistence,
this here's now an everywhere, lingua,
ling chih, words burning ceiling to sun,
as yellows flow, fish-rich & streaming
strings of a land & air overture here
on seven I can see — 'Unmarried Time',
inventing lines to teach truer psalms—
thought is, finally, feeling, the sky is
another face of love & the sea answers
air in tides, tone & lines, verse circles,
abandons gray duty & dances, is undone,
stanzas swim in sins, desire embodies colors
colors con-fused to beauty, ignite the season's
dangerous return, annihilating fires of the satyr's reign.

Manhattan Ghazwa

Miss DeBelliss had skies in her eyes.
But I remained far from my nine-year old wishes.
I'd have run a dictator's triathlon to win her affection
and sold my sister into slavery just to pull back her blue curtains
and come to know a smoothness that could assure me (wondering 'is
it true'?) does Saturn have such glorious rings?

she led us in phonics and in phonetics, in posture and the Pledge,
she threaded my right finger with ribbons to remind me which hand
covers the heart when we talk absently to the flag; she even led us
to part the silence with occasional Italian songs stolen from a second
floor Roman— *volare, volare, cantare*. She handed out maps and names
for us to study: was it a fisherman's state, or a shape in cattle-herding
country? What was that state's favorite fruit? Did you sniff those
mimeographs like I did to catch the glue and the hint of her perfume
and also to ask, did your parents approve that permission slip?
Can we (one day) permit all participation? Will you sign here, allow
your son or daughter to take tomorrow's field trip, down, to the top
of the World Trade Center?

Permission granted, I got permissive with dreaming.
I could smell her even from the back of the yellow bus
as we passed a fruit market's wood, shattered boxes, Bronx River slicks
and I re-dreamed her as a Scottish queen & me a liege to her golden rings
imagining battles on her behalf as we passed a rage of hollow buildings
cindered like the structures of Berlin; or graffito of Puerto Rican nationals
further south, pentagon sidewalks that gray-carpet a border for parks,
driving a center lane through the looming grids of scattered buildings

till our driver told us this is officially now Manhattan, kiddies:
there are no millionaires in the Bronx and no liege for queens
and no cathedral to speed by on your left, no jewel shops to comet
to your right and no narrow infinity of traffic lights converging
to blacktop and steel-heights, where one by one, we entered
elevators of desperate compression.

the huge cement swath on the south tower's roof was no footprint
from a remake of King Kong: I thought *Lord, please, give me a blonde in the
center of any black hand*, and give up to me what we couldn't call *sky*
because *look!*, I shouted, *we can't see the sky because we are in it*
and a penny dropped from this high would land like the weight
of an anvil on any walker far below; yet a flower blown off with a wish
would drift far over the river and become the train and gown
of five wives toward your future paradise

*going up by burrowing down
skyscrapers rise to nothing
& no story's sweet beginning
can conceive a happy ending*

Miss DeBelliss moved to Texas when I was twelve
and married a plebian; I grew up writing fables on dice
and allegories of ships anchored by dungeons of fish
& I drew her in every image that I imaged: pearl-rung,
safely castled, forever regal.

I even fashioned her a bracelet made of Saturn's moons

And I recalled her in the fall after the *ghazwa*
riding the ferry out to love across the harbor,
the nun next to me weeping at the burning
rubble, huddled about her beads & praying
as if she were trying to comfort the saints.

I pictured Rumi-become-Aquinas, asking
who will go up to the mountain of the Lord?
who will breathe God in the breath of flowers
that opens every night across the sky as peace
keeps its vigil to kindle the emptiness?
now, let the morning air bring the presence that angels
in amazement will watch. Love is that river; drink from it.
Love allures us within the green wheat.

I think she'd be proud of my psalms; maybe she wondered
had I grown up to be one in the stairs when the earth dropped
its burden to hell? & did she catch the fires live?
or was she sipping soy latte on a Dallas freeway, singing
to her own Faith Hill song, while on this end of the earth I wished
she'd never left, silver roars came streaming over our city,
serenading the garish sun.

Yellow Fish

label the yellows: yellowfin, banana, morning sun, butter.
fish fritters, a glass of French ale on a windowsill.
sea-breezes change, sending cool, settled winds.
painters dab. violently, with love.
so she says, be generously abstract.
abstract is carnal.
representing is retreat. *c'est vrai?*
lemonyellow background, evenly canvassed, *oui*.
feels the heat of yellow in his hands, stroking the color brush
across: unsteady.
God is yellow and unsteady too. Aurora. Canticles.
she said color measures your own ability to live within what is.
Debussy strings yellow. Hear?
love is art. what Shakespeare sonnets: painting
in fresh numbers. so with seeing:
and then: your world goes yellow as the mood settles on you, opens
you out to a tone you have never lived with: ghostly in size, soothingly
deep, so soon your hand is soaring across the canvas in new time:
stroking gentle lapses of buttery yellow in wet lines: the flat definitions
of fish, and more: water, speed, aquatic swirls: and living all the while,
yourself in motion, pressing out shapes of worlds, dabbing and
drizzling morning sun for more: there: a new patch
of liquid sun about the fish.

Bouquet

I remember well even when all I recall
reveals its spaces in reverse—six years since
I last saw you—I see begonia brightening
& stirring your smiles—this close-distance
of fiction’s memories is dumbfounding,
eclipsing the wide April sky that isn’t
yet wakes me incredulous about sense
so sparsely somehow flourishing & by desire
the lost passion outgrows itself—colored like
the purple heliotrope that snakes about the
darker stems & struggles to be seen
in the orange bouquet you hold.