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Poems

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Poems

Abstract
THE SNOW KALI
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Once again,
the black goddess turns to snow
in my dream:
the sword in her right hand
now glass, the empty blood-bowl
crystalled in her left.

Dream after dream, her red tongue
pales into
the drought of blood in the land
as skulls fall off her gold chain:
From which emptiness will I hang?

Her veins break like ice.
'Only your blood,' she whispers,
'will cure this drought.'

O goddess
paled below fahrenheit: I lift
the sword. Something zero
enters my mouth.

*In Hindu mythology, Kali, 'the black goddess', is a manifestation of Devi, the Goddess, the essential form. Kali is associated with death and destruction and is depicted with a necklace of skulls. She holds a sword in her right hand and a bowl filled with blood in her left. Human sacrifices have been made to her, even as recently as last year.
AFTER SEEING KOZINTSEV'S 'KING LEAR' IN DELHI

Lear cries out 'You are men of stones'
as Cordelia hangs from a broken wall.

I step out into Chandni Chowk street: once
littered with jasmine-flowers
for the Empress and the royal women
who bought perfumes from Isfahan,
fabrics from Dacca, essence from Kabul,
glass-bangles from Agra.

Beggars now live here in tombs
of unknown nobles and forgotten saints
while hawkers sell combs and mirrors
outside a Sikh temple. Across the street,
a theatre is showing a Bombay spectacular.

I think of Zafar, poet
and Emperor, the last
of the Mughal dynasty, being led
through this street by English soldiers,
his feet in chains, to watch
his sons hanged.

In exile he wrote: 'I spent
half my life in hope, the other half
waiting. I beg for two yards
of my Delhi for burial.'

He lies buried in Rangoon.

BIRTHDAY POEM

Thirty this monsoon,
from the distance of a decade,
from the longer distance of
exile, I see my poems still
resurrecting the dead
who’ve multiplied like the poor,
my memory a hurried cemetery
whose last space my grandfather occupied

as he played Chopin and monsoon-ragas
with a sapphire needle of rain.
The earth turned at 78 rpm.

But I flipped the rain,
the monsoon warped in the sun.
I slowed the earth down to
33 rpm,
and he cursed the altered definitions of Time
— in Persian, in Urdu, in mouthfuls of Shakespeare.
When the earth stopped,
he wound the gramophone.
But the needle cracked, his stack
of rare voices broken.

Only his voice remained,
grating my memory with advice:

Be a Robin Hood of a man.
Steal from the rich,
give to the poor.
Be dangerous, like a legend.

Thirty this monsoon,

I look at my poems:
No, certainly not the stuff of legends.
Not even of a rumour.
Every rumour about me dies.
ZOO POEM 2

this is, rather, a prose piece on zoos, their nouns, their verbs: zoo

to ape: Ape. To ape is/to ape, don't monkey around. God's fool, the poet. God fools the poet. Aping.


to crow: as in nothing to/about. To eat. As the crow flies. Crowsnest. STOP (crowing).

to fox: Dumb like a. Sly as. The page itself, (out)foxed. The beer, foxy. To goose/you/goose.


to lion: eyes. Leo. The fifth. At the throat of the (lunar) bull. Or into: the mouth of. His share. Got. Gate.

to skunk: You win. I lose. You skunk. (You stink.)
to snake: it, down off the mountain, the tree. The lot. Or, across, or. In the grass. Not Eaton's, Eden. Or the other side of (Rattlesnake Coulee) Medicine Hat.

to wolf: the wolf-month, January. Don’t cry. To keep the from the door. Or in sheep's clothing. Fenrir, the wolf of Loki, one jaw touching earth, the other, heaven. Don’t wolf your food. Please.

CALGARY LOVER

And me, I shoot roses.

Holding the barrel to each blossom, I touch the trigger as if it might be a thorn.

The petals take flight at the whispered blast.

I protect myself from the tongues of outraged women:

: by wearing a parka
: by growing pineapples in Pincher Creek
: by hanging a black cape over the canary's cage
: by sleeping in a highrise
: by eating peanut butter
(it must contain no words. It must be pure. It must allow nothing.)

I carry a gun on the rack in the cab of my pickup

I shoot roses on sight.

CALGARY MORNING

Once I was happy. Once I made love to a pterodactyl, but that was before I was born. Once the silver knife of day cut my umbilical dreaming.

I protect myself from the mouths of disappointed mothers

by floating across the city under a yellow balloon.

By peeking into chimneys. By photographing fish from the air. By eating avocados.
By waving at graveyards
and pregnant wives.
By talking to passing
pigeons.
By spreading peanut butter
on my left hand.

The children reach up
to the start of the sun.
They lift the earth
beneath them.