

A Slick Set Of Wheels

by

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PILGRIMAGE TO THE BIG SUR INN

A legend for his company,
I heard

the man called Grandpa knew
in his time
Freud in Vienna, Miller in Carmel,
even Hitler the housepainter.

His cosmopolitan paradise climbed
the cliff away from the skywater
Pacific

(across the road, barbs
barred us tourists from grazing
rich men's shoreline ranches

There was room at the
Inn this time,
a bed in the antique shed,
posted:

no smoking, no lights
"NO BEATNIKS," no jazz

only the healthful serenity
of baroque strings buzzing
to his swatter's aging

beat. He grumbled
his help off the grounds.

I left
my breakfast wine and wafers

(a rite

for the Lord of the Flies

A HIPSTER'S HIPSTER

born and bred
in his mirror's glance
Brooke fled

to Paris
to peddle his ass stuffed with phalluses
of hash

through customs
to prove he could move
with Burroughs

the Great Beat Legend.

He came home
to flaunt his vicarious fame.
He came home

to fold
his master's voice into the great
first novel

strangled
on Old Bull's cold umbilical
and peddled

his ass
to the Aircraft,
a phoenix

of the factory underground.

RATIO

for S. Michael DeRosa

“He breaks the rules
of shape and space

A hundred to one against
my taste

Ratio sings

rules exist
to be over-ruled,
the heart
to give head its feeling

1.

(under the minor moon

Warring triangles of night & day
slash the margins, pink, rectangular,
ordered as hope, trash the rules

wedge them to canvas,
wed them to Taste

trash the symmetry, slash
the square void of sky
into trapezoids. the clash

chops the inmost square
into a churning sea

(the minor moon sings

2.

“Too many loose angles
too many loose ends

dangle like Taste
off the tips of outstretched
pinkies

Ratio sings

the full moon's fade
to polite gallery openings,
angles dangling
loose ends among friends

3.

(the minor moon sings
to E

The warring triangles wedge
together in front of the choppy sea,
a figure-8 feeding on itself

infinite.
To the left

Fischer's pawn checks Spassky's Queen
while her Rook looks helplessly on.

At right
a G clef

breaks the night, a staff
spokes rays of sunlight

(the minor moon sings
to E major dawn

4.

“so jejune”

rhymes with moon but lacks
its feeling

Ratio sings

the underdog's end
to cocktail art,
the ration of victory

struggle brings

THE TRANSLATOR-POET AT FORTY

still wears
worker's jeans & college leather,

still cares, still
works to share the perfect world

he worded to chords
of coffeehouse guitars.

But the
denim fades like his serenades,

the leather
ages, tired rages crack

his voice. His words
no longer his own,

visions
sung with others' tongues,

he withers
away with the state.

THE BATHTUB ADMIRAL

1.

(just a man
& his music

booms the *1812 Overture's* cannon
in wife-decreed silence over his soapy
sea. Fat Al, a jolly man, waves
his finger, turned baton, turned scepter,
turned phallus,

majestically

over his fleet to rub-a-dub-dub
the foes in his dreary office day
over the gunwales, onto the mat,
at the mercy of his sandaled feet.
This brave Man O' War at play

dreams

of being

2.

(just a man
& his flotilla

Civil Service Supervisor III.
Appointed provisionally, pending
his passing the Civil Service Exam,
he traded his sandals for wingtip shoes
and declared

"I AM"

all that he ever dreamed of being.
He brandished his club over the sea
of desks to rub-a-dub-dub
his crew to the same galleys
where he cowered under the power

of the Commissioner's pen. "Never again,"
he crowed & boomed his Bach, his Beethoven,
his Tchaikovsky's cannon voice. He boomed
home to his wife-decreed silence where

he dreamed

he was

3.

(just

what Fat Al always dreamed of being
before his dream turned fatal. He flailed
and foundered through his exam, failed,
and floundered through the sea of his
bleeding ulcer.

Rub-a-dub-dub:

a demotion to his bathtub ocean
where his silence booms over the gunwales,
onto the mat, a vanquished fleet
weeping at the feet of his empty
sandals.

He

dreams

THE SEX QUEEN OF THE BERLIN TURNPIKE

"coulda been
Little Miss Rich Bitch layin' on my yacht"

but claimed her father left
his inheritance behind
when the Mob's hitmen climbed

his trail. So,
she's the doe-eyed darling of the clipjoints

on the Strip. She flashes
her tits for tips from bikers
& lonely old men

in glasses
steamed with dreams of what never was.

Her nectarine nipples
tease me, her buns swing the breeze
that sucks up my buck

on her wake
of chestnut hair. She feeds my fantasies

the way I feed her lost
wealth---what I can afford to give.
But she still lives bitter,

broke, strung out
on coke in neon turnpike motels

& runs out on the rent.
While I listen to her story
to escape from my own

she pays back
the memories of her father.

A LUNCHTIME REUNION

(just between
you & me

the table

stretches wider than eleven years.
Wholesome milk and diet seltzer

sandwiched

(just between
you & me

we eat the past empty, nibble
hints at hungry presents

(avoid them

like rich desserts.

My fitness, your kid
the writing we did

(still do

the nights of reeling rites
at the drunken confessional

the drift

wide as time and table seems
politely past seaming.

"Next week, Bill?"

(just between
you & me

I'm busy too.

HAIGHT STREET, 1985

The row of dying health food delis
& New Wave boutiques
used to be the home
of the Summer of Love

But the Flower Children turned
Power Adults & left
the Freaks to stay

freaks.

"You didn't hafta cut him,"
the blond Punk spits
over his Pit Bull's bleeding snout.
"I got a gun at home & I'll use it."

A smirk slits
the Switch-Blade Hippie's
graying beard.

"I'll get mine too."

He holds his growling Attack
Shepherd back. The dogs drip
blood, the human threats.

In the Summer of Love
when kids flocked to the block
for acid & be-ins & crabs
they probably settled rows in the street

better than their dogs.

A CONVERSION (OF SORTS)

Nom yo ho hren gay kyo
is the mantra

the Nirchiren Shoshu Buddhist
chants next door, speeding
his urgent plea for serenity to

Ni donya ni donya ni donya,
one with the sound of one pipe
clapping desperately for repair.

Nom yo ho hren gay kyo
is supposed to bring

Dimitri the Tofu Buddhist
anything his upwardly
mobile spirit prattles for.

I'll own ya I'll own ya I'll own ya:
a young blond lover from Polk Street
poking him in a Twin Peaks pad.

Nom yo ho hren gay kyo
a fool's chant

I think, leery of false
faith, cursing for the peace
of a parkingspace on Geary.

Goddamn ya goddamn ya goddamn ya,
I rant at the sea of cars,
then suddenly they part. Hmm...

Nom yo ho hren gay kyo
---what a start, what a start, what a start!

SALES PITCH OF AN HONEST REAL ESTATE AGENT

the castle is nice
it gives warm walls
to tenants who keep clean walls
castles crumble
if they aren't kept clean
you'll do well
to use the outhouse
don't use the floor
there's no room
for an inside outhouse
the excavator didn't dig a foundation
the contractor couldn't build concrete walls
you will the walls
sometimes into shape
sometimes out of shape
but into shape is out of shape
you'll do well
to bring a blanket
for wall-less winter nights

CLUB MUSIC

They play the same old tunes
these jazzmen
& never rehearse. The arrangements
they play off the cuff
shine like the knees on a crapshooter's pants.
Even the dirt
of blues bred into standard tunes
repeats itself
like the laundry, like the dishes
like the wishes
for escape to new freedoms
in old routines
that bring the buffs here to live
on the bluffs
near the soloist's latest peak.

THE WIDE-HIPPED WOMAN OF OLD WOOD

The first time
my words went dead on me
I tried
 to make her sing
 what was left
 of my song.

I could only wring
her husky murmur
garbled as my own
from her strings.

I left her
to search for her song
in my voice.

Faithful
as a widow's memory
she waited
 for my words
 to grow joy
 from their pain.

Faithful
in her brown canvas gown
she waited
 twelve years
 till I came
 to her again.

My new words watered
her old wood to life.
With her now I sing
 our song.

A SLICK SET OF WHEELS

We kill time on the curb
across from the club with our slow J,
watching life pass us by

like a slick set of wheels,
like the slick set of wheels parked
here to parade its owner's fast pace:

V-8 with virgin pink lacquer,
the cornersand gritting the teeth
of tread sneering fresh.

We wonder if the polished dude
so proud of it wears a turtleneck,
a medallion & manicured nails.

What a place to park his boast,
so close, so bravely in our faces.
We kill time on the curb

long enough to watch old beer-bellied
T-shirt sag near our feet, crank up,
change into old tires & burn out.

LIVING IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

My father left my mother
and me
to finish the family
without him.

In her uprooted dream
she begged
phantoms of family & friends
to help us find our home.

Her twenty-seven year nightmare
tortured her sleep to waking.
I hammered our empty walls
together with my fists
so she could live

the life
that ate her guts and mine
to Cancer
after he left us.

"I don't have that dream anymore,"
she said

then left me
to flower her grave from gardens
we never grew

and wish
the old man would rot
alive
under six feet of roof.

A TALE OF TWO DECADES

1966

"Anzio, D-Day, the
Battle of the Bulge"

the standards

the World War Two drunk raises
along with his glass. He sings
sloppy praises of days gone by
like old Sinatra tunes. He grumbles
in his beer at the end
of the bar,

an archetype

of Theater: the Atlantic Theater,
the Pacific Theater, the Theater
of the Absurd of basic training,
of four years sweating his survival
in

"Iwo Jima, Bataan
Nagasaki, Japan"

Georgia's heat.

His rhumbas

rambling & drunken, recollect
rumbles from his past, the glory days
of battle with The Enemy:
soldiers fighting sailors for hookers,
MPs for freedom.

How timeless

his struggles seem, as lasting
as memory or fiction, fixed

in glory,

an archetype

1.

a memory, I say, that must be
preserved in the flesh, as the flesh
is presently pickled. Platonic form
must give eternal fixity
to those who served

the bartenders change
the customers stories
of glories largely unlive
with nothing better

(coming later

old men
recreated in new men's flesh
old memories
told in memory of the old
drunk's style & lack

of substance

1986

"Happenings, Be-Ins,
Teach-Ins & Woodstock"

the Rock

freak, veteran of the 60's, sings,
graying at the end of the bar.
A new veteran of old times,
times too old for the young to remember
or care about.

The new standards

he sings sound tame

as the wildest times of his life:
wind-filled stories of wars fought
without guns, the glories
of

"Kennedy, King,
Hoffman & Rubin"

pipes of peace & (mostly)
reefer

remembered

like the better world
he took

(more likely toked
away, the kids say)

for granted

2.

they take me, they take me
for granted, these kids six stools down.
They fix me forever,
a clown on a Teach-In Beach-Head.
They take everything

Blood Sweat & Tears
the Grateful Dead
the Establishment
this establishment

(coming later

even their B-52s
for granted, but not the flesh
of new mirrors
reflecting their sameness,
the tameness of their best times,

their lack

BALLAD

I know the women who sing sad songs
with voices not their own. I've known
their pain through Billie and Bessie.

They drink too much, just as I did,
make love to the men of their pain
in gin mills, in bedrooms, in living

rooms where the tables turn to shadows
with half-empty glasses and half-full
ashtrays crying on the arms of chairs.

I've been there. They've thrown me out,
with the music I bring. If I sing
them a song, it's one of their own.

THE GEOMETRY OF INTIMACY

Not your simple
Euclidean straight, this line
that connects.

In the sweat
of my big-breasted beauty
thrashing wet

bellies with
me & your wildly pumping
biker, we

make it where
we share the touch
of our tangents.

SHANA'S GOING TO DISNEY WORLD!

blast the banners swarming past me,
pinker than the St. Louis dawn,
pinker than the ruffles
on the five year old bouncing
out of place in the Terminal.

Who cares who's going where
when you've gone two days without sleep!
Who cares about this Queen
for a Minute the Network Wagon Train
circles to save of the Six O'clock News!

She'd be a princess at twenty, anyway.
Her joy overflows the cameras
that try to contain her. And her
few blond filaments---how few,
I notice---raise the morning gold.

I reach back, remember my cobalt-bare scalp,
remember the last roots of life
salting my mother's chemo-stripped crown
and the hospital's coast-to-coast call
last night. The dike of my voice

cracks with tears and a shutter.
I can't tell Shana's mother why
I pay her my five-dollar tribute
to the sun cheated out of noon.

FOR BEBE

only the memory remains
to breathe life
into the collage
of stills my cousin
gave me for Christmas

only my longing revives you
miniature junglebeast of memory
tottering your aging feline's aloofness
through the fragmented candid

a glue that makes whole
the parts of what you were

how he loves that cat
how he loves her
my inner broken record blared
while I tried spoonfeeding you
back to a life whose end
you accepted more gracefully than I

a death less cruel than living
though I beat my chest
against the inevitable

how I love that present
how I love that gift
of memory that remains
to breathe life into your absence

THE B-MOVIE PRESIDENT

Reagan believes he is
more than a B-movie
actor, but the future

he creates will judge
his greatest performance
by watching America

reruns on The Late Show.

JULY 4, 1986

A Grand Spectacle

bombast & bomburst

celebrates

the renovated Lady

1.

"whose torch lit the way
for the hungry, the homeless
the poor, the oppressed
to find prosperity"

Liberty Weekend's
figurehead winks
his cathode eye at

"the lazy, the shiftless
the beggars, the crazies"

(people like him-
self & his line)

A Grand Spectacle

taxes up, the poor down

nothing too fine

2.

for the Lady

a polished gown, a plated crown

nothing too fine

for her & what she stands for

"On this day

we rededicate ourselves
to what we have always

stood for"

A Grand Spectacle

3.

RED

YELLOW

BLUE

orange

green

showers the black,

confetti

for renewed nuptials

popcorn

for the huddled masses

money

spent on fireworks & film

enough money

to feed

the hungry, the homeless
the poor, the oppressed

for a year

enough money spent

so the lazy, the shiftless
the beggars, the crazies
can hope for a hug
from the Iron Maiden's

outstretched arm

4.

A Grand Spectacle

sends up the Lady

to carry the torch