

DEMON DANCE

by

Vernon Frazer

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THE SANE

are always
with us, the poor

bastards
that we are.
The sane

appease us,
try, to please us,

their patience,
our patience.
The sane

try their balanced
lives to balance

the rage
with which we eat
our skins.
Their
condescending kindness

is the madness
we measure with
our attacks.

The sane
are always
with us, the poor

bastards.

NICE PEOPLE

They're out there.

I can hear them
chirping like birds
at the feeder.

Day after day
they have only good things
to say

Jennifer's job
Jason's school play
aerobics

class, the MBA
program to help them
stay ahead

like nice people.

Here
in my troglodyte's cave
I rave because

they're out there.

I can hear them
gibbering, gerbils nibbling
their giblets

like nice people.

The smattering
that starts them chattering so
brightly slights

my appetite.
How unsightly my
hunger must
seem to them.
I'm surly? Surely.
I'm not

like nice people.

I'm strange to them
for wanting & finding them
wanting

for not wanting
to test the festering flesh
a life-grip

beyond
the modest morsels they claim for themselves
like nice people

as they block
the way to my hunger
just because

they're out there.

AN AFTERNOON BREAK

All morning the assholes
trotted in their kids. The office
oozed with oohs, ahs

& accolades just
for breeding. I snarled.
The fools! Their fertile

clichés birthed from
barren lives make me puke.
Or want to.

I break away
when I can. Like today
when I watched

a schoolgirl hand
a dandelion to her crossing guard
& broke a grin.

INSPIRATION

Two, sometimes three times a week
it hits, four if I'm lucky, more
if I'm on a roll.

The words sing
like music.
The sounds ring
like music

if it's poetry,
like poetry
if it's music

& the exhilaration makes me
god, or one with whatever
creative force there is.

The rest is

prose: a language less attuned to my inner voice.
It's rhythm plods with the pulse of a plugger's
puffing breath. Its virtue is discipline, not
inspiration. A jazz musician would call it prac-
ticing, a mystic would call it asceticism. Still,
the discipline builds novels & symphonies out of
the drudgery of the day-to-day. Those of us who
practice the prose of our art live to rise above
the prosaic

two, sometimes three times a week.

When it hits

the words sound
profound as music,
the music sounds
profound as words

each reaching
the peak of
its poetry

THE DINOSAURS

(on the stage

of evolution:

extinct,
they call us, or soon
to be,
the new ones, or soon
to be

as though
their thinking, their believing
makes it so

as they

sing

(on the stage

of evolution:

the Golden Dawn

of their rising from

the Golden Shower

they rained on us

the Golden Handshake

they trained on us

They know
their thinking, their believing
makes it so

as they

preen

(on the stage

of evolution

through jungles

of office ferns

discover

our caves of *homo novus*

They own us

now & trash our history

They know,
thinking, believing, the tribe
the rug of terrain

will be theirs, will make it
so, or soon to be

as they

dream

(on the stage

of evolution

the eggs

that soon, so very soon, will hatch

their selves

"ROCK N' ROLL WILL NEVER DIE!"

Rockin' Rob
in the DJ's booth
screams at the pane

of memories
of lost love
& cars

screams

at the audience,
his voice as leather
as his face

screams

as pocked
as his cheeks, chin
& past

screams

his perpetual protest dreams
his perpetual protest

screams

straight from his teenage heart

still

throbbing

screams

from the convertible of his past
through the dice-decked glass
of his present

screams

to the rocker

of his future

THE FIRST LADY OF DOO-WOP

most of all
loves the Moonglows
knows all

the others
too, loves the ghosts
of her

memories
of the better time
that left her

behind
to trail the fading
harmonies

the falling
leads in the autumn
of their

careers, or
winter. Her calling
haunts her

taunts her
with old memories of
the newly dead

the thread
of her own mortality
tied to

the faltering
leads of the voices
the bodies

leave behind.

DREAM LOVER

1.

until then

I'll go to

sleep &

work. Waking in the smoky sunrise
simultaneously sunset, I wipe the crust of dead
memories from my eyes, scratch the flint of desire,
rekindling it, even after our vicious battles

over her guilt
over my jealousy
over our affair

being over.

Four years after

"Your car or mine?"

in hushed tones

on the phone

---was her husband

listening in?---

I hear

her

here

"Everything will be
all right this time"

Here

in the living-

room

she stands between me & the door to work.
She's divorced now, she's free, she'll meet me tonight
at the jazz club, renew the beauty of once-
forbidden love.

(Still separate cars.)

2.

until then

I'll go to

work &

the sun rises over Knollwood Acres where
I'm living twenty years ago, her challenge fresh
as the challenge college has, had more in memory.

There's my new car from Now, out there in Then's
parking lot

windshield shattered
ignition ripped out

stripped.

Was it her

three kids who live

in the neighborhood

or her angry ex

avenging his past

in my past?

"I'll be late," I tell my boss over the phone.
"Forty-five minutes."

What!
Illegally parked too!

The tow truck

tracks my car

tracks my hope

into the gear-

grinding glory

of its sunset

not mine.

There's still time.
I've got alternatives.

The airline!

routes me to Chicago, damn them,
routes my apartment too. And what happened to
my present-day home? I phone my boss, tell him
where I am, "Never mind how I got there"

and how

will I meet her

at the jazz club

tonight

or ever?

Make my last connection to an old love's flight?
Make the past all right in the present?

Not tonight
not in the heart
of Chicago

3.

until then

I'll go to

sleep &

A NIGHTMARE

of her, of me,
of my jealousy
fuming exhaust
clouds over her
reunion. He's

more her type
than me? Then, we
shudder over the shocks:
my envy the engine,
the fuel her tears.

THE DREAM OF HER

continues,
winding green while the reddening sun
sets the past on an empty present,

continues,
winding through the tunnel of flickering
Xmas lights funneling me to Bill's

Xmas eve bachelor party, a bath
of amber light, where the dream of her
continues.

She's there,
dammit! Her red dress my STOP!
her green eyes the drummer's cue
to GO!

I go
restless to the next party,
a midnight family affair.
She's there again,

dammit!
along with some buddies from Bill's.
Add Robin, the college poet
with the John F. Kennedy wave.
Hasn't aged in twenty years. He's her
new man. He gloats.

She floats
through the amber glow from kitchen
to parlor couch to mark him with her
kiss, then floats, bloated & now wearing
green, back to the kitchen. Her color
tints his cocksure

smirk.
"Man, I downed some pills a little
while ago. They really put me out,"
the jerk says.

"If it was me,
I'd never hear the end of it.
And I never did pills, only pot,
and not every night."

But
Robin's also Rob, her potsmoking
shiftless son & I'm the one whose
aftertaste of
the dream of her

continues
past the discomfort of waking life,
past the discomfort of pride,

continues
as I huff outside. I grind
my teeth & my car's ignition

---"Who needs this shit? I've had it
with her!"---into waking. Which
continues.

THE ROOT(S)

I AM

YOU

&

YOU ARE ME

&

WE ARE

(different

UNDER THE LAMP AT COBALT BEACH

"Give us six minutes, we'll give you
the world,"

the doc's carny barker's pitch
crooned my last resort.

Six minutes a day I sunned
in white-walled

silence. On a padded steel tray
I sunned my neck

budding death like a second head.
I sunned

till the lamp rattled its metal
aloha. My hair

stayed behind, old disease
paid with a new.

"You gave us six minutes, we gave you
your life."

The teeth of my laughter glowed
in the dark.

DEMON DANCE

The night

CRIES

"Pharoah"

The night

CRIES

"Trane"

The night

CRIES

OUT

ANOTHER PLANE

of

EXISTENCE!

Via negativa

the mystics

called

IT

(what the

MUSIC

I hear

(Pharoah

&

Trane)

makes me

see):

point-eared Pans,
dancing, pink bellies
baby-round, prance on
cloven hooves from

rock to

obsidian

rock, dance

across

sulfur

streams.

The steam

rises, my ego
rides the flow.

I KNOW
THE SAME OTHER

in the moment

I
SURRENDER

to the

via negativa

to the

NIGHT

CRIES

DAWN

of
self-
less-
ness

sur-

render-

ing

to the

SELF

till the

MIND

CRIES

NIGHT

As the

MIND

CRIES

NIGHT

so the

MIND

CRIES

DEATH

in the

DEMON DANCE
of the
LOWER DEPTHS

Vinblastine sulfate

called the doctors

IT

(what the

CANCER

of Life

(THE NEEDLE

the

PAIN!

of veins

& guts

BURNING)

makes

me

feel:

the weight of
obsidian feet
crushing pink bellies
that danced from

rock to

obsidian

rock, danced

across

sulfur

streams

that steamed

TRIUMPH

over

the flow of Ego.

Bellies writhe
against the flow

of

SURRENDER

to

vinblastine sulfate

NIGHT
to the
CRIES
DEATH
of
self-
less-
ness

sur-
render-
ing
to the
SELF
in the
APOLLONIAN
WAR

MIND
where the
CRIES
DEATH

MIND
As the
CRIES
DEATH

MIND
so the
CRIES
NIGHT

(alight
in the
LOWER DEPTHS
a
DEMON DANCE)
CRIES

NO

vinblastine sulfate

let the

DEATH

OF

SELF

sur-
rend
er.

END THE PAIN

with

self-

less-

ness!

END THE PAN-

dancing pink, point-eared,
baby-round bellies
on cloven hooves
dancing from

rock to

obsidian

rock!

END THE PAIN

of doctors'

sulfur

& your screams!

SING!

The steam

rises from

the stream

as the

NIGHT

CRIES

LIFE

as I

dance

to the

via negativa

(no more needles,
no more pain)

to the

DEMON DANCE

of Pharoah
& Trane

SING YES

to

ANOTHER PLANE OF EXISTENCE!

SING YES

to the

DEMON DANCE

of eyes

touching sight

in the

DIONYSIAN MIRROR!

The

NIGHT

CRIES

LIGHT!

The

MIND

CRIES

LIFE!

THERE OUGHTA BE A LAW

"The time to end this abuse
has come"
rolling forcefully
off the tongue

of the former city councilman,
now second-term state senator.
As he stokes his public's fire,
his noble profile fills the lens.

"A federal law will mandate
all control"
of matters that might
hurt us (him

at the polls). So strong,
so resolute, he offers up
our lives to stake his race
to congress, passing

the buck we'd spend
better without him.

BROTHER PROTOPLASM

for Michael McClure

SINGS

his lyrical paeon

of

ONE-NESS WITH THE OTHER

SINGS

his hyperbolic beef panegyric

of

PROTEAN PROTEIN

our

MISSING LINK.

THINK

ABOUT IT!

Think about
the carbon chain crossing the phylogenetic plane:

HORIZONTAL

NOT

VERTICAL

HORIZONTAL NOT VERTICAL

a

new way

to

THINK ABOUT IT(!)

FREE

from the highfalutin philosophy

of

benedictions
interdictions
maledictions,

ALL FICTIONS

of the

OUGHT

that

OUGHT NOT BE.

Instinctively,
it appeals to me
as it would
to any creature's

SHARED CELLULARITY.

WE ARE ONE!

THE HEART, THE SOUL, THE BELLY!

At the herb shop and the deli
of
isms & schisms

SECTARIANS SPLIT(!)

(different but same)

over

"WHERE'S THE BEEF?"

between

the Many & the One

a divisive didactic tactic
rarely well-done.

WHAT A RELIEF(!)

to hear

UNCLE MEAT

from his cell proclaim:

"THE MINK SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH"

MANNA'S MANIC MELODY

Here. In
my corner

(a SoHo Apple slice)

I

create

I

perpetuate

a moment
of self lost
in self

BEYOND SELF.

Here, in
my corner

(the Big Apple)

I AM

MANNA!

Cracking the rush of ecstasy

I

create

I

perpetuate

a moment
of self lost
in self

in the sea beyond Self,

my corner.
Here for all

THE BIG APPLE

I

create

I

perpetuate

the maverick artist's manic intensity

a moment
of self lost
in self

BEYOND SELF.

I create, I perpetuate

here. In
my core

near the Big Apple's rot

I

call the shots

I

CREATE

I

PERPETUATE

situations, reputations
complications

the angle of the dangle
of the freaks who show their thing

at the tug

of my alarm gate's string.

I CREATE

I PERPETUATE

the poets & musicians

I

CREATE

I

PERPETUATE

my thoughts

my will

MY

BEING

a moment
of self lost
beyond self

IN SELF

when I call

here from
my corner

(the Apple's core)

"LAST PIECE. LET *ME* PLAY!"

SONG OF BAOBAB

(thicker than water

the bloodroot,

Aunt said

straight from Grandma's soil.
But the boil of blood in me burst
when mom & dad's devilry salted
their Carthage of common ground.
Vaulted beneath their dying branches

I tore my roots
from the family tree.
Now they grow
outside of me.

(thicker than water

the bloodroot

call to

fall on my limbs. Plucking
dry leaves of memory grieves me
more than my bereaved Aunt's
lost opiate. She plants me
in her garden, not mine.

I tore my roots
from the family tree.
Now they grow
outside of me.
(thicker than water

the bloodroot

call to

grape the family vine.
Her old wine leaves my roots
thirsty for air. Bloodroot,
like Grandma, is dead. I drink
the end of my salt-grown line.

I tore my roots
from the family tree.
Now they grow
outside of me.

DREAM HAIKU

The little sports car!
My father gives me his love.
But my bass won't fit.

BUBBLES BRUCKNER

bottled blonde above
running black fishnets
running up flesh-firm thighs
to her secret place

("of birth, Bo-
gota, ha ha.
Gotcha.")

reads her fuck poems
to the rowdy crowd
ready to romp inside

her lusty alliteration
clever twists of viewpoint
& position.

Her verbs bag
like old boobs,
longer

than this work
bears watching
as she bares her

swatch for
the horns so fondly
stalking her form:

words not deeds on display.

BEDTIME STORY

She had nothing
left to give, she said,
not even love.

Her heart gave out
six months ago. Now, pills
sustain her pulse.

I told her
the wounds of my past had healed.
I was ready

to rub
our battle-scarred bellies
in one last act

of triumph
or defiance
or lust.

She had nothing
left to give, she said.
Not even love

appealed to her.
My appeal drove her out
of the room,

crying. I tried
to tell her I wouldn't try.
She had nothing

left to give,
she said, not even love.
Then, she gave in.

B-MOVIE LOVER

Saturday night.
On my way out to see

Fatal Attraction. Right
before I open the door

the phone rings.
I screen my answering

machine. It's my ex
& I pick up.

A SPORTING AFFAIR

One & the same to me,
she said,

knowing the hold she had on me.
I tried

again, tried to explain the boxer
throws real punches, knows real pain
---but keeps his dignity in defeat

while the wrestler fakes his holds,
fakes his pain---but takes
humiliation as his beating.

I tried
to make her see the difference

between us. But her crossed arms
blocked the cross of my pride.
She choked my bleating

throat, pile-driven my heart
into my head & threw me out
of the ring. Bleeding,

I cried,
You just proved you like wrestling better.

One & the same to me,
she said.

AN OLD-FASHIONED BREAK DANCE

Her toes
curled roots to the earth
while I
scissored my steps through

the sky,
Icarus without feathers,
Icarus
without wings. Too close

to my sun
for her comfort, yet too near
earth to fall,
she shimmied our sudden

rapport.
The next time we danced
solo.

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 END

The bathrobes
we swap so shyly
at my door

say more
than our whispers then

Vernon Frazer's poetry has appeared in numerous literary magazines, in his chapbook, *A Slick Set of Wheels*, and on four recordings with musical accompaniment, *Beatnik Poetry*, *Haight Street 1985*, *Sex Queen of the Berlin Turnpike* and *SLAM!* *Magic Realism*, *Massacre*, *Nude Beach* and *Plain Brown Wrapper* have published his fiction. Frazer's nonfiction has been published in *Batteries Not Included*, *Coda*, *Cadence*, the *Hartford Advocate*, the *Hartford Courant* and *Poets & Writers*.