

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Molly Fisk: Echoes and Mirrors

Molly Fisk · Wednesday, May 29th, 2013

Molly Fisk is the author of *The More Difficult Beauty*; *Listening to Winter* (#4 in the California Poetry Series); *Terrain*, a collaborative chapbook with Dan Bellm and Forrest Hamer; and the letterpress chapbook *Salt Water Poems* from Jungle Garden Press.

Cultural Weekly is proud to premiere these poems.

The History Lesson

As you undress for him, pull the mother-of-pearl circles one at a time
from their bound holes slowly enough that he can hear the diver splash
in a distant ocean. Begin to remove the slippery layers of spun yarn:
flax whose fibers were threshed and beaten, soaked in long summer days
until they softened and became pliable, bowing to warp and weft. Don't rush.
Let him feel the heat on his back. Slip off this delicate silk that carries
the rocking rhythm of wheels and slap of wind in a sail in its memory,
not salt but the shadow of salt, not sea-bird's cry but its echo.
Don't speak. He'll understand or he won't how the living world has given itself
to this moment: cochineal of beetles' wings, onion-skin gold, indigo secreted by ants
darkening the dye bath. Cleopatra wore these clothes, Eurydice, and Helen,
they were always made by women, deft with shuttle and loom, retting, knitting,
stitching, tatting. Spinning miracles light as air out of nothing to cover clavicles
and nipples, the smalls of backs, the fierce thighs, embellishing dreams
with gold thread and moonbeam so now, as you drop the last shred
and stand before him, he's every man and you are every woman who ever lived.

A Theatrical Death

Maybe it was Saturday but no one knows for sure.
In the house alone. Fell face down as if to block
a scene from Marlowe, one arm flung out, hand upon
his heart. Minor melodrama: neither a comedy of manners
nor a tragedy of blood. The details oddly comforting:
Near his feet, a tub — miscellany of back-door stuff,
who knows what. Because it was still upright,

the coroner deduced he died instanter, didn't struggle.
 (Didn't kick the bucket! Get it?) Probably returning
 from a second-floor screened-porch smoke.
 What happened? answered by the contents of his pockets:
 two half-packs of Camel straights, three lighters.
 We could have told them that. We who loved him knew
 the Bics got replaced before they'd totally run out.
 And if anyone had looked inside the crumpled paper,
 next to whole cigarettes would lie the halves and thirds
 he carefully returned to inhale later. He was precise.
 It was a way to hold his world together. He would have
 liked his death, despite not having time or anyone
 around to ask, as Alfred Jarry did — and we'll never know
 whether in English or in French — for a toothpick.
 — *for Oakley Hall, III*

Tahoe

The way ice melts in a glass, diluting
 dregs of gin or tea, chilling the last mint
 leaf, the vague hint of quinine that lingers.
 An hour later someone gathers up
 abandoned plates and cups on a silver
 tray the caterer provided, carries
 it all to the kitchen, Bach Cantata
 still playing. Slowly the sun sinks behind
 Jeffrey pines and the lake takes on its slick
 blue-black late-summer evening hue, waiting
 for moonlight. Ready for the next wedding.

Café

Wind lifting pages of Sunday's paper.
 Jays arguing high in the trees.
 Voices tender, sentences carried
 from table to table. Laughter.
 Sunlight. It's all rent paid for living
 in the house of yearning. Loneliness
 filling your white ceramic cup.

***Cathartes aura*, Carrion Crow**

We come here because April wind carves a path
 over the crest and down-canyon.
 Our ancestors taught us any place is as good as another
 but this one's ours:

shimmer of heat off flat manzanita leaves in summer.
Sit in a lightning-struck
oak or climb the thermals, sniffing what's dying,
waiting for dinner.
Primaries, coverts, semiplumes, filoplumes: still
as ghosts we stand, and silent,
our open wings steaming after rain.
There: high up, a glint and the vee of shape
— six-foot span — the vee of color,
practical, hideous red-scabbed head.
Brother to condor, sister to buzzard.
We know you don't love us.
Cathartes, in Greek, is "purifier." Give us,
o give us your troubles,
they will be picked clean by tomorrow, unmarrowed,
relieved of their weary flesh, their bones.

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