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* * *

Standing with all my might beneath the stars,
I lose myself in those dear olden days
when Mum would call to supper through the dark—
then all the world was simple, clear and straight,

the years were bursting up before my gaze,
years of a stormy, virile, fearless youth,
there was a mighty, still uncrumbling faith
and in my heart of hearts a great hope grew—

Now I know fear, and would not rather not;
for any faith I've lost I do not mourn;
what's alien in me feels strange no more;

I'm not ashamed of shallowness and rot.
But I like to revisit still at times
those days before I turn in for the night.

(Sonnets the Second, 1993)

* * *

The child has paused forever by the gate
and scampered off—forever, a small boy.
He'll grow to raise a roar and then abate,
he'll roam and love and taste a crumb of joy,

stand here, grow old, have children of his own;
he'll preen himself and, in a thin year, starve;
and live; and stare into the nights with hope,
grandfather though he is, to fly to stars

on freedom's wings; he'll stand here; sunk in thought
he'll muse at snow; he'll stand before himself;
toothless, he'll munch at pointlessness and pour
time in his glass; and never, always, then,

be more remote than any stretch conceived;
he'll lie upon his bier, a cold deaf clay
—the hall steeped in the scent of somber wreaths—
and stand, a boy, forever by the gate.

(Iambics, 2000)

* * *

This afternoon, befuddled by the wine,
I dozed off in my garden. My bare feet

went tramping through the sky; a parakeet,
the breath of memory, perched close behind

my ear to whisper of pornography,
so that the bees came settling on my lips
to feast upon my smile, while cloudgirl wisps
were blushing in their innocence at me.

I woke up when the gentle sun declined
behind the hills and when an iron freeze
—like fire on a wound—reached in my shirt:

above, a deep and empty universe
had already sucked every bird inside
and, gaping, hung enormous over me.

(Iambics, 2000)

* * *

A stone is glowing in the low soft light,
no silver piece, and slowly peters out;
the first of village windows flash to life;
the sun sinks down between two teat-like mounts;

in woods, the broadbacked wind has had its rest
and hit the road again; the quiet song
of girls, unhurried, folds into itself
and ceases but still faintly lingers on,

and all is as it's ever been—I'd shout
the unknown name of an unknown sweetheart
to shake the staircase, ancient and worn out,
which leads into the cold and purple skies,

but I've a mask I will not stir without,
and I'll not bare my heart at any price;
my gaze bent far beyond, I will exult
as I burn time and watch it turn to dust.

(Iambics, 2000)

* * *

What I believe in is the primal bird
in knickerbockers of an ancient cut,
pacing the farmyard where he preens and struts,
exalted by hens' cluck and squawk and stir;

and I believe he's—dubiously—right
when he crows from his dunghill to the sky

as if he'd burst in flame from sheer delight,
and then the dazzling picture fades a while;

he takes, the primal phoenix, long to wake,
as anyone who comes from nothingness,
and wakes up to himself and to the gaze
of choristers who cluck their praise of him—

I state my credo in the primal bird
—I, fledgling, all my life in swaddling-clothes—
my credo in his mighty primal word
by which he called me from his inmost throat

to be on the outlying edge of time;
in one who hones his beak on wintry ice
this side of parables, outside the orb:
a single peck, just one, and I'm no more.

(So to Say, 2007)

* * *

The wagon-driving woman calls to mind,
one starry night, still other skies and stars:
another horse had measured then the miles
of other roads in other steps and yards,

the dawn traced out still other towns to greet
the eyes of both, their skylines lined with gold,
another winter stung with other cold,
the year was nineteen hundred six and three,

and all was different and a different ring
was in the laughter from a roadside inn;
the cart was sometimes pulled by a huge cat
and rarely did the harness touch the track;

a different blue lay then on distant fields
of other kingdoms, other continents,
and, doubly other, is recalled with grief
and in the memory of someone else.

(Couldbe, 2013)

* * *

Over the town lies still another town
and where the town hall stands, there stands one more,
the picture has been neatly copied down,
each cross as cross, all gold ones made of gold:

in two eternities they glow from spires

which bore into the night skies overhead,
through both a like—not selfsame—winter spreads,
just like one painting mirrored in another;

two railway stations flaunt a fountain each:
 each fountain boarded up
by the two mayors, so that nymphs, twice three,
would modestly conceal their naked butts;

where two black bridges span a river each
 —as if from hopes to memories—,
two figures plod away through double heaps
into twin snowdrifts of two Christmases.

(Couldbe, 2013)