

### Ralph Bakshi at the Citizen's Bank

I'm waiting on line, minding my business,  
 royalty checks to deposit in hand,  
 liking that nobody here has probably  
 ever even heard of *Fritz the Cat*, content  
 that the fever to draw and draw  
 and keep on drawing finally broke—  
 trust me on this, I can take it or leave it—

when the built black-haired woman,  
 some kind of sub-manager  
 with whom I've had a run-in or two  
 about hidden charges and sneaky new fees  
 (though always across a counter, chest-high)  
 marches up to one of the tellers—no,  
 no one marches in what she's wearing—  
 snip-snaps across the linoleum floor  
 on heels reinforced with rare earth metals  
 smuggled from China by criminal gangs,  
 or else they would splinter and put all our eyes out

and yet as if lightly they're bearing along  
 geometries fabulously more extreme  
 than any I've dreamed of, let alone drew,  
 sheathed to bursting in taut black fabric  
 scootching up thunderous trunks of thigh,  
 scooping down slopes of gigantic bosoom,  
 ready to split from the pistoning pressure  
 of the double-wide pumpkins that define her behind—  
 she's one of my own people freed from the page  
 with the news that I *still* haven't gone far enough,  
 that there never will be such a thing as too much

and I watch her, with that sinking gladness  
 I'd almost but not quite forgot all about,  
 knowing that banking the Citizen's way  
 is not going to happen for me today,  
 my drawing hand needs a pen so badly  
 I pause at the counter that's on the way out  
 where one is tethered, stuck to the glass—

it anchors me for a moment in place,  
 but the head of the goddess startles around  
 at the pop and skitter when the base yanks free  
 and follows me hustling out double doors.

Plains Weather and other poems

### **The Bacchae, June, Alberta**

On a cold dawn run by the black lake's shore  
 snow still heaped in the lee of firs  
 low mist seethes like a bad idea

glides across the face  
 of the waters  
 seeping wisps  
 over broken road

and you hear the reckless rider gallop up behind  
 what the hell  
 but turning to let them pass  
 you're wrong

it's a mother elk  
 recently calved  
 primed to stove in with one quick kick

the head of a wolf that might swing in close  
 to her black-eyed tottering all-in-all

and she's cut you off by the low thorn brush  
 wheeled and with a wedge of hoof  
 split hard air like a billet of wood  
 in front of your forehead

and you try in what little Elk you know  
 to tell her you come here not as a wolf  
 although in the fall you stalked her father

but her tongue deserts you

so plunge aside  
 and break the mirror  
 the lake has made  
 for the sky  
 from a glacier

and learn to your bones what it costs  
 to cross  
 a local god

## In the Glass House

*“The cylinder, made of the same brick as the platform from which it springs,  
forming the main motif of the house,  
was not derived from Mies,  
but rather from a burned-out wooden village I saw once  
where nothing was left  
but the foundations and chimneys of brick.”*

—Phillip Johnson

On the springtime coverlet of a little Eden just after sunset  
the box of glass floats

and the master builder, alone,  
bored with empire, bored with excess, bored  
with getting away with it,

imagines himself a prince, back-lit, disrobing,  
teasing his subjects

who crouch in the bush like refugees.  
*This land is my land.*

##

Somewhere out in the dark the family tree blossoms  
laddered with shrewd poltroons  
who pitched Mannahattas off the Palisades.

Old money new money  
money accruing it  
never stopped . . .

In the massive, shuttered childhood homes  
the Daughters of the American Revolution  
passed for parvenus.

Now the prince sheds veils that shimmer of abalone,  
tarpon scales skimming in moonlit pools.

*This land is my land*

##

Plains Weather and other poems

Not all of the pure products of America go crazy . . .

Some live forever  
and grow rich, grow richer, praised to the skies.

Before his pampered chin grew whiskers  
aluminum made him a jazz-age Croesus,

the protean century's chosen element  
shiny ubiquitous light fantastical  
spinnable as silk, spun worldwide into

safety razors, throwaway cans  
fighter jets, shining skyscrapers.

Rich as Proteus the god  
he grew, immune to limits

the Depression for instance  
and ordinary life

transcending pedestrian rights  
or wrongs, free to float

an ecstatic excursion descending on Poland  
in the blitzkrieg's vanguard

burning villages  
thrilling the night

*This land too*  
*This land is my land*

##

Then home to celebrate the ruination of the Jews—  
print panting tributes to *Mein Kampf*,

throw bricks of cash at Huey Long and Father Coughlin  
avatars of radio hate scouring American prairies and hollows

and trick out muscled Nazi squads in custom fitted uniforms  
swooning to witness their strutting marches  
erect through the squares of Homeland hometowns.

Plains Weather and other poems

The money flowed and bore him up.

He stockpiled weapons and flirted with learning  
to shoot

##

When it became more widely noticed that these enthusiasms  
stank of treason

the money served and the talent too  
to float him up and out of harm's way

the postwar Proteus morphing into—  
no architect, merely—but more  
and more the transcendent hero of material culture

the One to decree to each new generation  
what is to be  
the next Big Thing.

##

As the impudent mandarin  
forgives himself everything

the new Canaan in need of mandarins  
forgets the unforgiveable—

celebrating the brilliant Glass House,  
his see-through palace

great wink at the world  
the joke nobody wants to get . . .

*This land is my land*

##

But entranced this soft summer night

all alone in his gorgeous deceptions  
the great man

Plains Weather and other poems

is suddenly spooked:  
naked and still, in view of the trees.

Now gather shifting mobs  
of shadow.

And he hears behind the mosquito whine,  
tree-frog racket, suburban cough  
of a car turning over

the click and whisper  
of baffles and dampers:  
history, not entirely hushed.

##

He slides open a panel in the façade  
flees the crouched and listening world.

Before him squats the cylinder of brick  
like a factory smokestack sheared by a tank round.

Light startles a brilliant frame  
through which he slips

and disappears.

On the chimney's far side  
a hearth is blazing.

To the ghosts on the lawn it looks as if  
at last he too

has walked into  
an oven

## Of all seasons

Take a walk in the rain  
to clear your head.

The crotch of the maple tree bubbles and foams  
where the grooved trunk plunges into the mud.

Stranded worms stretch and writhe in the road.

Crocuses, bursting out of their bulbs,  
bulge from the dirt, insist  
that you look at them.

The woods pulse at the edge of sight,  
a bloody mist of reddish buds  
pushing, pushing into new light.

Of all the seasons in which you might learn  
that your son is a faggot

why spring?

##

Lunch was a bust.  
Asparagus, lank, with tender tips,  
a seasonal treat you've always savored,  
lay in its oils on the plate, abandoned.

Not going into your mouth again soon.

Inconceivable that a boy you sired  
should come of age indifferent to cunt,

should reach in the night  
for a cock not his own.  
Yet there it is.

And who is completely surprised?

The delicious child who climbed you all over,  
demanding to be tossed around

and turned upside down  
and tickled to delirium

Plains Weather and other poems

became with the years more slippery and swift,  
 a quicksilver trout darting out from the banks,  
 suddenly shooting downstream and away.

Was it you yourself with your fond, greedy touch  
 that set in motion this metamorphosis,  
 from loving eye of all delight

to surly stranger, form-fitted semaphore  
 in teal and lime, swiveling in a dancer's pose,  
 this boy who never, in your sight, would dance?

##

And now the world will swallow him like a sweetmeat,  
 he will disappear down the maw of the world,

invisibly drop in a thawing glacier  
 flushed away in final darkness,

drawn down forever in bitter salt,  
 lost in the chaos of an arctic sea.

##

Or make himself a tidy life in the city,  
 scads of friends and disposable income,

unperturbed to be who he is,  
 admired openly, openly liking that,

living in some lithe and lightfooted way  
 as alien to you as Zanzibar, Mars,

yet not quite unimaginable, still . . .

##

And should it come to pass  
 in the fullness of time  
 that such a boy's life and its pleasures pale

and his announced intended  
 drives up the street with your son—  
 and which of them will be at the wheel?—

Plains Weather and other poems



and presents himself, manfully  
or not, on your porch,

will you be expected to invite him in,  
to hear what he has to say about things—

to learn, in time, in greeting or goodbye,  
to kiss the cheek of this self-same man

who habitually takes your son in the ass,  
or, as it may be, is taken by him?

##

Oh yes you will  
and if you are lucky  
if you are good  
you may learn  
to like it

for love

in its many unfathomable forms is a thing  
the one thing

devoutly to be wished

**Plains Weather**

When you wake up  
if you wake up

will you see the ceiling has flown far away

or maybe just into the muck pond  
down the road where cattle cool their shanks  
and switch away the flies, except

the pond's been sucked up to the sky  
as well?

The threads that came from Hong Kong or the new place  
they now make the shirts that celebrate  
your everlasting Oklahoma City Thunder—

will they come apart in shreds as fine  
as sphagnum moss

and flutter on the updraft high enough  
to find their ways back home?

Oh gosh I hope so.

Had about enough of you,  
and this heat.