

*Selfie w/ Quantitative Easing  
and other Poems  
from a Landscape of Great and Unmatched Wisdom*

- Selfie w/ /V.A. Hospital, Portland, Maine
- Selfie on the Border Between Us and Them
- Selfie w/ Quantitative Easing
- Song of the Paramilitary Checkpoints
- Selfie at the Grave of Albert Camus

Selfie w/ V.A. Hospital, Portland, Maine

I don't come for this, but when I hear  
one of these bad dudes, a lobsterman, an ex-convict,  
often one and the same person, sent to prison  
for beating a state trooper with the trooper's own weapon,  
when I hear someone like that speak with a catch  
in his voice and walk his way through the moment,  
all of us silent, then I know the truth is among us.

"I look at the obits, and sometimes you recognize  
somebody's name," he says. "You know,  
so-and-so died unexpectedly—that's the preferred locution.  
That's all they say: *died unexpectedly*--  
Well, I know exactly what that means."

And when another says he was *camping out*  
in a tent for a month in a state park  
before someone suggested that he was *homeless*,  
the laughter rolling through a room  
full of adulterers and murderers and sex-offenders  
seems to blast destiny through the roof.

And I think of Lawrence, done with all that  
Arabia stuff, grabbing his duffle and boots  
to muster forth and be counted again  
as one among the regiment.

## Selfie on the Border Between Us and Them

My obtuseness frightens me. I am helpless before it.  
I can't find a wrench for the bolt I seem to be.  
There's no grasping for a lever of language,  
no torque or turn of phrase to make the job easy.

The senators, meanwhile, tallying the votes,  
the snow of history falling, confirm the world to come:

Two fish are swimming along. An old fish passes by.  
"Morning boys," says the old fish. "How's the water?"

The two fish continue on their way, and then  
one fish turns to the other fish to say, angrily:  
"What the hell is *water*?"

Obtuseness never "arrives." You just swim through it,  
which is why being wrong, being terribly, horribly,  
*ploughing-through-the-bodies* wrong  
must feel exactly like being right.

## Song of the Paramilitary Checkpoints

Scratch the surface and the inevitable retires  
behind a story slash accident annealed in the fires  
of history slash coercion: appearances govern rules  
the rich keep cutting through on their ship of fools.  
The first to watch steel bob like a *waaay* too-heavy  
cork, well, that was [displacement] a real good day,  
for some. Today *rare earth metals* aren't even rare--  
just flush with all that's solid melting into air.  
When I say toss me another magazine I don't mean  
the thing you read but the thing you put the bullets in,  
Okay? Just looking for some clarity—understood?  
It's common sense that works and doesn't work  
anymore, esp. at the level of the cosmos, the quark,  
the country. But, otherwise, I think we're good.

Selfie w/ Quantitative Easing (Dancing  
with The Mnuchin to *Danke Schoen*)

Someone's gluing miniature cowboy hats  
on pigeons in Las Vegas.

*Danke* for that, whoever you are.

Meanwhile, Liberace's on the television screen—  
the bouffant of hair, the sequined limousine,  
like a rolling disco ball, the blonde boy-toy,  
the cape and ermine-entranced McCoy,  
the candelabra as big as a Christmas Tree.

In the desert, one feels truly free.  
One feels extreme religion coming on.

I track this to a mountain top, talus slopes below,  
wolf bush on the high bench. This could be religion:  
wherein a breeze, a gentle, quantitative ease  
absolves our demi-gods (or their proxy LLCs).

*For fun, why don't the rest of you  
sand this mountain down,* says the Mnuchin.

*Well, that's going to take some time!*  
I want to say, but don't.

The wind blows sweet fragrances of pinon pine  
in the shade cast by the walls of our abandoned city,  
where a conquering army rests its horses and men.

The army smells of beer and Aqua Velva,  
but mostly beer, their shields glittering in the sun.

The captain creaks in his saddle, leans down  
from his horse and with signs and gestures  
asks: "Whose city was this?"

We blink, and shrug. Nobody knows.

*We have an ice chest, I say. We have sandwiches.*

[stanza break]

The Mnuchin asks, *Who wants to be saved?*  
I raise my hand. I don't know why.

*I was being rhetorical*, he says.

Anyway, there's a catch: no water here in the desert,  
so, for "baptism," we improvise and dance a bit,  
me Ginger Rogers to his Fred Astaire,  
and when we do this nifty little dip,  
the congregation cheers.

*Just say yes to everything*, says The Mnuchin.  
*That's what I do*, he says, oiling his hair.  
*Oh, but just look at the time*, he says,  
flicking the shoulders of his black tuxedo,  
flecks of golden dandruff sparkling in the air.

The Fates watch this from a luxury dirigible.

Down below, the streets are empty, silent.  
It's the moment before midnight  
when the executioner's hand wobbles a bit,  
like the flutter of *ekstasis* I feel, my darling,  
whenever I think about how to explain all  
that happened to us, right down to the funny way  
our pigeons, of late, seem almost to *mosey right along*  
beneath a pencil-thin mustache on the moon.

## Selfie at the Grave of Albert Camus

A little off-putting, that title, but at 2 am  
jet-lagged, the window dark as the oblate  
glass of a turned-off television, tv dinners  
somehow still sitting on the tv trays

of 1960, the options appear infinite,  
if also, mostly, oblique. Put something down,  
you tell yourself. Let time do its thing,  
but try, if you can help it, not to concoct

a placeholder, call it a poem, and hope  
nobody and you notice the difference.  
Do the same with your life. Or not.  
The decision, always, is yours alone.

The world remains a demented poem  
stuck on itself, on the lunatic particulars,  
the way a gravestone, in a blinding flash  
of tautology, says: *Here lies A is A,*

hard kernel resisting, even now,  
the woven flight of a swallow  
into symbol, sunlight into cedar,  
the cicadas, the old couple in white

outside the graveyard who, upon  
seeing us approach, ask, in French,  
“Camus?” We nod. “Take a left,  
and then straight on, to the right.”

\*

My epitaph won't say, “This isn't  
the worst thing that ever happened to me.”  
That one belongs to my friend Rick,  
and he's not even dead. Mine will try

to note, across an endless afternoon,  
the shock of recognition in the heft of stone  
beneath the sun, of work, still, to be done--  
of camps to close, and Nazis to defeat again.

-- Lourmarin, France, July, 2019