

Pattie McCarthy

These poems are from Pattie McCarthy's manuscript, *bk of (h)rs*, based on the medieval genre of (roughly) that name. They evoke an ancient but still-operative aspect of our day-by-day existence—the ritual observation of its passing, day by day. The form suggests that there's something remarkable in the very unremarkableness of the quotidian that is worth exalting with ritual. Despite elements of continuity between our time and the Middle Ages, I think what makes these poems compelling is that they take us out of ourselves and our world and offer us a hint of utterly alien. The slight oddities of McCarthy's sharp vocabulary and phrasings carefully direct our view through scenes whose colors are heightened by great distance, scenes that stimulate the imagination because we can never quite entirely see them. McCarthy also honors the medieval concept of the page, acknowledging the importance of its visual aspect. By creating her page as a balanced and dynamic composition, she stresses poetry as something not only to be read, but to be seen—to be seen as it is read.

—Cole Swensen

Matins

blue, then. again she is—bending. against
 a gilt-checked backdrop, palm fronds.
 there is the denial of the senses & then
 there is the obliteration thereof. she came
 back to life with the relics of sweat on her
 tongue & strips of fretting fabric,
 something you lost unrecognizable in her
 hands. textile fragment :
 removed for restoration.
 suspended & broken folds of her mantle.
 to cover, to cast off.
 given that we will re-assemble
 given that we will pass things without notice
 : a torso from a deposition, given its posture
 : a series of heads in profile encircled
 by a tendril meander.
 the more—the more—the more—your
 unlimited cache of rapt faces.
 s o g i v e m e s o m e t h i n g
 t o c o v e r m y e y e s .
 all open doors are nervewracking.

all the makings : the bones of a saint, black
 shoes on the bedspread. reliquaried your
 weight, a fall of hair. she's gone to ground
 & found the hive. they were, of course, all
 necessarily sometimes daughters.
 that desire should be relinquished
 upon the veil.
 the clerestory as choice & not-choice.
 alphabetically I was a cinch & cut
 you out from the philosophy.
 “(instrument) for taking the stars”
 that kind of singlemindedness
 smacks of bad behavior kept behind teeth.
 all these things are one day sore. here
 where everything is rolling out from green,
 as if you could find a central spot, to still be
 still. the other green was reached crushing
 new wild violets & mixing massicot.
 something you lost & the manner
 in which it is lost. & so your eyes are
 painted the color of a dark coat at night,
 frantic with absence & struck by return. or
 should I say, struck with realization of it.
 shall we meet in the after ?
 some strange comfort, such as it is.

Lauds

sometimes the city is there, sometimes
it is only fashioned there, & sometimes
one cannot make anything of it.

if there's a distance, console me with that
it's always equal.

what isn't worth having or pinches
limits. anyone who grew up behind
the wreckage of a pastoral screen door.
the eccentric treatment of the heads : low
foreheads & emphatic eyes. attenuated
in high relief : linear treatment of drapery &
the agitated, fluttering hemline. she has this
distinction : burned one june thirteen-ten,
some years after her book :
& what could she be given ? if she
were given all that ever has been
given & shall be given, this would
be nothing in comparison

hover, how I envy you that.

: the shrines tumbled, lamps pale
(an omen—)

when a streetlight burns out as one passes
(that happened several times last night).
the candle as jester : the book, the bell—
they will say it as though a shirt pushed
up over the ribcage. as though so
simply breakable : now

make that true again.

he answered—the girl will catch
an apple with the lap of her skirt.
the three of them, a gaggle of homonyms,
conceived & carved as a single
element within the drama of the scene.
judging from my jaw, I dreamt of you.
bare & nervous. her only chronology
given to us by these two burnings.

your name has become a beautiful excuse
at the top of the page. aspersions & the like
cast. yet all are in fine fettle. said as though
we met with our mouths.
as in to sharpen : from the needle. an ounce
long pepper & one of turmeric, two ounces
grains of paradise & the same of steel filings
all in a powder—an electuary with honey &
taken about the size of a walnut. at night
& morning. good morning.

Terce

they hand it out & we take it
because it is given.
I have taxed the imaginary you
to its dissolution.
groan is akin to grin; sigh is unattested.
again, there are three & they are linked
each to the other & to their book
with an interchange of color & aerial
perspective. again, there are three in her
digression. not what thing
is experienced but how somesuch thing
is experienced. of late.
we would do well to consider this.
there will be no intermission
& the knowledge of this is the crux.
all that time spent in train stations—those
timetables kept, his every & only one.
he met every train & I envied him that.
his eve is prone—
but pleasant enough
looking & on her belly among

seedlings. the only surviving & broken
bit of this particular tympanum. he left
a signature—which is considered unusual.
she was made similar to ether.
: in fact, whenever one has a hoarse voice
without any infirmity, they have
secrets & are hence
shrewd. but if this throat is forced
somehow to give clear sound
: that person will die soon.
tears for a fiddler
s i m i l a r t o e t h e r
the eye is composed of fire & water.
the eye is dark off-shore & always at night.
his eve is her contemporary & the word
she used was “ensnare” — partly hidden
but almost swimming & about to speak.
or whisper. which, via
an old & dubious etymology,
brings us again to sigh
(which you insist is an exquisite dessert).
there is an impossibly high white staircase
which dominates centerstage :
& someone will surely climb it
& will climb it more than once.