

The taste of it

What's to be done though with a floor of pure cement,
even if it has pretty flower-motifs of flowerpot-red?
Only when vacuum years have past can licking start
along this long despaired of, broken-into sole, just as
a glint of light is caused there solely by a film of grease.

Whenever the smell of damp - complex whorls of mildew
on stone and wallpaper - asserts for good its immortality
around the limbs in cotton and water-green terlenka
(as the skin is called), there's no more kitchen
in the house - no tap of stainless steel that
spouts at the encrusted sink and no
inaudible fan-blade in the pane on which
no azure worth the name's been pasted on.

Just as a cavity can suck, a minimum of suction comes
here from the cellar opening. A water surface, dark -
which to disturb a pan of chipped enamel serves -
catches the afternoon light as in a baby's eye,
but gives no reflex. Predictability and empathy
will have no place here. The stranger, visitor appears.
Your very own jewess, hidden in your outhouse.

Five steps, I still recall, this little step-up to the vaute
where a bunk with a stinking palliasse
looks into the diaper-young eyes and then pretends
he's laughing though (*it is singing in a tiny head*)
he's dying and in pain.

Five steps can sometimes turn out
five too many. Sometimes stomach and guts only function
to testify their strange existence: hidden although real,
deprived of any name and full of small cramps, wind and gripings
for which no remedy exists. (*This knowledge blows, relieved,
when it throws up.*)

Time that's leaked away in this sink would seem (*it stays concealed, never before displayed*), to have eluded measurement. For does

not departure (*even as it flops into the stream of the emotions*)
go in slow motion, more despondent than a July day,
and does it not last, as anticipated by the sweaty

body, until the footsole's skin becomes distressed
by the granules of weatherbeaten concrete, and the gentle stroking
of a feather duster, seaweed-green (*'hoary plantain',*
commercially quite useless, therefore called a 'weed')
from which, a little later possibly, a crown of chalkwhite
latex blossoms on the finger-tip.

Assigned its proper name, it - this film and its refractions - is,
however, through no looking ever seen again.

A trace of buttercup, as when - after the loss
of the calyx with its oily yellow smears
and its transformation into water-greenish sea-mine -
if patiently rubbed on the skin it
always generates a gentle enigmatic prickling.

As if a wind had sprung up which, most fierce,
refuses to subside before the *self* is lost, so causing
all phenomena, in all their randomness and colourful
profusion, to blow through the field of vision, to
let their colours' nakedness be seen - then, unavoidably,
their black, their underside of bloodtrail-black, as well.

The taste of meat, of salty liquorice,
a premium cheese, a pinch of cinnamon, a pear
or cream, an apricot or madeleine that's
soaked in tepid tea - a taste of everyday,
that tipsily swirls round the mouth, is proof of it.

Whoever tastes unpractised, almost poisoned, tastes
at no time *its* self, its essence - a ground of mist that
must reside in others, too. The *taste of it*,
that's lurking in the flesh. You sample the quite
unexpected thing that then sinks to a bottomless abyss.
Yet, after myriads of spurs, eternities of jabs,
of blows and knife-thrusts, the wall of clay or wax
suffers not the slightest loss.

Don't even think of it. Get rid of feelings such
as tearfulness, as love for someone who's alive
and has to die, exposure in togetherness.
The fount of recollection sings here, bubbling up
from poorest highland. Denying, in its entirely
or close to never fathomable undertow.

As it blows

... came unexpectedly. It murmured like springs, an inner ear, and you was he while I said: ...

Cherry, dangling on an azure ground.
Blood, trickling in your mouth
Knife. (Oh, the glittering.)
Sun. (Blazing weather.)

(Summer under raffia parasols, a deckchair by the blue swimming pool, sultry.) The longing to be rid, of what? This selfsame pool, a glass of ice-cold, sugar-free non-decaffeinated ...? Emptiness blows on screens where it silently (liberation is so lethal) endlessly snows. In front of circling lenses demisting has begun, and creamy-white clouds are being towed through the air.

... upon which your outstretched hand touches her fingers
which are elegant, dry and cool
as sand, flour, mummy powder.

Myrna: Never bought things at the door.
Lorna: No incense, myrrh or even toothpaste.
Kelly: No negligé, no Wonderbra.
Candy: The whole lot's such a total waste.

... the skin looks browner too because of this whiteness, spotless, of dresses, the freesia-lily bouquet with its long, long ribbons, the bled-to-death swirl of sheets, washed and laid out to bleach in this the most radiant of all sunlights.

(So off he goes again.)

Look in the mirror? Depths the poetess saw, a maelstrom, night that was black and fathomless. Swiftly the head - oh yes - goes in the oven.

... that as in Venice the gondolas glided through the water of lagoons, seagrass and algae ... was as liquid silver. Where in the weed-root-reddish beak of swans song came into being, the dance had floating masks ... a swarm of people, with the pleasant rustle of natural silk, cheerful but so restless. And stairs too, as those of palaces, metaphysically empty squares, the *Teatro Comunale Masini*.

*(As it blows here, so it blows nowhere any more.
The clock tick-tocks, the house is locked. Rocked by the gale,
the cuckoo's tiny wooden skull describes a painful sneer.)*

... of considerable beauty. Where it appears clear and intelligible (a mountain lake, pack-ice, pails of pee) the quiet splendour of the poetic secret repeatedly and unexpectedly ogles.

... Repetition tastes of
sand and ash, and yet in everything (the maggot in the heart
of hazelnuts, beauty) resides repetition. What is
saved if at some point it all must blow away?

(Raining-down, breathed-into, merry tongue of fire:) A utopia,
flight, final outcome are not under consideration here. Only, the body can -
sometimes out of longing - fall to pieces and each shard still smelling,
hearing, seeing lie wide open. The steam from spittle-yellow tea
brushes past cheeks, the stroking of fig-leaves (curled round the green
and shiny fruit) touches the hand, wind blows up something like
powder-dry loam. Once more ...

... hardly recallable the time in which,
ice-blue and slim, the Cortina silently glides. So too, never real, never
materialised, under a glass roof-covering, arches the hall of recollection.
Familiar are small, naked knees with the meadow grass. Plastic sandal,
causing the child's small foot to sweat. Display of lemonade:
blood-red in colour, carcinogenic. Dolphin that saves lives. And love
of the black-cloaked man, with dagger, mask, horse. *(In gusts blows ...*

Titian/Milkmaid

Dripdripdrip. On canvas blood and semen drip
or first with pigment enter into sombre fusion
as once they did with Titian, in whose full-frozen spaces
flesh would arise to blossom as azaleas.

Beyond you find with ease a female figure
as *Milkmaid*, always game - high-powder-rosy wonder
that submits to undressing to order, is open to her
violation, enthuses at her defilement.

Image of the removal of skin, the laying bare
of muscles round the skeleton, filing of nose and ear,
a limb that's wrapped in cellophane or clad in
armour-plating. A back with four vertebra added:
most elegant to the eye.

Balthus

Trissy, how you dream
is your deception.

Skin-thin desire of
school-acquired dissimulation. His titillation
takes its pleasure in light yet so tight spaces and
the provoking *faire semblant* within.

Flesh-coloured sun embraces shins, each knee.
Hypnotic shadow play where young girl's biceps are,
the hollow, conical of thighs, the curving of a neck.

Around this firmness of fourteen-year-old flesh, the temple
which, in its introspection, artlessly though wittingly offers
in stockinged foot, in velvet slipper, this falling-open
lace, these cotton folds, this hitched-up leg
that slices through the field of vision like a knife,
hangs like unfathomable cloud, like gauze.

Quite stifled in the heavy coat of
its longing the cat sticks a reddish
strip into milk, gnashes its teeth,
waits.

Almost in pain the space resounds around the
supple, blood-suffused young softness.
It has to be an apt caress that moves, intensifying,
itself, in that direction: this the darkest
of all aims. Thing which, bordered by night,
is unarticulated still.

Bettina Rheims

Spun in the sheltered world of video, engrossed in the weaving of a history where nothing happens that hasn't gone before: stories without disorder, wounds, hankering and absence. The non-existent eight minutes free of any noise, the simulated smile of no infant, but a *video baby*. A mutable gender that looks for substitutes and gasps just as all gasping is produced in studios. And then it's whirling in a snow of merchandise, ephemeral owners.

This is the point, though at odds with all the tumbling, Bettina breaks in. Out of techniques that pre-pack images, control perspectives and redesign reality, there suddenly emerges - and, what's more, through deliberate, persistent study - the life-uncertain unfathomability of the imperative: the untamed folds in the moss-green of the raincoat just as those on a breast (shelved up by hands and scarlet, short-clipped nails), a tuft of furry-soft frizzle that's singing like a thrush, the skin's sheet lightning and ink-black self-supporting stockings is revealed.

She rings you in a strange, unspoken language, yet all the more urgently. Call, *collect hits home* through this red telephone.