

Women and Christ

Boulder

If they should roll it away and the place be empty
of your bird bones because you've flown
what then?

This is about angels, women and men.

Your disappearing act, seasonal resurrection
impassioned erection again
and then
this is about angels, women and men.

Hair aflow, skin aglow, gently untaking, beloved
climbing up, taken down, the crown—
so then
this is about angels, women and men.

We roll stories from our tongues: the woman's never stoned
the God-man always pardons her
but then
this is about angels, women and men.

Missing Him

I would leave even myself for you.

It might not always be true that wherever you go
there you are.

A petrifying thought—like the mundane terror
of dark nightmares recurring, though they tell me
that a dreamless sleep is worse.

It gives no rest.

Most of the poems I haven't written
haven't been written about you.

You can see why.

When a ghost dies the sorrow can be awkward—
all that nothing, multiplied. My old beliefs rise
into the trees, catch on their arms like

artificial webs, so every night is
all hallows eve, tangled up in dollar store
investments.

What is most lasting
is neither nature nor artifice,
not what is or isn't real
but the grimy bone-grey marriage of the two.

What about the body?

For my God wyll not be eaten with the tethe, neyther yet dyeth he agayne. And upon these wordes, that I have now spoken, wyll I suffer death.

Anne Askew, in John Bale's *The Lattre Examinacyon* (1547)

Given what they did in the Tower
the only woman on record tortured
there and also burned
could not walk to the stake
to be executed as a heretic.
She was carried in a chair.

This in 1546, the last year
of Henry's tricky, sticky reign.

Anne read her Bible publically
in Lincoln Cathedral, goaded
the priests who had warned her.
Her defense was recorded
in two *Examinacyons*.

She wanted to feast her own eyes
on the five lines more nourishing
than five masses; would not admit
to chewing and swallowing God.

Instead she argued symbol;
the eucharist a reminder of Him,
but not Him. People died for this

before there were airplanes
and Henry Hudson mapped Manhattan.

Anne (preacher, poet) had other problems
that led to arrest and death at twenty-six,
forced to marry her dead sister's husband—
he a Catholic and brutal, not
necessarily in that order.

This man, whose name she would not take
sought her reformation, while she
turned to Paul: "If a faytfull woman
have an unbelevynge husbände,
which wyll not tarrye with her,
she may leave hym."

She wanted inside her only
who she wanted inside her
heart. Someone who could
not dye agayne and agayne.

If I am Catholic, now
that tolerance matters
now that there are
fewer fates worse than death
I'm story-martyred, martyr-nurtured.

With the teacher-nun's tale of a man
who pretended to swallow the host,
pocketed it, attacked it at home with an ax
and watched it spurt blood on his table.

These are things I learned early
about daring denial.

I suppose I believe my God
will be eaten with the tethe.
Though I was taught
to let Him dissolve on the tongue.

Witches, like Christ

For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.

Matthew 26:11

Laid waste by mighty poverty they climb
up to the stake or plunge through rotten air
the ones with nothing whatsoever to lose.

Struck on their way by stones and piecemeal cats
women who have no orange peel to sell
in other theatres, here create their own.

It might be too much beauty or too much
that's foul, or too much luck or likely less.
Behind it all is someone lacking bread.

The magic and the wood wedded in death
another body pinned to kill some spell
that penetrated listeners, words or love.

The witch's besom is a besom still.
Objects that clean what's soiled cannot stay clean.
For that you have, too, witches always with you.

First Single

Their litany demands and promises
so many things. Some Paul, say, sings
alongside some John their request
for an exchange, an “always” thrown in.

Love, love me do
You know I love you
I'll always be true
So please, love me do
Whoa, love me do

A please in four syllables
and who could refuse
such imperative length?

The listening world each
time had tired of reeling
from its trials and tribunals.
It was recovered from all that
and wanted to be reeled in.

The lyrics reveal their withdrawal
though, don't they?

Someone to love
Somebody new
Someone to love
Someone like you

Post-war advertising speak,
girls, this *new*, this *like*—
Any post, any war. Buyer beware:
it is always new bodies for old.

When you let them get you het up
don't bother to pretend you
don't agonize over which boy
in the band is most worthy of you,
as though you were not
your own ancestor, all
shook up before settling
into sacrifice.

You are.

Something depends
on how you pronounce
what is written as "Whoa."

Honeymoon

They breathe the word passion
mouth the word ecstasy
decade after decade and
no wonder: the only
brides who remain brides
are those of Christ. And
even on their knees, polishing
in supplication, or in thanks
even handing schoolbooks
to children the same age
year after year and instructing
new mothers on what their babies
need, advising stimulation: “Take
them off your backs and *play*
with them.” Even then
they are waiting— touching
nothing to their faces
but soap and water, piercing
no holes in their ears for gold.
Their virgin lips grow puckered
with time and pursing, to lick
a frugal thread, to thread a needle
to mend a stocking much mended.
At prisons and deathbeds
with the flaking flesh
of other bodies on their hands
even then they are girls,
fresh and graceful and expectant.

Insurance

She says, "But in contentment I still feel
the need of some imperishable bliss."

Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning"

It has taken some time, a common era
for our gratitude to fix only on
the chance sun for our day
and the chance sun for our night
until we can tell the story
without cause, just effect.
Here we are, happening,
close enough to a star.
Myth replaces myth. Logical
scrawlings light up the darkness
until nothing remains invisible.

Pain, however. However, pain.
It pleads still for explanation
beyond tooth and claw and
crass casualty. Civilization
should not allow this.
Voices crying in the milder-ness
demand recompense. Who
will pay and take it all away?

Acts of extreme weather must
have cause, a God-clause
given any other name
to sweeten the smell.
The mind is its own place—
no other heaven, hell.

Afterward, the beloved

Perhaps from living longer now than He
I lose each year the fear I'll cease to be
my ego greater, seemingly, than Keats'.
Although the chaff I swallow with the wheat
and am not sure what lies beyond the veil
or sky or sea or woods, or will prevail.

And sometimes Locke—another John—I trust
to reason from the fact of self (e'er dust).
In the five senses was his faith all bound:
as you see, I see sight, and I hear sound.
Surely I am a copy of the One
original, and then the Ghost, and Son.

And dear to me the branchèd after-times
and after-places, even after-rhymes
all sylvan are. Poets dead in charmed woods
whisper the good apart from worldly goods.
John Milton, say? My soul proclaims the lord
because I read, and flesh comes from the word.

Those sure in faith with doubt I must betray.
Those sure there's nothing think I wish away
the only life I'm given—fail each test
merely for books and blessings. I am best
like that beloved John, my final trope
who stood before an empty tomb, in hope.