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NOT SLEEPING

Introduction

D. R. Wagner

WAITING IN THE COURTYARD

Pick up your money and get out of here.
Can't stand your heat anymore.
My mouth's full of blood, makes it hard
To speak. I keep my heart in here.

I can't wait until tomorrow.
Like Jesus Christ it never comes.
I'm still standing by the edge
Right where the stage ends.

I can't draw a gun. I can't even
Draw close to any open door.
I slammed into the wall much too hard
Way too many times before.

"I make my place in the mystery.
I am the branch surely fallen
From the rootless tree."

I have traveled much too far.
I barely have my skin anymore.
I've seen the bodies drop. I've asked
For permission to stand up.

What do you say my brother?
What do you say my sister?
I keep playing all the music
I am able to play and my hands
Bleed like yours do when they
Cannot touch one another.

Help me through these words

That make your voices.
I have no kingdom.
I am a single wing.
You are the bird.

SKY WITHOUT A NAME

...a vision

Say this then, that I have known
You better than waves know the shingle
On the shore of the sea that speaks to
It, at telling of its presence, its golden
Robes, shadows deeper than the memory
China dresses up and presents as a tiger.

Crossing the sky without a name,
Claiming that it is beautiful, while a bird,
A most beautiful bird, a white one
With the head of a wolf pounces
Upon us full of those damned flowers
That keep us from all committing suicide
In the light of such a setting sun
Too incredible to be believed.

Pleasure in a warm young bird.
The sky drifting high above us,
Feeling this on our skin like leaves
That fall on our graves with every hour we linger,
With every star we dare to name.

Carolyn Gregory

THE CLOWN SINGER (after the song "Royals")

The recital hall is sedate, tasteful in buff
when the soloist strides in,
suitcase in hand.

He's arrived from a broken down train,
hobo on a long ride
cross the Rockies and Corn Belt,

holding onto his dignity
despite the flounced collar
and Ziplocked mouth.

On the way to the party,
he has counted his dollars
acknowledging gold teeth
and blood stains, pulling himself up
by the bootstraps

to let the doo-wop girls in little
black dresses snapping fingers
somberly sing to his right.
The drum's slow
and the bass, restrained.

Wearing a giant clown suit
and a child's Halloween crown,
his left hand enunciates every syllable
to his baritone, fluid and flying

as he touches clown buttons,
ascending, knowing he is headed
to another train ride soon.

FALLING AND THE THREE MARIAS

Among the trees of heaven,
on a sunny afternoon
in the company of friends,
I fell like a small tree
on uneven sidewalk.

I did not see the broken sidewalk
as I hurried toward the church,
landing on my knee
and twisting into the thigh with pain,
too stunned by tumbling to stand up.

Three sweet women hovered over me,
asking with real concern
if they could help,
hoisting me up with steady hands
like the three Marias of grace.

Shaken and stinging,
I ambled slowly forward,
watching the Marias sweep off
with hoisted sails,
their generosity filling me.

MEETING AT THE PLACE OF DEPARTURES

Past the fast food joints and hubbub,
around those juggling tickets and lunch,
your welcoming smile drew me,
following the zigzag line to your table.

The children suffering by the sea
with heroin and psychosis,
our husbands who came and went
packed up and left
for Chicago or the mountains.

Where men in business suits
stalked by, checking departure times,
we spoke about miracles
in that busy train station.

You were saved from collisions
and the loss of your children,
steered a boat with one hand,
typing with the other.

The light slanted through glass
as we traded the devil's country
for facing the music,
our native spirits applauding this meeting.

ROAD BABBLE

He talks about Shoeless Joe
past Fudrucker's on Route One
down Home Depot Road.

The clouds are white and mountainous
as we roll past endless shopping malls
selling tires, donuts and even the future.

Moonlight's name was Archibald
in real life, he says
as the bus hits the road
back through corn to Iowa.

Should they plow the fields for corn
or build a ballpark?
Shoeless Joe casts a spell,
putting the enemy to sleep.

The field will not be sold!
Magical for winners
who bet their lives on a full stadium,
they cheer as they're showered by fireworks!

FOR THE CHILDREN

The voices of children are weeping
through steady rain
when white lights shine,
green garlands wrapping a fence.

In classrooms, they weep over the dead
in Sandy Hook, gunned down like factory meat
while they bent over crayons,
drawing green and yellow cutouts
for their mothers,

gunned down by a crazy boy
in camouflage and body armor,
smashing a window like a burglar,
his Bushmaster stuttering metal

and children huddle over candles
in Pakistan, praying over cousins
killed by drones
aimed toward a military target,
fire power off the mark,
dropping charred corpses behind.

Who will comfort the mothers
getting ready for the wake
in long limousines
or black burquas stained by tears,
hunched in silent prayer,
their anguish unrelenting?

THE OSTRICH (for Fukushima)

The ostrich wandered on startled legs
through the empty city of Ono, Japan.
No humans stood on the corner
waiting for streetcars,
getting children to school.

The street was empty past the closed shops
where everyone was busy
yesterday when the ostrich was fêted
by the Tokyo Electric Power Company,
fed vegetables and insects,
protecting his harem of three
in a well shaded space,
his photo in the company poster.

Then the tsunami drenched the land,
killed many, dropped boulders
and the wet nuclear cores melted down,
sending anyone left to higher ground.

Today the ostrich wanders alone
bare-headed, squawking at signs,
his huge eyes searching for things to eat
like a dinosaur with no country.

Mark Young

El hombre que siempre siente pena

He picked up
his dulcimer

& sang *I am a
man of constant*

sorrow. Scattered
applause. Then

they let the lions
loose on him & the

entire audience
went apeshit.

frozen cherries

offer

more than 140 characters.

funeral & cremation excellence.

stunning views & stylish amenities that include gourmet coffee & luxe bath products.

a relatively low price point customized for the Chinese market.

a mix of original & aggregated content across categories that the demographic cares most about: celebrity, healthy living, beauty, fashion, family life & food.

big loans to Indonesia.

art history, art education, & curriculum development.

a free Swedish dictionary.

software to help keep your children safe online.

a game-based submarine periscope trainer developed for the U. S. Navy.

help to put the genie back into the bottle.

ways to save your loved ones from financial burden.

a revolutionary visual experience with crystal-clear, high-definition.

cooking tips, nutrition news, special offers, & healthy recipes anyone can make.

a number pad, a digital phone book, a pick-up/hang-up button, & not much more.

a time for dance.

over 3000 colors you can find, coordinate, & preview.

smart design, technology, & engineering to give you all you need in a compact car.

earthquake early warning systems.

A line from Martina Navratilova

The calyx tails turn
brown. Ponchos are *de*
rigueur. The young boys
of Santa Fe are coming

out with anti fracking
messages—body part
specialization isn't just
a trick for pros. Her first

dance lesson gave the young
men a taste of salty lime. She
followed that with tamarind,
ended with a strong wine.

in Bahia Blanca

the bossa nova blends
in on the beach
like a sleeper agent.

Is seemingly innocuous.
But. Others think other-
wise. The U.S. Air Force

have bombed it several
times, drawn by its
pink south polar cap

& the scars it bears
within, without, from
earlier witchhunts. Out

of the sun it moves in
a retrograde orbit, is
negative, tropic, drawing

away from wandering
minstrels & their liberal
arts. The young live in

caves, undetected, still
uncertain where they
fit in the food chain.

High Tea with Donatien

I go &
have tea
with

the
Marquis
de Sade. He

bores the shit
out of
me.

So
much so
that I find

the cucumber sandwiches
he serves
exciting.

Metamorphism

Green pigs have been around for quite some time now, the green due to abundant green chlorite. What hornblende is there is probably

secondary. It's always best to decorate in layers, combine the cell breathing technique with great deals in collectible quilts. This technique has been used

successfully to reduce downtime & improve posture, coordination, & balance. I shot a mackerel sky this morning. Marble is a little more tricky.

Irving Gamboa

Three songs for the wounded

DEATH

The end approaches

All motion has been injured

Night undresses from its crystal gown

Tender whispering memories

Flash along the empty countryside

A small bird wearing golden slippers

Cradles over a soft silver skull

Cleansed, soft and drenched

You awake at infinity's shore

MEMORY

A white day approaches from distant fields

The first summer breeze carries the slight green words of dusk

A wonderful Polaroid light filters through the kitchen window

And I'm a child again: watching a dusty road

Dreaming of now

Dreaming of the unknown safety of time

DREAM

Her arms stretched far beyond the gleaming bend

The warmth of evening light upon a distant mural

Nosebleed scathing a child's dreamless night

Her mane: a roof on fire

A liquid navel echoing across the streets at dawn

A dreaming child: a dying soul: a ghost across the shattered window

Zak Block

What Have I Done to Deserve You?

The hot wind blew and blew, the hawk passed me by, not once but twice, and then the hornets returned. I awoke as if in a dream, and there I am again in that nameless city of unremitting night. I can't remember my dreams, but there lingers the insatiable urge to document them, and if not them then the raw emotions, passions and dreads of them, involved in their recitation by the light which wavers in the hot, hot wind, in the twilit thing encircling me, and the terror in the sky, the growing black filigree of infection. First like shooting stars, then skywriting, calligraphic, black; until a cacophony, coursed by flighted hens and monstrous things...

...but this is not madness, not my dream, imagination, this is the way of things now, the helicopters, those are black and red and come in the day to poison the sky, the things that live in the clouds whence the hot winds blow, round which the hawks circle, by my window torn open with the rotted lace dancing in the falling ash of the sky.

There was a storefront, cafeteria, the sign was of a taxi-cab yellow, crushed, rusted, leading everyone in there was a greeter, a fat man in overalls, we all took to wearing them in those days, and male dresses.

I made my way to the line and saw Buck Harvey there. Where is she, as if to ask, then to answer he said, though he didn't, "How goes it," well I couldn't tell where I'd been, what I'd been doing, so "What's on for tonight?"

"Have you seen my beloved wife?" "Mercy. Mercy me."

It must have been fifteen minutes earlier, I was coming down the elevator shaft on a rope.

Bounded by fleshy eating bodies with their jaws working and all of the denim: "I'm going to kill her," I said. "Might she not be dead already?" What he meant was that this, like one-hundred and seventy-five nights that had preceded it—well, this was the last, as in our last on earth. Or at least in this country on this planet. The future, that meta-future whose seeds would germinate only in the bleeding of the dying present, to grow up into something muddled and unclear to any of us,—and distinct to the future as we saw it now, or rather then,—but nonetheless something bleak and perpetuating bleakness. But blurry in its bleakness, staid in its misery-making.

###

Always a muddle, like the past, moving from room to room, the fortifications that were there, the way everyone lived in each of the units and how strange it must have seemed to everyone but them. Then the family dinner in the long room in the country cabin. A friend of my father's, important to the family before my birth, hence important despite, in spite of; and like my father he can't comprehend my existence in any number of ways; doesn't know what I am, only vaguely suspects it's something terrible. Lower order. It's difficult to get it all down and divided into all of the separate rooms.

Then in a strange city of perpetual non-light, battered storefronts and labyrinthine complex-stations, descending into a world of horrible dreams: from compartment to compartment in the trains, something new and terrible, like a tramping army of militarized teddy bears. Awake in an eye-burning chill beside Mercy, as if trying to figure out where to penetrate her; an infant.

She isn't there, there's the contour of her there in the bed: I run my fingers in the sweat of it and think to go to Buck at the cafeteria, and I'm there, Buck says, "You'd better go out and find her. I here there's going to be a bad one tonight."

###

I'm going to be sick, I tell him and he hands me a brown paper bag, the one who's got me by the shackled arm leads me up to the end of the hallway. "He'll be up in a minute." "Alright, I'm going to go back down there, keep an eye on him." "I can't get up out of this chair." He asks me if I'm going to stay put, I say "Yeah, no problem." So I'm standing there for a while and the guy whom, I think, he was talking to comes out of the office, this is obviously a detective, from the way he's dressed and he doesn't touch the shackled arm.

"We're going to go in here. Take those things off him."

I sit down in an office chair. "Tell us about Buck Harvey." "Tell you what about him." "How do you know him?" "We went to college together." "Shit." "What?" "I wasn't talking to you. John, bring him back in here."

I feel my wrists where there are marks. "They put them on too tight?" "No, it was lovely."

Whoever it was came in, "What's he want?" "I just got a call from Dick." "Well you told him..." "Just get back down there and tell me when he comes in."

"Busy round here?" "What do you think, Block?" "So it's true." "True that it's a rumor. Doesn't matter. We've got considerations antecedent to the sudden magnificent incidence of death and mass carnage." "Riot control." "Riot control. Death control. Mass carnage control."

"Back." "I know you're back, what did he say?" "Buck Harvey." "He's downstairs." "Buck?" "Shut up a second, send him back down." "But is he here?"

The detective, what might be a detective, produces two manila envelopes and what looks like a manila envelope. He puts his smartphone on the desk next to the heap and signals for the tea.

"He is here, yes. Tea?" "I don't drink non-alcoholic fluids." He prepares two anyway. "Why is he here?" "Why, well, because he went to college and consorts with a murderer." "So let's get started then?" "Let's. What can you remember?"

"Well, I'm walking down a street, in a world of perpetual dark. I awake each morning in a world of perpetual dark, to look out of my bedroom window at the swirling mass of poison in the sky. I spend at least fifteen minutes every morning, peering deep in the murky black of it, trying to discern shapes, patterns. I see. Polyhedra. The whipmarks of shadow aircraft lashing poison into the thick skin of clouds

out of which they emerge, in red and black... I'm in a complex-station, then I'm on a train, moving from compartment to compartment, pursued by mechanized teddy bears with fangs."

"You said she was in the bed beside you? When was that?" "When. That must have been earlier. Then, it might have been later. But it wasn't she, it was the contours of her, and sweat. I left, I went to the cafeteria with the battered yellow front and went to see Buck Harvey and find out if he'd seen her."

###

I ended up using the bag after all. The tea washed away the revolting taste of what I'd come up with. I'd never had tea like this; I told him, when I couldn't find her at Buck's I went on to the Black & Tan and talked to Rudy. Who was he, a barman-bouncer who I knew there, we also went to college together, so he knew Buck, why wasn't he here, because he was dead too, Buck was right, it was all coming down tonight, shot to death trying to defend his hold.

Well, when he was alive, naturally, upon my arrival I repeated the question and he said he had an idea he might have seen her with a man with red hair. Some man. They went that-a-way. Useless. I had two tumblers of the stuff, then an entire bottle. We'd gone to college too, you see. Now everything was clear and I had the violence in me then, I knew, but it wasn't murder it was something else. I needed to go out and find her and see it myself and subject myself to the enormous and elaborate torture of it, that was the violence.

I made it back out into the street and had the sudden compulsion to lay down in it and kiss the pavement. This was the only way I could reconnect with the earth as it spurned me, and the obviousness of its intention swirled above me. The earth was then a spurned lover and a father or a father's friend who can comprehend neither my conception, gestation, birth nor the fact that I have a name and address. Well they're all gone now, it's just me and her, and there's a warming security in that.

No, I thought, she isn't with me now, she's with him, but we're in the dying present together, and so we'll die together, and be united in that. And there was a warm embrace that had nothing to do with how much I'd drunk, and the lights awoke and the sky was filled with them, I knew, though I couldn't see them as I rolled into the gutter and a rickshaw rolled over me, some kid in overalls on a bike. I'd thought I'd broken my wrist, and there was a lot of blood from the liquor, I knew, but there was a sense of warmth in that too.

###

"So this is it," she said, "my triumphal rescue from the hands of my captor." "My captor." "What you've done to me is disgusting, Block." "Here?" "What you're doing to me here, what you've done to me in every vestibule in the Metro area." "Sick. Disgusting. Crawling with slime. Festering with boils. The language of lust." "Zak. I'm sorry but I just don't have those kinds of feelings for you. I have them for other people, but not for you. You're not my type. I think this whole marriage thing was just a huge misunderstanding. He's coming back from the bathroom in a few minutes. I told him to wait there. You know. Get ready." I jumped up, grabbed the stool and smashed it against the bar and let it fall to the floor. I picked up the spindly corpse of it and smashed the bar up and smashed some of the bottles in the back." "That'll be twenty-two fifty," the barman said. "Here," I gave him a credit card and went into her face. I had to smile; she looked at me pure without emotion, as to kill me with her low gurgling black opinion; I said, "I wouldn't hit you... for an ocean of whiskey." I stormed the bathroom, looking for him. He seemed to be on the phone outside. He had red hair. I hit him twice and then we became friends and

got more drunk. I blacked out, but luckily Harvey told them the truth: he'd hid the gun and had an idea of where she was laid to rest. At least a few of the places. Buck and I were under the jail when the red and black craft landed and flooded the city with pure white lightning. So the mole people and we were the only the survivors, they were the ones who cut us loose. A few weeks later we came to the surface and couldn't find a drop but millions of dead lining the avenues saturated through with the white whiskey. So after a while we ate them. At last I could see the sun.

Steven F. Klepetar

Whatever Comes of This

You will know soon enough.
All you can do is wind it up,
let it sail through space-time,

see whose eye you hit. Maybe
this time you'll offend someone
important enough and they will come

for you, or you may get an answer
dancing on a sunbeam or
on the fluttering wing of a dying bird.

I galloped

on the black horse of night.
Your face shone pale from velvet sky,

your billion eyes
splashed across heaven's dark brow.

How often have we met beneath
the fruit tree's bending arms

where golden serpents play in the azure
pool among sapphires and ruby stones?

How your skin radiates in
cool air
through melodies of
wind. Tonight

I am stone cutter and
cloud, a man with
empty hands. I stand
before you spinning

with sleep, wearing the
ropes of day,
dressed in thin and ragged
shreds of dream.

Above the Circling Birds

Of course the sky is a paste of gray
and the river has disappeared in cottony

wrap. What else would you expect
in this world of rain and weeds?

The park is empty except for a man
in blue shorts splashing through mud

and strange white birds skimming
puddles, undisturbed by the noise of dogs.

They say if you walk alone, an angel
could whisper to you, reward for quiet

contemplation. But what if she has starved
and spent a long night in someone's

tangled hair? Then what kind of song
will bring you back to light? Beneath your

feet, a river pushes downward toward
a flaming core. Even if words were rungs

on a ladder you could climb, even if
the dripping trees you pass harbored

dryads with faces green as meadow mist
at dawn, even then your feet could find

no purchase on something airy and symbolic
as a sign hung in clouds above the circling birds.

Colossal

Here at the margins of the world, I sit
slumped, elbows on knees, cheeks in my

hands. Breath escapes as rising mist.
How colossal I have been, how my legs

straddled the harbors of night.
Ships with their twinkling lights have sailed

past, wondering at my stride, amazed
at my anchored calm. Alone, I have breathed

the light of a billion stars. But now I have
lost a word in the ocean depths, something

clean and sharp like "flint" or "blade,"
"scalpel," "axe" or "tool." When I reach

my hand into bubbly waves, only its shape
remains, an absence at water's salty heart.

The Road to Thebes

The woman I met on the road to Thebes
laughed like coins jangling in a purse.

Her hair was wet and smooth and full of light.
I asked her name and she said "Moonlight

on the Black Lake," she said "Swallows
Spinning in August Trees." "Dust," she said,

"Ochre Dust from Sweet Wood Sawn by a
Patient Hand." With her nails, she carved her

names on my naked thigh. I held her hands
in mine and breathed the scent of her golden

skin. Her mirrors shone in the sun, sending
sparkles into summer air. She held my lips

in her palm, like an offering of seed, buried
my eyes as they burned, planted my legs

by her sacred stand of pines. Through earth
I grew, under bones piled high beneath her feet.

Michael Lee Johnson

No One Cares

I sit in my 2001 Chevy S10 truck drunk on smoked salmon vodka,
writing this poem on Subway sandwich napkins.
No one cares my life insurance policy is a carburetor
full of fumes, worn filters, filled casket.
No one cares Nikki my cat; 19-year-old veteran, no bills, no veterinarian visits.
Jesus is a stray cat and a life of His own.
No one cares no one has adequate health care deductibles clauses, debt.
No one cares Mr. Skunk travels nightly with his tail up passing
steam by my balcony window 3 A.M. farting gas both sides of his glands, anus.
No one cares I still have Microcassette recorders, old, obsolete,
mini cassettes not found any more Wal-Mart, Target stores.
No one cares poetry-writing compounds saints, sinners, nightmares,
thoughts, twists insanity inward a lonely bitch curls.
No one cares lines of life too long, house of David.
History is vampire drunk on innocent blood, cheap Skol's
shacks overload detail, house of horrors-
antique images, draft dodgers, war hero memories passed out.
I clutch high school 1965 Memory Book \$25 paid
between years past, many hearts gone-
I face thrombosis bulging encore in my right leg.
I failed English. I slept through business class next to Tommy James
rock star, neither us attended drama classes.
No one cares I nearly flunked high school,
rode around 35 mph in John Hibbard's candy apple red Mercury Cougar.
Even in high school, there were stoplights, cheap gas.
No one cares John's parents, both, hated me.
I see shadows, days as old memories, unjust wars, antique Studebaker Larks.
Life is a worn out tread tire, rusted rims, steel now in junkyards.
Niles High School, August 15 2015, 50th reunion sees you all there-memories, faces most forgotten.
Revising this poem now back, confused with the tenses, no one cares,
I sit in my 2001 Chevy S10 truck
drunk again smoked salmon vodka.
I have always hated the rules.
Little penis travels in the dark.

Jesus in the Snow

I find your footprints here in snow, fresh and broken.

Will your lawyer fragment me, talk to Jesus private tonight.

Will belief set me out of chains, battery acid, free?

Life here is a urinal.

Search moon-eye in lonely sea feel swim of exile, sandpaper spots on skin, do not torture me.

Even devil in hell has his standard, private harvest, his jukebox baby.

Jesus suffers with the poor feels lonely in distant planets shares visions of the moon.

Let me drive you home truck tracks, then you left footprints in snow.

Do you hear sounds on the radio, jukebox baby?

I copy over, print remains, over footprints in snow.

Lilly, Lonely Trailer Prostitute

Paint your face with cosmetic smiles.
Toss your breast around with synthetic plastic.
Don't leak single secrets to strangers-
locked in your trailer 8 foot wide by 50 foot long
with twisted carrots, cucumbers, weak batteries,
and colorful dildos-you've even give them names:
Adams's pleasure skin, big Ben on the raise, Rasputin:
the Mad Monk-oh no, no, no.
Your legs hang with the signed signatures
of playboys and drifters ink.
The lot rent went up again this year.
Paint your face with cosmetic smiles.

The Drifter

The drifter in the room is a stranger,
he is crazy, is Bigfoot with deer moccasins on—
monster of condominium rooms and dreams.
The drifter in this room used to be my friend.
He spoke straight sentences, they did not sound like poetry—
reverberated like a narrative, special lines good a few bad,
or stories being unwound by the tongue of a gentleman,
lip service, juggler of simple words to children.
The night is a dark believer in drifters,
they sound sober, affairs with the wind,
the 3 A.M. honking of the Metro trains.
Everything sleeps with a love, a nightmare at night.
The drifter.

Ace Boggess

DISORDER

I aim for the coffee aisle & find shampoo.
I follow a lane in search of sodas,
meat, a bag of chips.
Nothing's what it seems or where it ought to be:
lines tortured, twisted, bent.
Who would shuffle a store's shelves?
Madman! Sadist? Sartre's
dewy-eyed grocer who dreams?
Shoppers live by their rituals like aging priests
who still perform their Mass in Latin.
As for me, I can't locate the coffee,
orange juice, or cereals, &
already I've given up on bread
by which I've heard I shouldn't live alone.

THE START OF FOOTBALL SEASON

I should get up & play songs on guitar.
I should dance to sounds of my breathing in the dark.
Instead, I stare at the screen as though colors will change,
waylay my eyes from the book in front of me—
something by David Kirby filled with lines
about his not having wasted his life—
while I'm squeezing all the juice from my TV.

**LETTER TO THE OWNER OF THE LAST USED-BOOK STORE
IN CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA, UPON CLOSING ITS DOORS**

I miss words in the margins most of all
liner notes from an album of young philosophers

I once read a spiting page-long sermon
scribbled inside the back cover of Buber's I & Thou

in Beneath the Wheel I found a scribbled order
for Cadet S. to appear before the Dean

such an ill omen in that book years ago
too there have been declarations swearing love

you have robbed me with your locked front door &
candy-apple going-out-of-business sign

where will I find my Sanskrit dialogues?
my hieroglyphs of hand-drawn genitalia?

no graffiti hides in sharp-edged pages of a book
from Amazon.com: you stole the mysteries &

I wanted to say I forgive you
but I will not forgive you even then

THE FREE MAN'S SHADOW

stretches twenty feet
to the nearest tree

hulking & loose
as the world's largest ball of lint

I have never seen a happy shadow
ticklish dragon

fire crackling with compassion
for the skin it sheers

or a god that forgives the darkness
in the darkest hearts of men

**VARIATIONS ON THE POLIS:
V:
THE ANTE-BELLUM AMERICAN SOUTH**

A Play in One Act

by

John Ladd

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CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

The Overseer

The African Slaves

The Master of the Plantation

SETTING

An open space on a plantation somewhere in the Deep South at some time before the Civil War.

AT RISE

The OVERSEER has gathered all of the plantation's AFRICAN SLAVES into one place. The stage is so crowded, that it is almost impossible for anyone to move.

The OVERSEER stands at center, downstage in front of the AFRICAN SLAVES.

Enter, from stage-left, THE MASTER OF THE PLANTATION.

THE MASTER OF THE PLANTATION

Overseer, have you assembled everyone?

THE OVERSEER

Yes sir, they're all here.

THE MASTER OF THE PLANTATION

That's good, that's good- we wouldn't want anyone to be missing.

(pause, then loudly)

Now, there are scoundrels up north who are agitating.

(pause)

They are agitating against our way of life-

(pause)

they are agitating against what we do and how we live-

(pause)

they are agitating against slavery!

(pause)

These troublemakers are called abolitionists!

(pause)

They want to do away with slavery! They want to set our slaves free!

(pause)

And, so, I've decided to put it to a vote!

(pause)

It's very simple- there's only one issue to consider-

(pause)

-and the way you vote is by raising your arm.

(pause)

I, then will count the votes- the arms- and announce- *and honor, live by and be bound-* to the decision.

(pause)

Now- here's the issue-

(pause)

All those in favor of ending slavery and freeing the slaves, raise your arm!

[All of the AFRICAN SLAVES raise their arms. The OVERSEER does not. THE MASTER OF THE PLANTATION pretends to count the votes.]

All right.

(pause)

Further- all those in favor of slavery for today, tomorrow- and *for-ever*- raise your arm!

[THE OVERSEER *and* THE MASTER OF THE PLANTATION
raise their arms. THE MASTER OF THE PLANTATION *smiles.*]

This has been a triumph of the democratic process- and- as such, I am pleased to say- to announce- that there has been a unanimous vote that slavery shall not perish from this part of God's fine earth!

(pause, then in a seriously demanding tone)

Now, get back to work- go on- get going- move- move- move- faster- move faster- get into those fields and start picking or I will bring down the wrath of God upon you like you've never seen before!

(pause)

Now, git!

BLACKOUT

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY

Post Scriptum

D. R. Wagner

NOT SLEEPING

Where is the poem?
Too tired to put its little
Feet on the rungs of the ladder
In order to reach the place where
It can finally see over the top
Of the wall in a quiet neighborhood

Where the twilight shows tiny points
Of light, lamps being lit in windows
So soft that melodies come from
Them like sighs or glances taken
In leaving some loved place
For the last time.

The million mistakes we make
Trying to find where it can go next
And then seeing it sleeping next
To us in bed, late in the evening
Breathing the breath of the lover.

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