of Letter to Seraphin

AKRON SERIES IN POETRY
Dlaczego wszystkich utrzymanie i nienawiść niedawno leży w domu teraz w trzymam w dniem i nocą z🕛

Chyba nie ma prawej miłości w miłości, a prawdziwym Bogu dobrowolny wie z

źródła doświadczenia pomierzał i siostra kołosków w oku temu jak un

nie wiadomo takim nadrzędz

was wszystkich samu Bogu
A Letter to Serafin

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A Letter from Serafin

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Farm, 1962

Each October, they plumb the black soil
for beets and turnips and carrots.
It is not a harvest so much as a heap
in a horse-drawn cart. They ride
to town with potatoes to trade for clothes,
potatoes for Sunday offering.

They wouldn't mind riding to America
like my grandfather who's returned
with a suitcase crammed with cigarettes and toilet paper,
who sits in the wagon with his brother
and the potatoes. In the foreground, children
wear my coat from two winters before,
my brother's snowsuit, dresses from my cousins.
The linings where my grandfather stashed tens
and twenties have been ripped open
and resewn. Maybe they'll pay off
the overseer to overlook their poaching in the forest,
buy another horse to share with neighbors.

My grandfather's Polish, fifty years out of date,
still works like an old Ford. They look
at the camera, my father snaps the shutter.
With their cigarettes and their smiles,
Hello, America. In three years, my grandfather
will begin coughing up blood.

Outside the church in Sokółka, the names
on the family stone will stop with his brother, age ninety-two.
There is no room for new names.
Annunciation

What is she reading at her stand-up desk—
the Psalms maybe, the Song of Songs—
the morning an angel, feathers trembling
like aspen leaves, appears?
The fragrance of his lily so overwhelms her,
she can barely hear.

Golden rays penetrate
with none of the usual trickery—
no ride on the bull, no rain of gold—
just two fingers he points at her,
light that makes her wince, a quick
Ave Maria, and the world
has changed. No enormous bird,
just a shimmer that became
a beautiful man, her book’s pages
fluttering in that sudden wind.

She holds a hand up to ward it off,
then both hands on her belly,
the name of the father
never to be spoken.
October Primrose

Its green flag now red,
it holds its own against turning maples
like an old partisan song.
Remember the black butterfly

of summer, stuck in the craw
of heat? Today
no one holds these leaves
against the sky.

They have abandoned
green camouflage for this
one chance to pledge
allegiance to the ground, to bugs

tending them during blossom season.
And now, under the bloomed-out
phlox, the brittle khaki stalks
of daylilies, like the remains
of downed Cessnas, the red
of bull-vaulters in the museum
at Irakleon, not the ambitious rust
of asters but the glowing sword

of the Archangel after the fire’s gone out,
some Eden begins slipping back
into the world like a cluster of leaves going nova—
a gash, an open wound in the air.

Let other leaves turn yellow
and scabby brown; let morning
glories go full-throttle until frost,
and yellow jackets without exit strategies

continue trading in the spot market
of the trash can. The primrose,
red shift in the spectrum,
has nowhere to go but here.
Michelangelo: Leda and Zeus

Here’s Michelangelo, ladies and gentlemen, squirreling around the old candy store of myth, it being the Renaissance and all, with a female nude for a change;

and here’s Zeus, roving the planet like a talent scout looking for the most beautiful woman to reward. Hard to say how long he had her in the crosshairs before making his move,

how many advances she spurned before he hit on the swan thing. She’s actually flattered he settled beside her with so little fear, laying his head on her lap.

And the feathers—Zeus outdid himself on this one—soft as sea foam as she strokes them. It can’t be long before she’s flat on her back, and it’s pointless to resist—her mother never told her about swans.

That is what Michelangelo wanted, the god not being such a churl that she can’t have her fun, too,

a rapture that moves the god to touch beak to lips, or between them, exchanging breath. She clenches her arm around his neck to keep him from rising to heaven without her. O, she must know nothing can stop him, just as nothing can stop her from keeping him earthbound one moment longer.
Kraków

Walking past the Vis à Vis bar
a whiff from a Gauloise pulled me up short.
I breathed the acrid smell
as though it couldn’t harm me

and held it, the way the vain
hold onto lost youth. There were
Braques and Mondrians;
there was Giovanna driving Uro
to the airport, giving him a carton
of Caporal Bleu before he left Rome for good.
Back in the present moment
seasoned with street musicians,

She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah,
the sun still climbed through October.
There were rats, for certain,
but no one saw them. Maybe I became

invisible as I once was, sixth grade,
when I could look at no one
and be safe. Later, in Florence,
a waiter ignored me, an American

whose country was pimping another war.
It only seemed like the end of the world.
I cannot say the name of the street in Kraków
that moment which turned into other moments—
espresso, a brioche in a bar, the first tobacco hit
in the morning when I was twenty and invincible.
I’d just seen Leonardo’s *Lady with an Ermine*,
the gallery of contemporary art being closed

for updating. The light fell on us, on me.
The sun kept climbing.
The rats maintained invisibility.
Nothing could be further from the truth.
Relics

We can’t help but hoard them—the Mickey Mantle rookie card, mint copy of the first X-Men—but something from a saint was extra,

a get-out-of-hell-free token, the super rich snapping them up by the gross to grease the eye of that needle they’d have to squeeze through before the golden stairway. They commissioned shrines and tiny altars for a scrap of St. Agatha’s veil, index finger

John the Baptist pointed to Jesus with. Relics were the rage, they were everywhere, they must have worked.

She sat in the back row on the flight to Rome, speaking of her pilgrimage to Padre Pio’s monastery before starting a new round of chemo. Having lost both parents, a brother, and daughter to cancer, her odds, she figured, hovered at zero. A visit to the Vatican was out, ditto for Assisi—opportunities for miracles were, like her time, in short supply. I saw her again at Stazione Termini, waiting for a train to the monastery. She sat alone, clinging to that moment. Her son wandered the food kiosks, grazing on a ham and cheese, his last before home-grown artichokes and sautéed chicory.
If there's a half-life left in that finger,
you who wandered, half-crazed,
wearing the skins of hyenas and jackals

out of the desert, point it
at her. Make like laser, make
like fire. If the batteries

in that leathery finger are still good,
fire it, you who have nothing
left to prove.
Tree Lilac in Blossom

Nearby, a bee’s motor stops and starts
like a tattooing needle from petal to petal,
O, not-so-tall-tree-of-the-ear.
I sit under as though wearing it,

not to hide from the sun,
but to feel its brief absence
through the leaves’ absorption,
in the miniscule blossoms floating in my coffee.

What is missing today? Not slugs,
those revelers of wet summers,
nor cumulus, always with us.

A peregrine drifts over, roving.
A million unhinged rotors float down,
smearing the world with pollen.
Prophet

\textit{woe onto him that saith to the wood, awake;}
\textit{to the dumb stone, arise}

Habakkuk 2:19

Among statues of prophets in the Baptistry—beards gnarled as oak bark, scrolls they hold like mirrors to the people—this one is clean-shaven and bald as a pumpkin, his hands hanging down like acorns. If the lord says go,

he goes. Should he flee, the lord will reel him back like a bad cast. Sometimes the lord waits invisible as air, as a dull ache. Someone has given him a heel of bread and a sardine. He hopes the lord will not call before he’s finished eating.

Will the lord mind his fishy breath? When he opens his mouth, he doesn’t know whose voice he’ll hear, so he remains silent. He wrote what he was told, now he looks on the doomed going about their daily business. Though the lord has given him to see the invaders, their horses like leopards about to attack, he is not, all told, a bad man.
Abraham

For once, I’d like to ask why this business of killing a son is so delectable. I accept the obedience part, the ritual knife, stone altar. But why truss the boy like a fatted calf? Yes, the storm overhead could be the all-seeing watching me place a rag over my son's face, to avoid his silent pleading before I thrust into his neck.

And after, in that killing place, would lightning flash down like a tongue to lap the blood?

It might be enough to know the sacrifice nourished the gods like smoke rising from battlefields, but I don't need any more parables.

For once, I’d like to know what would happen if I declined: no tricks; no adopting a lamb or goat, killing it instead. Something polite but firm—I know you’re my God and everything,

but I can't keep doing your killing for you. Would he make our drought go on indefinitely? And if he were to say, Congratulations, you finally passed,

I’d still like him to show the angel waiting, in case I’d gone ahead with it, to stop me before I could nick that beloved neck, to say there, there now; to take the knife from my shaking hand.