

Plath Profiles

Poetry



"Stillness" by Linda Kosciwicz- (previous page)

Polymer photogravure, 2010, Edition – 50

See End Matter for Artist's Statement

LUNATIC THIRTEENS, MONUMENTAL SHAM

by Jacquelyn Shah

The hour is crowed in lunatic thirteens.

Sylvia Plath, "Doomsday"

You never altered your amused belief

That life was a mere monumental sham.

Sylvia Plath, "Dirge for a Joker"

I.

Hard, the pellets that have come to us
like hail that pummels windshields, heads,
reward for shaping all raw data from
the vale of tears. Our hands, dry & cold,
hold these primal rocks. They do not melt.
Watch the heaping up of global angers,
field of knots that burgeon into tangles.
Watch, they're ready for a terrible harvest.
The rain is steady on the glass between
one country & the next, the sun exploded.
A reign of bits, stars & night is all
we see. The moon is gone. I have my own
opinions, fist as tight as anyone's.

II.

. . . just keeps on going strong, tick-tock tick-tock
tick-tock . . . I wait, taut within cocoon
drawing dotted lines in yellow chalk,
perforations sweet. Break out, break soon!
This instar though . . . tick-tock tick-tock . . . seems endless . . .
I watch the clock, its hands & thirteen numbers,
its deadpan face: all proof to me it's heartless.
I want, I long to shrink from the edges of sham
called *living*, fold in my pupal form to implode.
Me in this lunatic scheme? . . . tick-tock . . . what hokum!
O, to be nothing, or at least, the hollow of geode.
But butterfly's my fate—I'll break, fall up

to sky, & flap, sunup sunup sunup . . .

III.

They form the incorporeal: those odes
& epics, myths, fables, sagas, sonnets—
in the sea of human fabrication, they're droplets.
Material assemblies known as roads,
bridges; castles, cloisters, shrines, abodes;
spires & steeples piercing clouds, all summits
are honored more. And garb, like helmets,
uniforms & badges used for preen & strut.
But all erections peter out. And men
are joyous when they do, for deconstruction
is their true (especially explosion!) passion.
Knock it down, blow it up! Again, again, again!
Maul it, wreck it, trash it, kill it. Then film it all.

IV.

My own in this tight fist, opinion-grist
I grind & grind, is this: the lunatic
thirteen—slam jam ram wham
cram bam flimflam sham & scam
Sir Sam, Dam Miriam, even lamb & I-am—
is cause for endless smiling, if not

outright laughter, (holding-sides kind).
Otherwise all man-and-woman-kind
would wallow endlessly in *cris de coeur*,
tear out hair, destroy their decor
(they often do).

While I make sure I find,
grind & wind & bind—I'm mad!—a lot
of words to build the frivolous . . . if not . . . ?

Aria

after Plath

by Jacquelyn Shah

The dark thing will not sleep in me, I am a smile!

I gather bees and poppies, reassemble words for luck,
sing of salt and iron, glitters masturbated to a spun-gold net
that catches sky and waves and every odd-tongued night.
Happy and enormous with my treasures and a Cerberus
who guards them—moon and bone, yew and you,
u's invading sulphur, fugue, untouchable, and mausoleum
umbilicus, laburnum, eunuchs, tubular and surplus
(U, the bucket letter sometimes holding plush and puke,
but filaments and peppermints for me). Happy with my dog
who dogs me, making sure that smiles are never irretrievable,
wintering means eating sweet preserves. Eely tentacles
of you caress despair until it rises up, declares itself
a garment out of fashion, a poultice no more efficacious
than a kindness or a madness.

Let me be an afterbirth
wearing, in your memory, the poppy's bloody skirt.
I'll buzz, sting, fly, dare to breathe, achoo at boot.
Awe is mine, not for gods or stars, but stubbornness—
a word that bears its born: defiance that makes me close
like a sea anemone on life, and chase away the dark
thing that would jinx me all the way to mud.

Let me breed
this happiness, make it hulk and cornucopia, surge and sting,
be a swivel-headed jeweler finding glints and facets,
claim an ill-bred muse and feed her glowworms as I root
among the skulls of incandescent songs. Let me sing
of pistons all in motion, churning, churning
in your distance blue and blood jet, all your multiplicities
that carry me to wings and petals—hot bald wild!