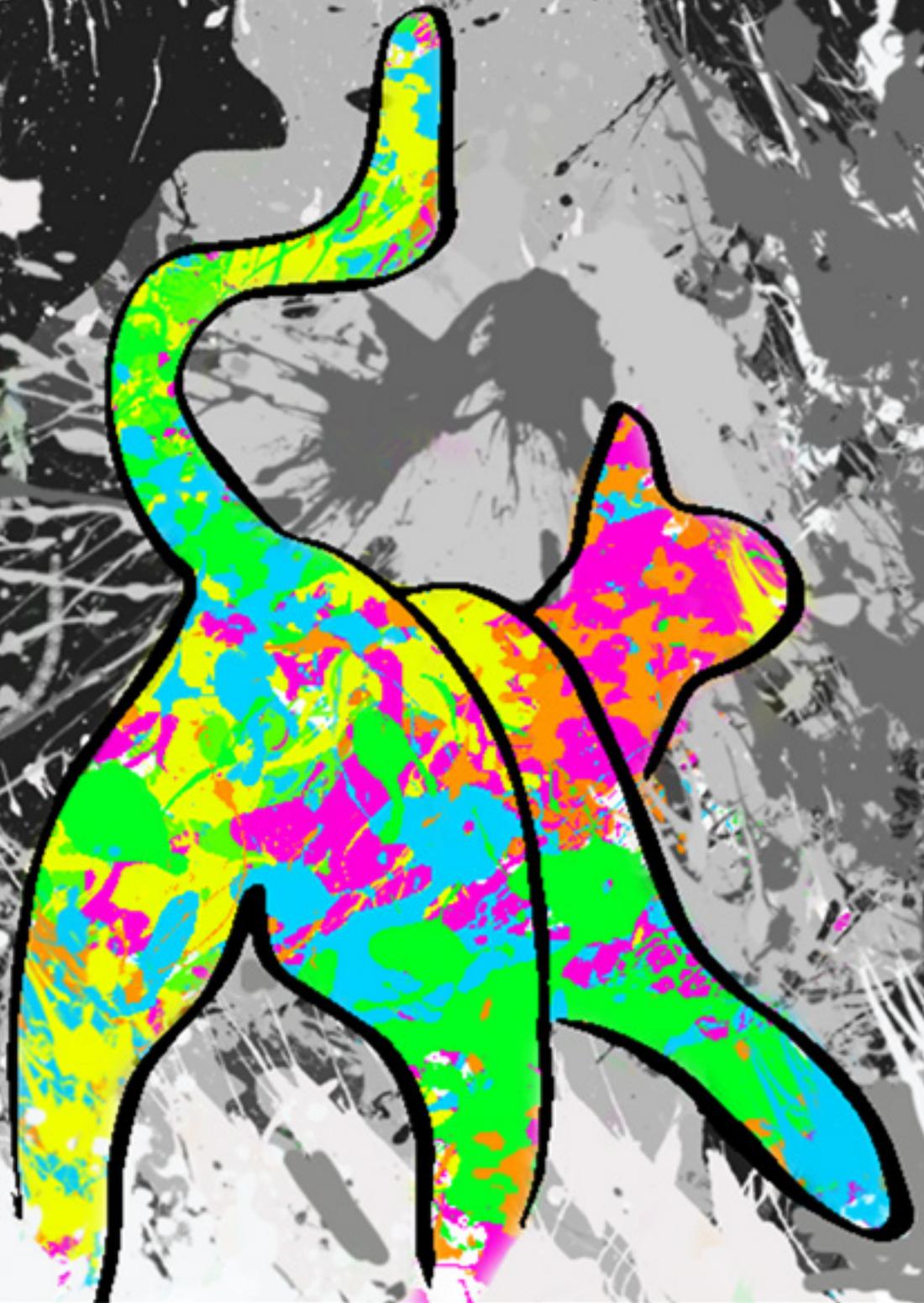


earthly Sharpness



poems by manny blacksher

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manny blacksher

designed by mick theebs

“We have allow’d our-selves to be Formalists in one Point; and the same Formality may rule us as it pleases in all other.”

-Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*

“That needs
An experienced eye of earthly
Sharpness ...”

-Stevie Smith, “The Galloping Cat”

November 2015

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About the Author

Manny Blacksher has published over sixty poems in print sources in Ireland, England, Scotland, and the United States. His works have appeared in *The Guardian's* Online Poetry Workshop, *Poetry Ireland Review*, Belfast's *Fortnight*, *Measure*, *Works & Days*, and *Buddhist Poetry Review*. He is Literary Editor of *Forwardian*, an online journal of arts and creative writing.

About the Designer

Mick Theebs is a writer and an artist. He is also the progenitor of the website *ALSO THAT*. He has been creating art for most of his life. *earthly Sharpness* is his most recent undertaking in the world of electronic publishing. His other works include *The Wolf Hunter*, *Kiss With Teeth*, and *Heart of Fire*.

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Finding the Cat

Cubist calligraph in lampblack, the room's
a zero plashed abruptly by some master's
careless hand. His brush strokes' pranking whiskers
fray door frames, matte the shadows you presume
are headlights nosing through the bamboo blinds.
Sleepless early morning, you cannot hold
the pillow, and your shoes are empty. Cold
comfort creeps beneath the bed. Pay no mind,
but dream a thousand cat-faced demons wailing
murder, till your clock's knocked off the vanity
—a thunder crash— and wake. This is falling
on your feet. Get up. Remember to keep
the box clean and bowl full. Hungry,
you eat. Sleepy, you go back to sleep.

lambe

No joke. She's never worn the same outfit twice. Today, her shirt's a careful hand-stitched reproduction vintage-90s soft-weave cotton-construction fuchsia Tastee-Tee – glitter-flaked device, a rainbow over rampant horse, with shooting stars – one size too small. Taupe miniskirt, pilling tights, the brokest pair of Docs debased to just the right aporia of Hubba-Bubba gum-smear tar. “Transgressive!” rave the Twitterati. She prefers “freak.” Her installation of Clément's “tarantella” as witchcore suite went double-viral. Her sisters confide the cutting – then, later, her paper-doll amputees, Groomsman's Protheses for Falada, those Medusa heads painted in cereal bowls.

Tristes tropiques

“[T]he images thrown were intelligible neither to the lecturer, who had his nose immediately beneath them, nor to the audience, who could with difficulty distinguish them from the huge patches of damp that disfigured the walls.”

—Claude Levi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, trans. John Russell

The new DSM had placed him in a spectrum, so he didn't have anything particular any more. Ideas of rainbows and color scales would bob unhelpful through the tedium of meetings like cadavers of old therapists in Noah's flood. A colleague asked, "What's the matter?" He said, "I'm burnt sienna." Those words tripped, overture to a winning bit of blarney, except their gist required a sharper turn of phrase, and then he'd missed his cue, and panicked peered about, uncertain where he was. Yet so familiar, being never right and always partly wrong. If he grew fatalist, he stayed a game one. Startled from a vacant stare, he'd beam with horror both good-natured and contrite.

Gruesome Twosomes

It's time to poke at beauty's seemliness,
Baby Snookums— time at last to sneak
a glimpse at what the pretty parakeet
gets up to when those chirrup deliquesce
into dry scratchings, faintly furtive, underneath
the curtained cage. Imagine Ted and Sylvie
makin' whoopee to that jungle melody,
so brassy shrill it hurts your baby teeth.
A soother in your pusser is the flower
of the ages, or it may as well be
if it puts the piddle in your trousers.
Momma wears perfume, and Poppa pants
he'll fly her to the moon, but ecstasy's
their prattle for the dirty, dirty dance.

Lucy Looks into a Wardrobe

“Pleasure, pushed to its extreme, shatters us like pain.”

– C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

This is a story about something that happened to them. Peter inspected his penis, pored over the warts. He said, I can't believe that fucking cunt. Counting one hundred, Susan heaved another breath and muttered, God knows, I won't endure another blowjob for the working poor. Otherwise, I love that asshole to death.

The bread was stale and hard as rock. Edmund tamped his sandwich untasted down the commode. He thought, that shite might feed the moribund refugee, but it's bollocks to me.

Lucy said, as she peered in her wardrobe and found all the clothes, This is my body.

Syllabub

Dark Arts for dessert. Not what mothers teach but what their girls will learn. Nice cream curdles for kicks. How to make a daydream stand with just a drop of vinegar.

Tell the maiden she must hold the bowl beneath the udders. Whisper how teats ache until they're milked. Make her squeeze lemons. Break every good egg. Fold the wine she stole in Daddy's tarnished loving cup. Lay it up to seethe until she's owned the rhymes are coiling snares she schools herself to say.

"Happy the cook that cracks the plate that wastes the bride who crumbs the cake and scatters lime upon the grave my true love's tongue shall taste."

Kindness from the Public Obliviator

Of course, betrayal begins in innocence.
Yes, I empathize— I'm not so lily
white. Omission's the softest remedy
for trouble. You must not think your absence

will be painful but peaceful as the snow
that falls at crossroads. I myself am cold
and piecemeal from a thousand secrets told
to no one, but the State endures. I know

everything. You met a fellow-traveler
who honored anonymity. Despatched
to the back room, with its dentist's chair

and bucket, you'll find their hands endow
erasure with comfort, much as I scratch
your face off the bottle I drink from now.

Valediction Against Mourning

Christ, I see you're finished lying here.
You tried everything to get me off
and go. It was distressing how you coughed,
until you stopped. Sweet, I'll leave you somewhere
safe, I swear. Nearby. You'll never need
to wonder why I brought you to my stale
crib, made you show your age until your nails
tore ragged hours down my chest. Don't bleed
so fast, Dear. I've been your chaperone,
a steady hand to waltz you through some songs
of stuff that conquers all and makes us one.
I'm touched, grateful that you've come along—
just to feel the long arm of a grown
man's relief. I'd never do you wrong.

Ms. Thresh

Blessed is he who has been able to win knowledge of the causes of things, who has cast beneath his feet all fear of unyielding Fate, and the howls of hungry Acheron!

– Virgil, *Georgics*

To meet those awful Phelps was to taste the bitter cup again. We sorely felt the loss of our dear schoolmistress, who'd dwelt long years beneath the knoll. Each spring, she graced the slopes with daffodils. Fall, she spiced a bowl of apple-jack and opened house. Winter, she wrote, our laureate. The parish paper printed her last verses, "A Georgics of the Soul."

The Phelpses didn't stay. No one wondered after they'd unearthed the blanched phalanges in her arboretum. Later, we plundered the flowered yards, and saw the clay beds yield their extra ribs, and gathered home the hands ranged in the high pastures and teeth sewn through the fields.

From the Shallows

“You can’t expect quality from people whose lives are a subjection to a lack of quality.”
– Raymond Chandler, *The Long Goodbye*

Susie says she hopes she gets run-over
by a milk truck, just like Roland Barthes did.
Truth is reflexivity, she tells her bud
Freddie, Fashion’s our big silvery mirror.

Gotta keep the surface shiny, says Susie,
Nuthin’ else matters. Really? Freddie says,
But if we were to scratch the silver away . . .
Susie:—We’d see concealed surfaces, Silly.

Susie got breast cancer. She saw shrinks,
swamis, urban shamans, and a surgeon.
Freddie helped her to the mirror above the sink.
Holding Susie’s hand, hearing Susie weep,
he felt he’d been pulled past the paddle-end
and sunk somewhere far out and awful deep.

The Mollusks

When you are old and full of sleep, they stick
you in a box and sink you thirteen fathoms
deep off Florida. Un-magic kingdom
of the drowned undead, the great pacific
reefs suspend a sessile efflorescence
of retirement arcologies
till world's-end, till stars swim in the sea,
until taxpayers rescind that immense
last dignity extending franchise into
senescence, Pilgrim, and cut the juice. When
tides turn we're blinkered: the pearls that blue
our scalloped eyes suck death beyond reach,
flush catheters, and bless our great-grandchildren
who reinvent these golden years at the beach.

Posted Notice on Economy

The field of thrashing long stalked grasses by the beach may flatten in a gale or merely flick involved by summer breeze. No equilibrium resolves. Ocean currents cross unreconciled, though each compels and is induced to cede its course by force. They change, but conflict does not cancel-out. It's true that on a fine day all the butting waves in view contend a million points of light. They land, of course, by grace— not right. Attend.

Nature is not proper.

Human wish and fear once fixed frame need, set need necessity— the fix found permanent names property. We covenant with windy water to make natural law. Stranger by my lot, take heed. Trespass, I'll shoot you dead. Heaven squares my aim.

Rapture at Hebdenstall

Blaze, M.E. 1. To blow (e.g. with a musical instrument).

2. To proclaim (as with a trumpet), to make known. *SOED*

I dreamed I got up dirty from the ground
and frightened. I'd been lying in a furrow
and could not remember why. The sound
of footfalls drew my eyes, a shamble slow
and dim: a road nearby and on it slung
rough lines of refugees as grey as rain.
I shrank but was forced up to go along,
and stumbled with the throngs through narrow lanes
and open fields and down into a town
(I knew the place) that's built on stones they say
that ate Old Lady Lazarus. The crowds
milled in the streets, then stayed. I saw your face
and yelled out as the sky broke and flew bloody
from the cherub rushing on us, blazing, ready.

Livelihoods

He brokered home and accident insurance
twenty years downtown from an office
with a desk that held within one jaundiced
lower drawer a mason jar that balanced
in the stale and dreaming ichor of a quart
of alcohol, complete, a human hand
with one black fingernail. When he hastened
back from lunch at one each day, his heart
brim-full of blameless industry, he'd stop
to buy cigars and chew the toothsome fat
with Mister Stein, who'd bought the lobby shop
with money found inside a fresh latrine
in a still field outside Landsberg where he'd sat
and seen a shadow stand like pain in sunshine.

Acknowledgements

- “lambe” in *ALSO THAT* Blog Poetry Contest. 3rd August 2015.
- “Kindness from the Public Obliviator” in *The Guardian* Poetry Workshop. November 2006.
- “Valediction Against Mourning” in the 2015 *Able Muse* Sonnet Bake-Off.
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- “A Rapture at Hebdenstall” in *Poetry Ireland Review*. Winter 2000.
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