

## Richard Foerster

### *Aix en Provence*

... and then the world arced open  
like a door, a blue ventricle

pulsing with muscled flow,  
yet the space between my heart

and brain seemed a suitcase  
stuffed with shadows, a gorged

terrain of misunderstanding.  
Along those ancient stuccoed streets

the windows were iced with summer  
blaze above swarms of red

umbrellas—so many medusas  
casting about their tresses of shade.

And the snipped sycamores squatted  
like green hens on Cours Mirabeau,

where I brooded over my own  
clutch of regrets while the bistros'

cranked awnings lowered  
their indifferent lids. A waiter

swept from Les Deux Garçons,  
out to a table for one. His cloud

of pastis pearled around  
a single cube. Across my knees

a creased white napkin spread  
like a map in all directions.

Richard Foerster

I stared as pigeons scoured  
the pavement: *Where to? Where to?*

## ***A Field in Bohemia***

*"On this site the so-called 'Gypsy camp' used to be."  
— Information panel at Lety Concentra-  
tion Camp, Czech Republic*

A marker plots the old geometry,  
redrawn atop the latest property lines:

a square jackknifing to a right triangle,  
the ragtag buildings sketched-in, numbered,

and keyed to the necessary legend: Isolation,  
Disinfection, Delousing, Deratization.

And so in steps, three hundred twenty-seven  
Gypsies died, another five eleven crated off

to Auschwitz—such precision in those numbers,  
abstractions that almost obliterate what we can't

see and yet survey to pin it down as history. Here  
the State demarcates the garden of its mean regret:

a tract of waste between a barley field  
and a row of barns that slurry the sun-washed

Bohemian air with the pungent slop of pigs—  
all left unchecked, where weeds now outnumber

any counting, their flowerings useless as lost souls,  
till in the not-forgetting we might recall their curative

lore: that yellow mulleins' woolly leaves, dipped  
in rationed drops of fat, once served as lampwicks,

that nettles' prickly stems can be boiled for soup  
and yarrows brewed to ease the ache of unrelenting

Richard Foerster

sorrow. To tread among the camomiles,  
toadflax, and thistles, the lupines' patches

of blued earth, the wild carrots' fragile lace,  
is to know at last that we, too, trample

the unruly litany of outcast names.  
Their profusions cluster like gaudy caravans

for the dead. So let the scattering seed-winds  
tend what we must neglect.

## **Flame**

*I don't want to think about anything,  
except to become language.*

—Stanley Kunitz

Once again the poppies:  
I'd stay the wind to keep

their pure scorch, this  
conflagration thrusting

up from mulish roots  
despite years of my spade's

accidental loppings.  
This morning it seemed a hundred

crimson Hydra heads  
rose through the seadrift fog,

the kind of monstrous beauty  
we demand of myth in the aftermath

of winter. That's the problem,  
isn't it: the splendid seduction

of these Salomes, what they unveil  
in stages, the black intent

they keep hidden till the end  
within scrolled parchments,

the taunting logic we can't help  
thoughtlessly lusting after,

and would, at a stroke, become,  
even as the leaves drift

Richard Foerster

toward jaundice beneath  
brittle, rattling pods.

## ***A Young Horseman in the Camargue***

He rode into view, all rumbling thunder,  
bare-chested, bronzed, yet little more  
than a boy atop the gelding's bellows-flare.

Like combers rolling in from the sea, the sheer  
dare and thrill of him carried me in their sweep  
as he hunkered to the animal's heaving

crest, the thin arms stretched to their limit  
around the brindled neck, and I knew  
that gallop would soon outpace his prowess,

that slick flanks must sap a boy's  
clamped thighs, and the two-as-one  
fall out of sync. And yes, he was spun

to the sand, lay there dazed while his mount,  
no longer compelled by heel and crop, grazed  
on dune grass, mighty in its indifference.

How does one plummet with purpose,  
approach again an overshadowing,  
unbridled force? Before I could reach him,

the boy had stood, unbroken, and I thought  
I glimpsed the youth that I had been,  
or wanted to be, gripping a frenzied mane

that seemed at once blast-furnace white  
and glacial as a page, and I remembered  
that broodmare twitched with attention

when I first whispered in its ear—as if  
into the din of chaos, beyond all fear or falling—  
how I wanted to haul our weight into air.

## **Rapture**

Driving along the Mass Pike  
near Amherst, I let  
the radio stray, till I was seized

by an evangelist's rising pitch  
on the last days, the coming  
Rapture, "with a capital R,"

and I tried to understand  
his fervor for the universe  
to end. The highway before me

unreeled its illusion of infinity  
while I clocked 80 and the world  
flooded past in a blur of inattention.

Whatever intimations I've had  
were lowercase, and yet  
those little raptures came

clawing through my skull  
with wingbeat thunder  
till each thought was pinioned,

finally beyond struggle.  
—In Dresden once I laughed  
at Rembrandt's *Ganymedes*:

the boy, infantilized,  
besmits himself, not comprehending  
the god's ravenous grip and cry;

his pudgy feet paddle the air,  
desperate for any toehold, any  
anchor to the comforting mundane—

but in Rome, Bernini's Teresa  
was so meltingly marbleized  
in the eternal moment of what seemed

orgasm, that she embodied  
rapture's helpless ascent  
so that the angel's arrow

poised above her convulsing  
heart already pierced deep  
to a farther, immaterial core.

How much sillier, then, for me,  
confronted with dis-  
concerting beauty—a passage

from *Petrushka*, the fervent  
greens of Van Gogh's *Starry  
Night at Arles*—when my body

shuddered, welled with tears,  
irrationalizing the world  
while onlookers scoffed,

until that vision left me  
(as every time it must)  
humbled, back inside

the tremored flesh, torn  
out of paradise, remortalized,  
and gasping still in life.

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**Richard Foerster's** fifth collection, *The Burning of Troy*, has just been published by BOA Editions, Ltd.. He lives in York Beach, Maine, where he edits *Chautauqua Literary Journal*.