

Richard Freis

Night Flight

The pilot, backlit by a yellow sunset,
prepares the cockpit, dimmed to silhouette.
His dashlights flush the dusk. The cabin's cold.
A German tourist wipes his hands of sweat.

Along the runway green drains from the pines.
The engines rev and roar, roll us toward flight.
Our light plane lifts and wobbles, lurches and lulls,
as, strangers to each other, we climb into night.

The sunset rides beside us, a fluorescent
fresco, ocher, orange, neon rose;
a river like a ribbon hung on darkness
unrolls sunset below us where it flows.

Amazing how tenacious this last light is!
Ghosts of snowlight blur the nearer slopes.
Across the mesa reservoirs and lakes
shine like dimes tossed on a countertop.

My eye is ready to let darkness come,
weary of the light, too long awake.
Each separate self sits lost in dreams of home.
The plane climbs on the way the pilot takes.

Lesbia

I sometimes think the poems more than he
were my true lovers. Urgent to exist,
they made him love me, knowing I'd become
inevitably their mother; and in them
he found the greater self that he could love.

I've numbered other poets as my lovers.
They understood how much such love affairs
are like the art of writing pleasant verses,
knew how to keep the beat right, to compose
a music with beginning, middle, end.
And knew that they weren't of the selfsame
substance as their love. Or as their poems.

He wanted me to love him for his words,
to earn by them unbroken love, almost
a wife's obliged fidelity. He couldn't see that
women don't marry poems, they marry men,
and not, with luck, obsessed, possessive ones.
His famous plaint that I did not prefer him
before all others was unjust: if I
had asked, he'd not have burned his poems for me.

The Liminal Ones

They wear a layer less of skin
than others do; are, in any company,
the first to feel hot or cold; have borne
in their bodies every
side effect of every
medication they have taken; and
their senses are too alive:
each nuance of color or light
incises their eyes;
and they, when listening,
so completely hear, they
are all ear.

They are so pervious, you'd think that,
standing against the light,
they'd be transparent;
instead, we, the solid ones,
are transparent to them:
they know what people mean
before they speak,
and in the slightest shrug may rightly read a soul,
though others won't believe them.

And, finally, they prefer
this disbelief, prefer to be
as unnoticed as that silence which they are.

Empty of themselves, they
let what-will-unfold-itself
unfold itself as it will.
In their contemplation,
their seeing their blessing,
they walk through creation
inviting it to be; and are
themselves a liminal place,
where stone and spirit marry,
healing within themselves
the divisions of the world,
a poverty filled, an unnoticed mystery.

Richard Freis is an Emeritus Professor of Classics at Millsaps College. He has published studies in the fields of classical and modern literature and the history of criticism. He is also a poet, translator, and librettist. His present deep engagement with integral frameworks is reflected in his website www.body-mind-spirit-integral.com.