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BEAL, HARLEY JUNEAU. Lodovico's Curious Experiment and Other Poems. (1977) Directed by: Professor Fred Chappell. Pp. 21

Most of the poems in this collection are written in the "abstract expressionist" mode. Since the "abstract expressionist" mode is the primary mode of hell in the present time, there will be no apology here for having written in it, whatever difficulties it may pose for the reader. Nothing is forbidden here, neither "rhyme and meter," nor archaic phrasings, nor images of sense and nonsense, nothing forbidden but death and direct meaning which in this mode are synonymous. What is known either by invention or discovery must lead to action not category.

Historically this mode was born and its patterns set in reaction to both realism and romanticism, the previous modes of hell, and to the resulting modes of their calamitous interpenetration, modes which were, on the one hand, prone as a pancake and dead still like a photograph and, on the other, puffed up with moralisms like a corpse. Thus, both modes had reached their perfection as far as hell was concerned: a photograph of vision.

The following poems and their speakers face death of one sort or another not life, life is whatever action is possible. With two or three exceptions they are not about anything in particular, but are instead groups of particular images, words, sounds, concepts juxtaposed and constellated to conjure meaning not express it. They are better seen as

curious experiments in finality and transformation (the raising of Lazarus was another such experiment) which is to say the meaning occurs in the reader's mind and/or it isn't anywhere. The dead body leaves the page and rises there.

After this, make way for the Zen-like future mode.

LDOVICO'S CURIOUS EXPERIMENT AND OTHER POEMS

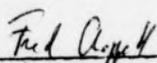
by

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Approved by



Thesis Adviser //

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Date of Acceptance by Committee

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Six of the poems in this thesis previously appeared in The Greensboro Review; "Mayday: In Honor of the Occasion" appeared in Intro.

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LODOVICO'S CURIOUS EXPERIMENT

With high windows bright behind him,
 And the afternoon sun on the slope of his shoulder,
 The doctor's servant wonders if the clock's wound down;
 Worry divides him from his chair and book,
 He attends the clock and placing a vase
 Of flowers on the doctor's mantle
 Sees them all blooming, red
 And brilliant yellow in the vase of fired clay.
 Illuminated simply as in an instant of remorse.
 Petals as they fall, yellow
 Of sun in the falling light, and red
 Of rose and of the speaker's robe
 Withering and taking clouds of purple in the folds,
 Petal flesh pulled fit still bright gloves, ethereal shapes!
 Brown time turns 'round the stem and strips
 The leaves and memories of Sunday afternoons
 In multitudes, dim sun and summer grass
 What graves and memories contain:
 Days retracting with other shapes and recollections,
 Bridal wreaths and copperheads,
 Into the redrobed speaker's eye.

All day was veiled in understanding.
 Night treads down the veil in blue-green tatters
 Finger shapes reach down the copper wall.
 Night the magician could have been that man
 Who pushed a starry fever through your lids
 Released the pin wheel helix in your eyes

Breaking the seals of clay into the blinding room
 Where the five fates do not come and brown time
 And the figure five in flesh is blind
 And blooms through time along the passing stem.
 Light weaves, gliding on the green fronds,
 Clinging on the flowerheads rose and gold.

Spinning rose and gold a lake of fire,
 A lake, to hold, Lodovico, in your hand,
 With a deep heart, black as August in thick needless anger,
 Black as the cannister of milkweed dancers
 Around us when we sleep.

The long fish
 Watch us, catch the light
 And pass like needles thin as days
 Below us when we sleep.

Q EXPLODING THE BASIC SPIRAL

His sentences went out
Like the red of ashes in the air
Apprentice to the engineer,
Captain of a company in France at 21
Was caught, miraculous
A silhouette in the flash, enfolded at the starry center,
Holding the stubbed toe
Bleeding under old bandages,
Wrapped in its flesh of soaked cloth,
Swaddled and as crooked
As a smart turn in a minefield. Inverse
Reverse
To the inner ploughman, going in the mouth of March
Along last year's uneven furrows and the wind
Rickety-nik in the shacks and exactly the same.
If exactly the same, it is not without grandeur.
The wind in the casements of abandoned buildings
Bearing down upon the sills like hands. Her hands
Had lain and not without folding
And not without holding, holding to her, and to her
Her own mind.
Were her eyes phosphorescent?
Were they bubbles in air?
Blue to clear green and of a liquid sheen
Flecked with the white of sunny waves?
And white wings, were they waves lifted into flight?
Nowhere is left the mist and orange of the morning storm,
But here, in the mouth of this shell, is the color you seek.

MAYDAY: IN HONOR OF THE OCCASION

What do you say
We get amazing Daisy in the shade
And make her lazy jellies crazy?

What would you think
If quick as a wink
And stripped to pink
We got with her down on the ground?

If we laid in the shade
For the rest of the day
She'd return from maid
Into fondness for roundness
As the day whirls around us
Full to a point of light in light
As the sun seems an eye
In a field of Oxeyed daisies.

CHUANG TZU KNEW THE JOY OF FISHES

The day has grown blue;
 The intolerable glare of winter snow is broken
 Where great arcs of earth show division in the year.

It is the time of year to feel divided.
 Snow could easily come again;
 And the no-colored wing the wind
 Makes itself known in all the windows.
 There are signs:

A pale half-moon in the afternoon is rising
 Right above the trees
 And a crow flies
 East through the Ram.

It is the time of man to be divided
 When the meaning of so many signs
 Is ravaged with the seasons;
 And all the changes that the seasons show
 Hold no images whole with redemption.

The wind spreads stress along the rafters
 That sets smaller tensions in my house
 And mind like scattered fires.
 In all those knots desire grows
 For the grace of an easy creature,
 A serpent or a bird.

In its quick fearfulness, Mind seems more primitive
 When the season is unsettled and the wind incessant.
 Moon-colored, wooden hobbyhorses,
 Or China seahorses rock near
 In the air and again in the sky
 Where such a bright rocking rhythm is loosed
 That undivided mind

Arrives where imagination holds a trembling light,
 And light's beaded pictures
 Slither into diamonds and out of sight.
 And only the eyes are left empty
 In the marvelous sea.

Lightning is balanced on scales that pass by us
 In water, flash by us like writing all gold
 In a language older than races:

By a stream or in a vision,
I saw a mendicant whose bowl
Was overturned upon the rocks.
And saw myself, humbled with weeping,
Lamenting all the births and deaths of man
And all the forms of heaven tumbled
And straining in his flesh.

By the stream I was riddled with questions,
Until my questions shattered and rhymed and were one
Where water drifted over pebbles and the sun's reflected
Image broke in omen's characters upon the water.

Deep in green water and the shady smell
Is a spotted fish whose rippling flesh is near,
Whose sudden flutterings make him seen.
The hidden is

In an instant plain!
The wind or water
Rams upon the door, signaling a change;
I open it and the house is filled.
Though all my copious notes are flown,
There is a smell of flowers in the cold.

AUTUMN IS A CARELESS HAND
THAT LET A CLOAK DROP IN THE DOORWAY

The sun on this cold October afternoon
Throws love's rayed colors on the glass;
The wind has heaped love's clothing in the room.
In the window hanging bells regret
That summer lost what love would keep;
The falling harlequin flesh.
What returns is skeletal, anciently naked,
Reaching into rings of coming winter
(Winter become a cup turned over
Spilling stars and hexagrams.)
The fragments of a shattered flame, the sun
Poured myriad over snow lights up a skull.
A lone figure of bones in kingly vestments
Gestures in a great blue room.

WITHIN THE SENSE OF RESONANCE

The sun lit
Shells on the morning shore;
Birdcall glittered in the air.
In one time, all elements
Rhymed and time exploded in my understanding,
Synchronicity of memory and world.
Waters tumbled into gilded bowls.

And the day expanded, pressing on horizons far away
And I was reeling on the way in the day/night flickering
And I was kneeling on a day in summer in an open field.
The sky had split above me and the whirring of the wind
Was like a brace of clocks. The leaves of distant trees
Were snickering and cicadas wound all sound into a ball.

When I was a child I saw a great ship burn.
In a high night wind, fishermen lit the derelict
And flames leaped from the water into dark sky
Into the common space of sea and sky.
The sea spit and swallowed flame, all elements gathered
And the sea's white teeth were flickering.
Where I was taken into realms of light,
The sea and fire were silenced in the sea's mouth,
Taken into a nameless vessel and cleansed of name.
The still sameness seemed round.

UNDER THE CLOUDBURST LATTICEWORK

Go on down, the mother said,
And down, the child broke into movement
Down where the goodnight fades
Dying easy as song on rainwind;
Going back to where the spirit was
Before the soul fell into matter.
Like mother's voice and father's voice
Mixed and rising from the canyon,
The weight of spirit fell
And fathered endless miracle
Like a line of marigolds in rain.

The poet at age four
Looking through the screen door,
Smelling for clarity
Sees its presence next to clouds,
Sunlit clouds;
Light lit light
Lit like orange
And then white. And the white
Rain too was falling.
Rain and the sun too,
Two together gather together
Rainbow out of light
In light lit
Bubble-pretty in the air.

Along the fence his mother's mother's marigolds
Arrested the attention of his singing to himself;
He looked through ironies more plentiful
Than natural years or squares in the screen
And saw his new world knew no end
And his lovesong only faded, fated,
Did not shatter
To scatter as starseed upon ancestral graves
Or as stars that lie upon the rim of night.

LIKE THE SNAKE IN THE CRIB THAT SWALLOWED ITSELF

When the rocker ceased to creak
And the light closed under your lids,
In the night outside, a winter away,
The wind could have been a man
Who nodded and slept in a thousand chairs
Each with a cat asleep before the fire,
Purring in his throat;
His winter breath whistles
And rattles the absence of leaves
Against the doors and windowpanes;
In his dream he leans on the sill,
Reminded again, how pale the ghost had been
Through his bedroom window
The year before he learned to read.
He saw it descend like the quarter moon
Wrapped in a fluttering cloud
And pass before the naked trellis in the yard
This clear winter night.

THE SAME OLD SONG

By the road where the appletree is in flower,
Hedgehogs lay like lazy grandmother in the shade
And ate the blossoms as they fell
From the season's changing fingers.

Madeline married Bill that summer
When the summer sun made it hot in the park,
But time revolves; that's why it's never worked.
Autumn comes, the touch of life grows harsh;
She's fickle as seasons and he is a fool.
Their love, as time solves nothing,
Is a stone and the sound of the cradle rocking.

It will take a child to teach them,
If the master cracks, that birds are egg-makers
Whether they fly or not when November
Breaks the sky in winter trees.

In spring they are back again
In the appletree
Eating spiders or what they find easy.

POEM IN THE WEATHER

When it seems as if the age
Of whiteness is upon us,
White as light from a christcrown
Or greywhite light
Color of old snow,
I am amazed
Within complexity of winter trees.
Oracle lines on palms
Evolve mathematical down witches' fingers;
Blue shadows in reciprocal are caught
Fragmented sky or sapphires
Laid in master-crafted necklaces
And rings on mythical queens
Seen where the winter sky has shattered.

Perhaps in the next snow
When new hexagons fall
A vast December clearness sparkles
Whether dark
Or light's in the weather.

LADY IN THE GARDEN

Her passion overcomes her in a flood of yellow
Light not golden, not quite white.
Her blood betrays her and her lips
Are stained by the grape's dark blood
As in the garments of a lovely courtesan
She stands enclosed within her master's garden,
A luxury in bloom. Wearing a heavy glove
That her daintiness be not marred by violent claws,
She regards the hooded falcon perched upon her hand.
She speaks to it and calls it clever,
Other names unfitted to its nature.
Beauty's sin does not reside within her passion
But in its distribution among unlovely patterns.
In another time, one closer to nature, her beauty
Living in its quietness, would have outshone the yellow sky.
Spirits then there would have been,
But lodged within the bodies of most gentle hares
And goats with jeweled eyes. Her father would have fashioned
Their images in stone to keep her childhood happy.
Still, she would have been a dark-haired pensive child
Grown up sad. She would with care
Have held her child and loved him with a brooding love.

SETTLED WAYS

winter snow
over the settled ways
vision of spring light
now
green in memory
drifting
mounds of birds
come down to sycamores
home to twilight
and the laps of women
older than memory
whose memories weep and say
the custom of the birds
is older than the past
remembers easily

or forgotten
pushes older rings
of what

the mind has seen
in solitary venturing
prone to love always
versions
of the song itself
sought mirrored
beyond
its own telling:
in the story
that must pass
from voice to voice:

the man of passion
laced to the winter tree,
time kept by stars;
and the strength
of the just arm waiting
in a future season
to spring forth
force resolution in the bud.

PINE, SOFT FOREST

Pine,
Soft forest
Twilight burnishing
Reindeer moss.
His moccasins pressed

Toward what,
Heavier than night
Between the trees
In the way, narrowed
By vines, briars

Clearing. A woman
Kneeling, the arc
Of her skirt
Dissolves in moss.
Her thought

As easily dissolved
By singing, hidden
Birds. Between their
Notes the man-
Woman silver pantomime

Floats on timeless waves
Waves of day
And night together.
He breaks
Through trees

For her,
His feet
Sinking
Night.

GIRL ON A CYCLE

Marilyn had her picture taken.
With even this forgiven, was she right
To ask another copy for a mask?
Four, the number of the square
You can see and feel it,
You know it past the random
Wood and metal movements
Measured by rule and the clock.
Lines that border need nothing but themselves
To look into on rainy days in mirrors
Just to hear the sound of motors,
Or without any sound at all
The pat pat pat of the juggler juggling,
As quiet and hanging there
As a planet in space, or a lavender nosegay fastened on the sash,
Blown forward from the morning window when the wind
Puckered his lips and whispered
Blue.

RECKLESS WOMAN

The universe shifting year on year
Has all day hastened to conclusion;
Crash of glass, colliding
Spheres of winter storm.
Glassy years collapse
Against a surface that contracts and darkens,
The universe prepares its silence and contrives
Its absence in a smaller room, snow-carpeted
Beneath a script of trees.

The trees are noisy with ice, elm limbs fall
And everywhere a brittle surface breaks
To ears like flaking tiles inscribed
With wiry hieroglyphs of broken limbs,
Fallen from summer's symmetry
Mosaic onto misty fields.

Foreign gods are figured there,
All eyes and ears and separate,
Geometries of folded miracle, blurred by nebulae;
Sometimes the miracle of gesture
Traced through clouds the wintry wind unrolls
As when a sinewy forearm seen above the scroll
Extends a hand, a cup inside a lighted amber ball.

Once more the moon is seen to glide
Upward on night's canopy, her indigo hair
Falls with moon reflection everywhere
Windless to the man-shape standing
Beneath green pines that glisten and junipers that labor
To the piercing syllable of ice.

It is the sourcing of her grace
Fracturing the grasp of winter
When her hair flies up;
The pines are stirred.
A spoon-shaped wind is whirled, withdrawn;
She lifts a hand so white the juniper goes raven black
Behind her and moves dark tongues around her arm.
Primeval cedars twist. The pines are green, membranous
And each one glistens like a lip.

IN THE WITCH'S PARLOUR

One man yawned and three lost their seats
The last spent an evening with a wish
Dressed in magenta in a sugary light
Bowing she came forward into the red room
Her hair fell willowy
Over her shoulders
Her glove white hands
Clasped the envelope above the roses.

An amorous note from such an extravagant lover
In such an extravagant age he is enamored
Sealed with the seal ring's five gold points:
She broke the wax design, and read, she heard
A voice she hadn't heard in thirty years
And every tooth was gold in a mouth that told
All the old stories at once with all the old points
Giving the sense of passing time and then
Of timelessness thrashing about
Outside in the season of change.
The waxen room was apple red, the floor was mottled green
R. H. the porcelain man stood up
With greetings in the center of her brain
Naked with greetings she could not return
Nor was a god to wed her
Even if the words, as they vanished from the page
And wavered in her throat read like a wedding vow.
In quivering yellow and unholy black
Red diablo gives the stern command.
What is that sound?
The spider weaving.

THE CONVERSION OF RED MONEY MAN

Long ago Red Money Man
Played at backgammon
And drank red whiskey from a glass;
Kept his money handy in a mouth-red bag
Buttoned away inside his vest;
Its strings drawn tight
As days when time began to drag
Like a red dog lengthening
A stubborn neck against the leash.
Red Money Man prayed against
The black rays of the game,
Cursed the Black king's stones,
Stars and star-black rays
Of men upon the board,
His own red money he bore
Off smartly under his arm. Lean fingers
Tucked the bag away and spent
The pieces sparingly on angel's bliss
Until the ruby kiss of the Indigo Queen
Like a falling thorn of a star
Unstrung the red mouth of his purse;
His miser's hand grown generous
Fingers saintly merciful and strong
Dipping in and spending handful
Upon handful, radiant metal
From the red silk purse of his heart.

CONVERSATION WITH PICASSO'S GHOST

Brother John for Joy was lost
 The inches of his lives had made
 A frozen sea
 Of moments, clear as flight.
 His eyes had found
 The curve of somewhere
 Vast
 To wander in, covered
 In a thinner skin again.
 Again plain talk, a human skin alive
 Without portent, with portent bursting
 Silver twixt the syllables
 Round as a moon, for the same reason
 Thin as a birch
 For the same reason, living
 Turning in the same carved sky.
 His eyes turned, discovered questions.
 Why should the wind
 Blow through spaces, as it does?
 Why it did not come
 Headlong at us through the glass
 Is anyone's guess.

Who stands behind the curtain?
 The cockeyed matador looked down,
 Razor of light into the pit;
 His head become a portal now
 His sword: the master's staff.
 Who stood behind the curtain looked below
 Where love had met
 With lamb and made a beast
 Whose teeth were as waves on the sea.

"That makes no one's sense," someone
 Will surely say, and usher in
 The best intentions
 Dressed in the drabbest hues, perhaps
 Akin to mountain blues, a cloak
 For sure, but not so full of light
 As when the machination fails
 And the sense it makes, my dear, clears
 The mind of what is sensible, clears
 The edge the sensuous world's
 Slight horizon, will unfold:
 Two mirrors, the actor's dressing screen
 Whole columns of mirrors, high windows
 In turrets above the bunting clouds,
 Magical stations, the sphinx on guard:
 Two sides forward like an empty box:

Inside: mist, loveliness, perfect
Symmetry, a summer's day serenading
Childhood. The childhood
That is gone.

Behold the windows on the sun,
The flags and snapping no's
And brooches on the women's breasts
Bearing portraits, peasants clad
In palest elven hues, perhaps
In elven caps. One with a sparse beard
Another with eyes, thick as ten
And of blood's color.
The beloved is a queen, no nun
The curious woman, child of no mother,
Alone in her room. Before her window
Curved to meet the day, her lover's face
His sweet face
Cocked up in space
Frosty profiled on enameled blue
Was sunny-visaged as a coin.
Picasso made his peace;
The Devil draws a figure 8: the moon
Asleep in her white canoe,
The porpoise of an angel's breast.

