

New Poetry By Abby Murray



Hercules and Cerberus, 1608. Nicolo Van Aelst, Antonio Tempesta. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

13 WAYS TO APPROACH A THREE-HEADED DOG

I.

Those who tell you
to carry raw meat
have never met me.
Bones are better,
they last longer,
but if there's

no bones to be had
bring peanut butter.

II.

In this analogy
I am always Cerberus.
My beloved is inside,
changing.

When he wants me
to sleep in his bed
he comes to me
shaped as a body
like yours.

III.

I grew old here.
Compliment the quartz
mouth of my cave,
my heavy collars,
the bronze of my bark.
Tell me I sound
familiar.

IIIa.

I live to be recognized.

IIIb.

My hearing is spent.

Your language
is a red fruit
everyone loves
to chew.

If we lock eyes
I'll stand.

V.

I wouldn't call
human souls
delicious
or even tempting.
I swallow
what I must.

Dogs escape

all the time,

cats too, crows

and wolves.

I let wolves pass

because they sit

a while before

they go,

they don't trust

this river any more

than I do.

We watch it twist

around itself together.

VII.

What would I buy

with your money?

Lie down. Stay.

VIIa.

I do not know what a changed mind

feels like. Grass? Maybe sun?

VIII.

In this analogy
you are convinced
you are *sui generis*.

You will be the one
with quick feet.

In this analogy
the ferryman drops
your fare into a sack
with everyone else's.

Bring water.

I'm not saying
it will buy you
time
but I am thirsty.

In this analogy
you are the one
who thinks you saw
the city shimmer

before it split.

You're not wrong.

XI.

My beloved

has built a city

where all the bread

is free.

XIa.

His garden

is free of spiders,

nothing

that can be crushed

is sent there.

XII.

Show me what

a sleeping dog

looks like.

XIII.

Are you the moon?

If you are,

make me know it.

I keep a song

in my throat

for you.



Johann David Wyss, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, George Routledge and Sons.

HOW TO DIE IN PEACETIME

Welcome the cancer cell,
its sense of justice
more twisted than the DNA
inside its rebel membrane.
Welcome its obsession
with reproduction and division,
the way it makes a home
in the left breast and waits
so patiently, still a pearl
within a pearl within a pearl.
Welcome its false history
and family-friendly values,
its desire for more and more
children, the way it butchers
its own meat forgiven
by the prayers it sends abroad,
the way it campaigns for leader
of the immune system
and loses gracefully each time
until it doesn't, until the first
letter is tied to the first
brick and flies through the first

window of a neighbor's house.
Welcome its lavish parties,
electrons everywhere,
flags that flicker like emblems
of peace in the bloodstream,
welcome its marksmanship
when it shoots down the doves
who wake it each morning.
Your body is a sovereign
unable to wage war on itself,
your body is a black night
rippling with radiation.
This is peacetime, this is grace,
this is our merciful killer
rising like a star in our bones.
Let us raise our telescopes
and toast to its brilliance,
its speed, its true aim.

ARMY BALL

You've outgrown the army ball,
the men I mean, not us, the wives,
who spend hours buffing time
from our necks and faces.

We dazzle in our pearls
and tennis bracelets clipped like medals
to our limbs: my OIF amethyst,
OEF diamond studs, SFAT cashmere.

Some new wives miss the mark,
overshoot the dress code
and show up in wedding gowns.

They pick and pick at the tulle,
the crystals, the ruching.

At our table, your jaw is softened
by gin and a single year,
the one before Iraq
when Blackhawks dropped you
into the unarmed mountains of Alaska
and you floated down like bread.

We toast the dead and drink.

We howl like dogs for the grog.

Men come forward with liquor bottles

so large they contain entire wars,
dark rum for the jungles of Vietnam,
canned beer for Afghanistan.

A bowl the size of a bus tire
is filled with two hundred years
of booze and we serve ourselves
with a silver ladle made in America
but polished last night, too early,
its grooves blushing with tarnish.

RANGER SCHOOL GRADUATION

A cadence is written like so:
wives show up for the mock battle
at Ranger School graduation
in heels and spandex skirts,
some of us threaded into silk thongs
and some bare-assed,
some in black and gold
I heart my Ranger panties,
all of us too late

to hear this morning's march:

You can tell an army Ranger by his wife!

You can tell an army Ranger by his wife!

Because she works at Applebee's

and she's always on her knees,

you can tell an army Ranger by his wife!

This is how we sway like choirgirls:

America oils our hips.

Rope off the wood chips

and call it a combat zone.

When you're paraded into the lot

beside Victory Pond I pretend to know

which smudge of red is you.

Already I am washing your uniform, your back.

Your mother says *oh, oh!*

and claps: the sound of deer ticks

kissing your blistered necks

before we can.