

The Twilight of the Dogs

I know what it's like to be busy with other things.
All this fuss comes out of the landscape
choking the eye and stifling the ventricles.
The last thing you have to do is stand there idiotlike
clearing your throat and himming and huffing,
puffing and hawing, or whatever it is you do
when all else fails and the best is a faded dream,
a gleam from afar. This is my subtlest gist,
my one truth to stand for. I have not heard
Mozart's concerto for glass harmonica,
but I know it marks the instrument's epitome.
I had it from someone I regard specifically
that there is a phenomenon called arrhenotoky
and that I ought to look it up to see what it means
when he claims that he and I are two peas in a pod.
The tremendous blast I get from such a thought
could send me into orbit light years beyond
the coldest planetoid and back again
before I could give it form enough to speak it
calmly among friends, it is that titanic.
I will tell you what it means if you tell me
how you got that zebra down on one front knee
in front of your statue of the Virgin Mary
then fed him artichokes for his reward.
Whole countries in Africa would pay you to do that
(forgetting the Virgin Mary part of it)
and make you a very rich man in the process,
probably a chieftain or an emperor—

certainly, no doubt, a man with countless wives
and a reputation as a sage and a magician
to be honored till the fifteenth generation,
which is way past the limits of immortality—
and as you can tell I am excited by this idea—
it moves me, it takes me up in its embrace—
moreover, you and I seem richly to deserve it—
it folds us into it with a sensible sweetness,
a warmth not unlike what the saints told us about
in the places where they swooned with ecstasy,
somewhat in the manner in which I am swooning now
even to think of all of this at once
and in a noble frame of heart and mind—
ennobled by themselves in fact, I think,
contrary to every impulse to discern
in this the workings of some prevalent spirit
utterly without me and beyond. The accoutrements
of a cast of thought like this are such as to
appoint themselves everywhere hereabouts
in my own continuum, so I know it is best
that this be so, and that the holy gods
are mystical effusions from the uppermost
altitudes where our smoky ancestors
all sit enthroned above us in the brain.
Which brings me to the point I would like to make
about your zebra and the Virgin Mary,
along with Mozart's glass harmonica
and other timely things I have brought up,
which have been on my mind a great deal lately,
as you doubtless have surmised. Arrhenotoky
is the exclusive production of male offspring
via parthenogenesis, which is, of course,
conception without fertilization, or virgin birth,
and a glass harmonica is a set of glassware
filled with water at different heights, so as
to produce a melodious humming sound when rubbed
by the fingers of one's hand held lightly and flatly,
as an uncle of mine used to do at Christmas dinner,
while the last of the snow was falling into the twilight,

and my grandfather's old Dalmation, Pagliacci,
was still alive and sighing by the hob,
and soon the night came on, and we stood up
and listened by the window, and looked out.

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