

**BRENDA PORSTER**



*SELECTED POETRY*

*Antigone in Apulia – A Gypsy Mother's Tale*

Cast out we were  
into the dark sailing away  
not towards, but together,  
she exactly filled  
the empty cradle of my arm  
a damp-warm weight her need only I  
could meet, the dark vague depths  
of eyes, the desperate searching,  
the shell-clenched fists rosy  
uncurling prawns grasping  
my breast, tentative  
lips and then that clamping pull  
of life from me to her fulfilled  
our mutual need, each to each  
bound, in perfection,  
the circle closed.

When did I see she was not  
there, her small weight gone  
limp, suspended, all warmth  
drained, the searching ended?  
She no longer needed  
me, while I was left, longing  
and my arm circling  
empty. Chill terror clamped  
my breast and suddenly I knew:  
they would come and  
cast her down to depths  
infinite she would drop  
down never to be found,  
her tiny body unfurling  
waving anemone limbs  
forever searching forever  
exposed.

No! This could not be! I,  
her mother, would provide  
for her a warm covering, decent sand  
and place, a collocation

PORSTER

of the mind, for both our needs, together  
a final time, before I said  
once more: good-night,  
good-night, my heart's own dear,  
and left her there.

*Note: For burying her baby daughter on the beach of Apulia, where she had landed after escaping from Kosovo, this Roma mother was arrested by the Italian police and charged with illicit concealment of a corpse*

SELECTED POETRY

*Danaë*

is that any way to treat  
a so-called darling daughter?  
shut up in a chamber  
for my own good, he said,  
but really meant: no sex for *you*,  
my girl, till *I* decide;  
and so I paced the rounds, muttering curses,  
clawing bronze walls and crazy  
in want until: he came and

looking up I saw  
light-filled particles of gold dancing  
in air reflections of sun filling  
every pore, my body bathed  
in warmth opening  
to him and he penetrating  
my inmost need

now  
in my chamber the shower is lifted  
the empty air cleansed  
pure as space and I  
alone again, but knowing  
inside me, deposited, lies  
a hoard of gold,  
an ecstasy of memory.

*Eve asks a question*

into the secret creases of your mind  
my insinuating tongue curls  
as yours does in my body  
this lust I have to taste  
in utter intimacy  
your inmost self  
is it the real  
forbidden fruit?

*SELECTED POETRY*

*The Curve of Things*

“These things do tend to take a certain curve”  
- so what do you do at the end of the curve?  
get off, I suppose, or, better, are let off,  
stepping down to a point off the line,  
a bleached and empty landscape, displaced  
you look around you and can find  
no horizon, no axis to refer to, only  
vast suspensions of space and time  
with no direction to follow,  
except backwards,  
where you cannot, will not go  
though your body’s every fiber  
be aligned  
to that pull.

*Paranoia in Springtime*

So much rain has been shed  
the grass is growing, growing  
knee-high and rank  
cannot be cut  
down, the mower is not working  
and I'm choking on  
the lust of it.

There are wild cats  
out there too, black, I am not  
kidding they really do  
snarl and bare  
fangs if ever I dare  
step out.

The lines are also quite  
quite down, your cell  
phone does not answer, my Provider  
either, who can I call on  
for help?

SELECTED POETRY

*the cruellest season*

*“one brief rain  
then earth goes dry again...” (d. greig)*

Only slightly joking,  
I said you were  
my cruellest season.  
You never would  
quite get the point,  
although you could  
- great sperm-whale of the mind -  
spout flashy geysers of remembered verse.

Not so long after  
I understood  
how earth might not desire  
the softening rain,  
her pain  
at penetration, the stretch-marked crust's  
slow smoothing to the touch  
of liquefying fingers,  
the shyness of green shoots  
just daring to suggest –  
while toughened roots  
already presage  
oncoming drought.

*binary signals*

how utterly amusing, I told myself,  
what fitting (albeit bitter) irony, this  
most carnal of encounters  
– mere bodies by night clashing –  
should end as pure  
pulses, virtual communication,  
an airy signaling

only  
my body belied the illusion,  
the urgent throbbing  
scripting its own, deviant sub-text,  
flashed across the darkening oceans  
on, and off, calling:  
come 0 come 0 come!

SELECTED POETRY

*the other*

i.m.l.p.

I

I never forget the voice  
from across the wires  
how it caressed the air around us  
how warmly her love  
(*buona notte, caro, t'abbraccio*)  
froze our loving

images multiply  
from the mirror's edge, smile  
from behind the slanting light  
(in derision? in benevolence?)  
onto the crumpled bed.

II

I know because he told me  
how drowsy he held her hand  
for hours, her vibrant presence spent  
finally, her mouth swung open with the weight  
of no words left to share, except,  
at the last, I love you,  
as she and he dozed off, together  
to a space of infinite pity  
beyond the mirror, beyond the phone,  
beyond the bed.

*cucumber cool*

we were both deep in sleep when,  
inaptnly late, we heard the ring  
you answered anyway  
and recognized a voice and spoke  
friendly to a friend somewhere:  
no, it was not too late (it was);  
sleepy, I heard fragments filter through  
... a child, political preoccupations...  
dreamily, to pass the time,  
I took you in my hand, you didn't mind,  
and grew, still chatting ... no, better  
not to isolate Austria but, hopefully,  
Haider ... I heard, as you went on

and on,  
interfacing across the continent,  
by ear attached to her, by hand to me you were  
a real, smooth cucumber  
and oh, so cool – making the bed hold three!

SELECTED POETRY

*manuale di grammatica*<sup>1</sup>

the result of this was that all children under this age were separated from their parents -

*note a possible alternative formulation (with the 'cause' expressed as an adverbial -*

*a prepositional locution):*

as a result of this all children under this age were separated from

their

parents

the babies and toddlers dependent on the older ones –

the toddlers

*a parenthetical structure (notice that it is separated*

*from their parents*

*by commas) consisting of an adjectival predicate*

(dependent on

the older ones)

*with a subject NP*

(the babies and toddlers)

separated from

*the rest of the text*

(at the age at which they begin

to walk)

all children

dependent on

*the rest*

*of the text*

<sup>1</sup> Lines found in a manual of English grammar in use in an Italian university. The text analyzed grammatically in the manual is taken from an article by Tony Judt in the NYReview of Books (12 Aug. 1993), "Betrayal in France."

*On hearing CAD read*

Like the cheeky Eolus she was  
she'd brought her bag of tricks,  
blowing winds of words to us  
she emptied vessels of verse her  
words bobbed above our heads their  
rhymes like glinting lights of  
word balloons in hues various as  
passion and wit, as laughter and love.

Doting we were besotted with her  
sounds, together first we chuckled, next  
sharply intook breaths in unison as,  
with a wink of an eye, coy  
she eclipsed the time, making of  
this place a New Jerusalem.

SELECTED POETRY

*Salt of the earth*

She remembers:  
a boy of five  
trapped in a tunnel of snow:

*Out on the streets, a boy of five  
hawking papers for a family  
of five (the baby having died).  
The snow is banked higher than his vision  
the banks muffle his voice  
when he calls for help, icy smoke echoes  
back glints with frozen light.  
He can only look up  
to a blue sky, or more likely grey,  
or perhaps the night is already  
come on.*

Snow drifts into memory  
now  
they have spread salt to melt the snow,  
the earth has drunk salty water.

*Myles Bay Blues*

*for d.*

You would have loved it here –  
waking up mornings in a saucer of light,  
ripples over the bay  
like fingers strumming on a steel guitar.  
A sudden clatter of wild geese interrupts –  
the harmony of their classic V  
broken, confused.

I, too, am in migration.  
No home now to go home to,  
while squawking birds cut their way  
through a watercolor wash of sky.