

Two Prose Poems

Michael Trocchia

Transmigration of Souls

Today the old philosopher moved out of the house. Beard left behind in the sink, a loaf of warm bread hollowed out on the table; in the kitchen a book of family recipes, a stone for sharpening, and a matchbook struck a thousand times over—*the turnings of fire, half earth and half burning* written inside its flap. He left the shovel out back, leaning against the elm; he left his radio on, tuned to a static sense of time, a pair of wet boots at the pedals of the piano, and his wool cloak, stained with wild game, draped carefully across the keys, as if to warm the heart of a winter song. He's left his breath in every glass of bourbon; the softback books of would-be rivals piled high in the hearth. He's left the hunting knife sunk deep into the headboard; and in the study, a hard mask given to him in a divided land—the face unforgiving, all closed up like his own now. Finally there is this notebook, open to a page inked with axioms for an emboldened life, yet each word struck through, as if a single thread ran through his head, the only way to unravel everything he left unsaid.

Furnishing an Interior

The idea was to bring things in swiftly, things undeniable to his senses, to make the room conspire with itself, and with himself in it. Standing mirrors framed in hardwood, yes, but also every obscurity he sought to find within them. Failing that, what simply did not exist, a rug thick with problems of fate, a bookcase full of false histories, a lamp for turning his mood from dark to light. And how, with the help of an old friend, or his father, he'd roll in a desk, its drawers filled with the soft fabric of battle flags yet to fly, with pads of passages on the everlasting birds of passage, and after that, a vault—which the two of them would set, nearly straining themselves, along the long wall—inside of which he'd keep the glove of a thief, half a bottle of polish, and a mechanical instrument for making myths. Whatever the weather, he said, it would make do for ambience, as it would, at times, be enough to thaw the frozen rain on his face as he came in through the door, or enough to drain the lust from his loins, or, depending on the movement of the spheres, melt even the ice-folds inside a great bear's skull. And for the two opposite windows, he would be sure to provide his own treated glass, one pane with dawn burned into its edges, another with the imprint of the night-bird that crashed against it when he, as a child, dreamed of flight and its failure at dark hours. And on the walls would hang from floor to ceiling paintings of warriors who never left for war—painted, as they were, into the doorway of their homes—and also paintings of a few speechless trees, those stranded on the hillside by which one arrives, their limbs gesturing desperately at every passer-by; and then, should any space remain, he'd put up the portraits of the first philosophers, the names and theories of whom he could never, for the life of him, keep straight, but whose imagined visages, he believed, must bear some semblance of what is and isn't real.

