

Inman Square Incantation

Forgive us, we don't exactly believe or disbelieve
What the President tells us regarding the great issues
Of peace, justice and war—sceptical, but distracted

By the swarm of things. The young Romanian poet in LA:
She said: "In Romania, bums are just bums, but here
In America the bum pushes a cart loaded with his *things*".

With a mean elfin look one of the homeless carters
In Alfred Vellucci Park sometimes begs using
A stuffed dog, bear or bunny as a prop: the paper cup

Panhandled toward us passing marks puppetwise—
Can you spare a little for Teddy? Or The Doggie's hungry—
Crooning maternal parody, a wheedling mock-innocence.

The noseringed leather kids who haunt the T station seem
The reverse—feigned menace. But one bashed some black girls
On the train, using the kind of metal rod called an "asp".

Some money to feed the bunny? His little poetry reading.
And the plush animal a street sign among signs, his ad
For something more personal and abounding than just need.

His smirk knows a thing sharper than pity to block my way by
The brazen ten-foot tenor saxophone that marks *Ryles*,
To *Top Cleaners*, the bank machine and *Patel Quick Food Mart*.

The dictionary says that a *thing* is first of all an assembly.
Forgive the word “bums”. Forgive “homeless”, our sheepish
Euphemism. “Derelict” is better for these forsaken.

Across the street from *Cerveija e Vinhos* and *Boston Improv*,
The Romanesque fire house’s arches frame bas-reliefs
Of horse-drawn ladder & hose. Amid these signs of civic

Rescue and cleansing, diversion and provender, let’s
Remember, you rat-faced beggar: I dislike you. Forgive me.
And if as I pass again from where I’ve been I choose to take

A dead president from my breast pocket where I stowed the thing
And put it in your cup, it isn’t Charity, but superstition—
a provisional
Wishful conspiring with the artist in you, son of a bitch, bastard.

Immature Song

I have heard that adolescence is a recent invention,
A by-product of progress, one of Capitalism’s

Suspended transitions between one state and another,
Like refugee camps, internment camps, like the Fields

Of Concentration in a campus catalogue. Summer
Camps for teenagers. When I was quite young

My miscomprehension was that “Concentration Camp”
Meant where the scorned were admonished to concentrate,

Humiliated: forbidden to let the mind wander away.
“Concentration” seemed just the kind of punitive euphemism

The adult world used to coerce, like the word “Citizenship”
On the report cards, graded along with disciplines like History,

English, Mathematics. Citizenship was a field or
Discipline in which for certain years I was awarded every

Marking period a “D” meaning Poor. Possibly my first political
Emotion was wishing they would call it Conduct, or
Department.

The indefinitely suspended transition of the refugee camps
Must be a poor kind of refuge—subjected to capricious

Kindness and requirements and brutality, the unchampioned
Refugees kept between childhood and adulthood, having neither.

In the Holy Land for example, or in Mother Africa.
At that same time of my life when I heard the abbreviation

“DP” for Displaced Person I somehow mixed it up with
“DTs” for Delirium Tremens, both a kind of stumbling marked

By a childish nickname. And you my poem, you are like
An adolescent: confused, awkward, self-preoccupied, vaguely

Rebellious in a way that lacks practical focus, moving without
Discipline from thing to thing. Do you disrespect Authority merely

Because it speaks so badly, because it deploys the lethal bromides
With a clumsy conviction that offends your delicate senses?
—but if

Called on to argue such matters as the refugees you mumble and
Stammer, poor citizen, you get sullen, you sigh and you look away.

Samba

The Hudson's not a river but an estuary. "Palisades Park"
Was a hit, then a jingle, or was it the other way round?

What's the difference? Or is it a difference O City of
Makers, among measures of freedom & commerce? It is

So a river because it is The Hudson River. In the same
Restaurant where Dick Powell ate with Veronica Lake,

Pacino shoots Hayden in the forehead & he falls face first
Into his spaghetti—making the place still more desirable to

Us from across the River & beyond, stunned too by live
Reindeer at Bloomie's. Donder & Blixen are caribou.

On the screen an old Eskimo with a caribou-bone needle
And thread of caribou sinew stitches together a raincoat

From strips of caribou gut. "You make use of every part
Of the caribou?"—the filmmaker's voice. The old guy

Smiles answering in Inuit while we wait for the subtitle—
"Everything but the shit!"—laughing as he keeps sewing:

Like a City answer, that profane assurance & fatalism.
A Canal herbalist might sell tincture of caribou droppings

For your cancer or your orchids. City of healers & cheaters.
Streets of sowers & killers, weavers & reapers. In front of

Goan Foods the vendor of girly lighters & bargain
CDs is dickering with his customer. They were born on

Different continents & the CD is not shit, it is the many-
Rooted music of the great Brazilian, Caetano Veloso.