

Bertolucci

The *magic vox*'s pale green disc
 blinks like an airplane tail-light
 or an astral event: a voice from the *Times*
 is asking if I'd like to write
 an obituary on Bertolucci
 —the father, the poet, not the filmmaker.
 Necrologue. Crocodile. Obelisk.
 Which leaves a couple of days to bone up on
 his life and works, to pry into his *Capanna*
indiana (shed or tepee?) and his *Camera da letto*
 feeling like a rank outsider
 who's intruded on a family funeral
 or a paid mourner desirous everyone should know
 how much the departed meant to him.

I remember him well in the cover photo
 before that hilltop Parma village he was from
 (whose name I've forgotten)
 in a sadly festive, broad-brimmed hat
 that shades his eyes. He called his condition
 Melancholia not depression, which made it sound
 planetary rather than clinical.
 Under the strain of obligation—of the “required”,
 as opposed to what: the superfluous? the inspired?—
 the more I read the less I understand,
 the less I understand the more I warm
 to the way his quiet voice is fretted
 by “the hopeless fatal transit of time”,
 the sense of loss that flowered from his hands.

Hearthstone

The gods of the hearth exist for us still; and let all new faith
be tolerant of that fetishism, lest it bruise its own roots.

—GEORGE ELIOT, *Silas Marner*

...it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home.

—THEODOR ADORNO, *Minima Moralia*

We had the old gas fire ripped from the wall
and see how they've rewarded us, the gods of the hearth:
a ruined gap behind a makeshift, nailed board,
a cold weather front where the back-boiler was.
We found an oak surround in a junkyard
and actually paid money to cart it off
—no rebate, a torque to one leg, the other cracked,
its mantel scarred by rusted nails and cigar burns,
the whole thing awake with woodworm drizzling frass.

Next we chanced on a cast-off, cast-iron fireplace
and a raw flagstone from a next-door garden.
fretted with stonesaw, claw or chisel marks
—a segment of the planet's crust, a cold slice
telluric and thick as a mountain's tongue
and heavy enough to put my back out
as I edged it into its resting-place.

The man who did the serious work said how
he'd spent his youth taking out these fires
and his old age fitting them back again...
I plastered over the gaps I'd tamped with twists of news
and filled the crack with cedar dust and wood glue
and all we needed then was winter fuel
to light the first fire here in fifty years.

Now we've journeyed back from digital heat
—the spring that threw the spark that lit the gas—
to manual graft and elbow grease
as though to rid ourselves of years of ease.

Firewood and fircones. Two hirsute bricks of peat
brought back on purpose from the boglands.
What more must we do to make the hearth gods happy –
carve oak leaves and acorns on the shelf supports?
Daub bison on the cave walls with our bare hands?

Penal Architecture

There are in London... notwithstanding we are a nation of liberty,
more publick and private prisons, and houses of confinement,
than any city in Europe, perhaps as many as in all the capital
cities of Europe put together...

—DANIEL DEFOE, *A Tour through England and Wales*

With a touch of excess or overkill,
George Dance the Younger
had actual iron chains
pinned to the rusticated stone
on either side of the double door
of Newgate Gaol.

Drawing the pediment
he thought of Dante,
just a consonant away,
and Milton's gates of adamant.
He was after a kind of
sombre, frozen music,
a literal metaphor—
turning the flow of words
back into things.

The mind is its own place
and can stress
the lock not the hinge
in the idea of door.