

E·RATIO

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Two Prose Poems

by Jonathan Minton

Lazarus, emerging

He begins again as a parable told for the first time. This does not reflect his need to speak, or the hunger pains before his next meal. He is a book in which foreign birds come and ago, their adjectives burdening each instance of arrival. In a tree beneath a window, yellow birds of the yellow color sing before a gathering crowd. In the story, he begins as a toy ship pulled slowly across a floor, under the table, or as a blind man stumbling into the crowded room. He is apparently sick, so nothing can be said of his surroundings. To suggest otherwise would be a form of cruelty. Instead, he thinks of the known diseases of the gall bladder. When not in that humor, he is in another, as in the beginning of autumn, as in the leaves returning to earth, or the misrule that results from the strain

between personal desire and collective goodwill. He asks if a city, in good order, though small, and built on a distant crag, is as foolish as this, even if an ideal model? If cattle had hands and could draw, they would shape the bodies of their gods in the likeness of cattle. He imagines cattle in the likeness of property, property in the likeness of wealth, wealth in the likeness of one's own estate. Resemblances, he concludes, are therefore private. Behind him he hears a full-throated song, and before him he sees an emptying room, the first of many signs.

Lazarus, after the disaster, the miracle

When asked to define the word *collapse*, he avoids referring to colors: neither the rich pink orange of salmon flesh, nor the soft electric green of a macaw. The ashen strips of his linens offset the appearance of red objects: fire, coral, and the cinnabar that bleeds its ink into the creases of his palms. He places blank clay paper in a clay pot and inscribes it with the word *thief*. In time, even the yellowing of the leaves will be dampened by darkness. In time, his light will pass through the space of a room to a perfect white circle on a screen. In time, each color will appear at the border between light and dark, with or without their objects. But now he stumbles from the mouth of the tomb under a canopy of trees thick as cordwood. He whispers the word *bellum* in a tone no one can hear. Belief, he will later say, is a line between *hunger* and animal, or apple and *apple-colored fruit*. Nothing, he will say, is green, or as green, and nothing is greener.

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