

E L E A N O I R A N D H U F F ' S
N E W B L U E S A N D G O S P E L



N A T H A N I E L M A C K E Y

—“mu” two hundred thirty-eighth part—

The air lay lit with a kind of dread. Expectancy's arraignment it felt like, the oud's outer inurement all there was, inside out.

The

conundrum the backs of our heads hit was death. We thought of it the least often we could but a lot, the closer walk being

what

it was. “Rue not the day,” we'd been told. . .

Happenstance rode us like an orisha, the unawares heaven we were in without knowing

it

almost to be beheld, recession a kind of rescue, not to be held on to. A kind of circling it seemed or it was we could not find a way

out

of. Huff and Eleanoir, sudden lovers, caught unawares was only part of it, verities purveyed in a row the least part of it, the it whose

it

we would be. . . We stared out our windows, Low Forest green a cathedral. Leafed limbs hung over us as we rode and were ridden, the green

com-

edy said by some to be clear profusion. The dry cliffs of Bandiagara were a far cry away but we might've been underwater crossing Mu,

Huff so wanted it so. It was he who breathed life
in-
to it all he'd've had us believe, the wobbly cap-
tain who steered our boat a god decked out in
shades dark enough to blind. One saw the passion
and
the pathos of it, Huff's pathetic boast backed
by someone inside each of us hollering would it
were his, would he had his way, someone inside
Elea-
noir the most, the bodies they newly saw they
wouldn't always have now newly poignant, lit
with a new appeal. . . It was all creation myth,
creation ythm, by now, Sophia said, was but hadn't
al-
ways been. How to break free of the said she impli-
citly asked, whatsay's world dominion, silence
long since no option, the underwater tissue of leaves
we
drove thru. She was the wise one, ever the one
we'd heard of, always our luck to hear from. She
pressed her lips together, soft wrinkly flesh nixing
talk,
nixing kissing, adjourning all surrounding sound. . .
We were on Cornwallis, passing under 15-501, the
daily for the moment immortal, preserved in amber,
what-
said lag let
go

•

Ythm was a corollary life riding with us, a concur-
rency, a wrinkle in time. Accompaniment it could
also be called and Sophia called it that, the green in
the
blue, the blue in the green. . . Not since embou-
chure met nerve-end had it been so close to see, so
wise or so conducing to wisdom we pounded the
heels

of our hands together, pressed our tongues to the
 backs of our teeth. . . It was all one to us whether we
 came or we went, mythic or mystic the ythmic ride
 was,
 drained or adjoining Mu we
 trekked

•

So too with Huff and Eleanoir's romance, the
 lens they slew history with or made it with
 history with, made history with. It was history
 cut
 down to size. "Let us never put forth any-
 thing unless it be parcel, part," Eleanoir had
 said. "Breath and light beyond any before,"
 Huff
 had said, "bodily breakdown bear me thru."
 So much of it was they wanted to speak that
 way, so much emotion a pretext for whatsay,
 So-
 phia would've said had she not summarily ad-
 journed all sound. . . It was a moment under
 the overpass, traffic noise cancelled as well as all
 else,
 more than a philosophical pause but also that,
 a nonsonance none but Sophia knew was there.
 Whatsay's collapse into nonsay rode with us now,
 momentary though the muting had been, return
 to
 sonance though we did, nonsay itself the blue
 vessel we bore thru green in. We rode along saying
 nothing now. It was all a corridor of green leaves
 and
 light, the standing-pat of trees between which
 we once debated if God could lie. We sat now
 tasting our tongues. . . All effortlessness it was now
 or it seemed. Everything attested its place without
 call
 or complaint, "mu" as in mute, made clear. I

too sat tasting my tongue, Nub's descent into Nur
 a kind of coating, nothing not affected by Nub's

un-

mer-
 cy

The trees were breathing in and breathing out
 for us, transitory support we rode on.

The realty show was depleting Low Forest

and

we cruised even so, an ambiguous boat
 amid a sea of green. "We took a real trip,"

Trane had said, "on a real ship," imaginary

sound

more real than the wind riffling the leaves,
 the hum of rubber on asphalt, the ones that
 were there. . . A faint, far eastern keening had

one's

ear, Nub's descent into Nur a kind of croon
 it prevailed against, hatesay remanding the
 we we'd be, "mu" as in moot. Turned away,

we

rode our boat of longing, locked out of the hea-
 ven we'd been in not knowing we were in it,

immi-

grant wish the boat we
 rode

•

It was Huff who had called it all myth, all ythm,
 a clipped or some other way compromised
 rhythm. There was an imaginal sound, he said,

loud-

er than sound we could hear, boat of soul
 the school of oud, oud as old as wood some said,
 some said even older. With the wood's daugh-
 ter Eleanoir took issue, wood not to be said to

have

come later, she said, subsequent to the oud's
pear shape, the pear not possibly prior to
the tree that bore it. Shape, she went on, was no
ab-

straction, shape was even less possibly prior.
"Enough with the 'some,'" she said. "What do you
say?" she asked. . . It was the beginning of he-
said-she-said, cosmogonic wuh rebutted by cosmic
flirt,

things began to come apart. "Wood was less it-
self before oud was," Huff answered. "Oud is what
made wood matter, oud itself more virtual than
real,

especially the school of it. Oud is only illuso-
rily matter, imaginal sound beyond concrete
audition." Wood's daughter, whose dream, af-
ter all, it was we were in, her dream of the blue
truck

that might've been a bus, might've been a boat,
said little. "Wood is wood," Eleanoir said. Then
she said no more, said nothing, not-saying saying
more

than saying would. "Trouble ahead," Ahdja whis-
pered in my ear. . . Huff himself not knowing,
Eleanoir had no way of knowing eucalyptus trunks
bare

of their bark were a Lone Coast memory, a grove
of them Huff's dream, his blue remit. A long way
away and a long way back. He spoke of wood as
one

who spoke of flesh, as of a grove of legs, bark
stripped away showing lionlike whiteness under-
neath, a Greco-arboreal mytheme or ythmeme,
"leaves" informed of which he'd long read. Oud, she
had

no way of knowing, he himself not knowing, was
a transposition eastward, troubadour stuff, court-

ly legs he saw, dreaming westward, an erotico-ecologi-
cal polis he saw proposed by the worry lines on her
face. . .

How Eleanoir dreamt her not knowing, how dream
could specify what she didn't know without inform-
ing her, none of us knew. How she dreamt Huff's not
know-

ing we could see. Her dream was to know with-
out knowing and to know more than he knew. Ahdja
whispered all this to me. . . We ambled along leav-
ing the philosophic nonsonance behind, the overpass
be-

hind, wood's daughter's falling silent of a piece with
it though we cruised away, blue truck, blue bus,
blue boat, whatever it was we rode on or in, heroines
and

heroes of her dreamt
récit

All hands were on deck as we exited the
nerve church. We saw there was nothing
not stained with motion. The animate
out-
cry "We've been had" echoed all thru
the trees. . . Eleanoir and Huff, having fallen
in, were now falling out, the pathos their
would-
be polis aroused gone against polis itself. . .
A bare limning taking place took the place
of the solid as their chances grew long,
they
and we the fools it took turning wary, more
likely
to've been trawling
sleep

R

NATHANIEL MACKEY's most recent book of poetry is *Blue Fasa* (New Directions, 2015).
Forthcoming from New Directions in 2020 is *Double Trio*, a three-book set from which the poem
in this issue is taken.