

THE
TRUSTY SERVANT

SAMPLER

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Andrew Jordan

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Canst thou draw out leviathan with
an hook? or his tongue with a cord
which thou lettest down?

Canst thou put an hook into his nose?
or bore his jaw through with a thorn?

Will he make many supplications
unto thee? will he speak soft *words* unto thee?

Will he make a covenant with thee?
wilt thou take him for a servant for ever?

Job 41: 1-4

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THE SEA

Identifying with a force that no-one then could articulate,
I concealed myself amongst mysterious coercive things;
a slab of sombre fish, the cracked quartz of bloody ice
and slit belly of what lay cold. A rubbery, dissociated head.
Dazzled at the door, I paused and then, as always,
checked for reactions and cues that might imply rewards.

Now everyone agrees that beauty overrules an unknown power.
We all accede to love's ambivalence. And yet there was a time
when ideals, fully realised, did not imply regrets. Inscrutable sea,
I found my compromise in the love conditional, its dark and
fathomless complexities, commands and signs, and thus
immersed in it from early on, grew gills and fins and spines.

ORFEO

Swaz hie gat umbe,
daz sint alle megede,
die wellent an man
'alle' disen sumer gan.

Giving up the ghost, I went alone to the ford where the dead,
still in open rebellion then, stood before God's vengefulness.
He, in the form of Philip, Landgrave of Hesse, commanded
mercenaries as at Frankenhause in 1525. But now a chorus
heralds *Fortuna*, who turns her wheel and moves the Moon,
at its full, across the Sun, eclipsing Splendour. *Pro Fortuna*,
accepting fate, I took my chances behind her wagon and saw
a hand lift the shroud for a lady to look upon that mustering.

Half-lit vapours rise at sunset from a creek. Follow this line
with your eye and you will come to the silhouette of one
making haste far off on the marsh. Dusk fog obscures
what happens next. When they can, men will look for him.
On Friday evenings at the pictures, with my friends,
I saw objects cast in beams from way back, symbols
transcending my first understanding, but not my corpse,
marching amongst carrion, beckoning from the screen.

Looking over my head, one lady holds up a flower labelled *Ioye*
and the dead, cheering, pledge their loyalty to her playfulness.
Through lustres dolorous, hidden forces animate decaying flesh,
and there I am, phosphorescent, on screen, with a maiden
I admired before she died. Spectral, in living memory,
she smiles. Desire ignites regret. Quickened by the thought
of lust, almost touching but not intimate, passion flagellates
and this is why, wanting more, those who passed still agitate.

Reliquias receptas. Through these songs, recovered from antiquity,
I also was drawn to consider what once I would not have,
that rights deny tradition, leaving those long gone forlorn.
Unselfconscious love, childish or innocent, informs the one
who rises when there is no other option, lifeless and cold,
from the effigy of everything we have forgotten, or denied;
the dead possess and move freely through that body perilous,
its constitution, within which all hopes and liberties are bound.

In Walsingham the pilgrims gathered in the pub to celebrate
their victory. Our ancient dead at rest beyond the wall. The jollity
of pretty girls in drink. Catching sight of himself in a glass,
the little priest lifted onto the bar by some great beast sees Death
behind him as the spirit lights his face. He's ready then to confess
that his was transcendent bliss, that he enjoyed nothing
but a harmless kiss; and he sees them all as they'll be judged
in the dark outside the inn when only the idea of love lives on.

On the Quay, outside the Fleece, fishermen watched as he,
in jest, held his child over water which, far below, echoed
their laughter. Cassiopeia, archaic Queen, head pushed back
amongst stars, I also was helpless. But now, looking up,
contemplating the night sky, seeing gods and monsters,
each caught in its moment of apotheosis or regret,
abstracted, emptied, lit and horrified by what it sees below,
I long to make myself at home where once I felt degraded.

As I sat reading quaint old English verse, a hair, tickling my hand,
moved me to inspect the place where, much like a bookmark,
it was caught. Thus the trap was primed. I saw it there.
To know what justified this low device, I ventured in
and lost myself amongst the leaves. Turning
amidst *Honters with hornes* and hounds, the hind, desolate,
fell as *thai halowyd hi hi* full joyful, whilst 'drery Dethe',
drawn by its cries, unmoved by what he saw, looked down on me.

An unknown ship, silencing Sirens, crossing the bar, navigates
the run and, riding the tide, enters the harbour where, turning,
it bumps the quayside. On board, men speak a strange tongue,
their words weighing what we have left unfathomed.
Castor, Heracles, Iphiclus, son of Thestius, Peleus and Jason,
Orpheus; they disembark and head straight for the Fleece.
What had the sea perfected in those men who went,
heroic, half brute, into that grove, dark beneath its emblem?

No warrior, nor valiant king, can equal Orpheus, Calliope's boy,
son of Oeagros; from early on he featured self-erasure in a song
and undid orgiastic gods to come. And this was when men
and gods went dancing with animals. *I liked that frenzy.*
Silent mouthpiece, oracular powers might infuse a grove
but I cannot see my way past Sirens, drowning them out.
Disembodied, gagged, inside my head is a listening voice
and it's this unlikely epic singing that now floats mythic Argo.

Bacchantes, extempore and thus liberated, ran out of chaos
and I stand where they danced to mete a form of stability;
their ironies, although long depleted, can still turn a word
upon which we rely. Moved to the scale of fantasy,
bounding horizons celestial, they'd go crazy. In that state
I also attack the image with bare hands: kaput, the head
sees a torso, limbless, thrown and now we too are hands,
knees, teeth, feet, the eye within dissolving completely.