

Après Rops

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*For Jeremy Reed*

## TRIBUTE TO CYTHERA

*(after 'Cythera's Toilette')*

Most of the cherubic *putti*,  
their wings shot to ribbons  
by the flung locks of her auburn hair,  
labouring up the jagged rocks,  
red-arsed with effort and the sun's intent eyes.  
Saddling the Isle,  
the goddess in immaculate stockings,  
all she needs to sheer her nakedness,  
that toss of the mane, her lioness triumph  
of tribute brought.

And what do they bring  
sputtering boyish praise as they mount the cliffs –  
'Cythera, Cythera' from blubbering lips – ?:  
powders and scents of the body debauched,  
the silver platter of sherried hearts,  
pedalling wings on an empty cot,  
a mangled jester; his quartered jerkin  
spat from a bottle of foul gags,  
pillows sodden with tears held by the neck.  
And a winged cucumber thrust in a gorge  
as she turns her head in delight.

## AT THE BALL

*(after 'Death at the Ball')*

Death is modish,  
has appeared at all the finest places,  
his chinoiserie cloak and chartreuse eyes  
always tilt at the angle of the moment.

He squeezes blood from chandeliers  
and spikes a schooner with a spicy tooth;  
his head thrown back at the ecstasy waltz  
the pounding gavotte of his bones.

His prancing boots in calf  
stripped from the living cud,  
one foot always turned;  
the exquisite trip of arrhythmic hearts.

With thin green lips he greets you,  
he marks your card,  
holds your towel as you powder your dread,  
gathers your wrists and pools your eyes.

And gets your coat.



## INCANTATION

*(after an etching of the same name)*

Skulls, retorts, the mangled taxidermy,  
the pierced handmaiden at the pestle and mortar.  
The heads of failing snakes  
hang low by the hems of spells,  
a febrile spitting from wickless candles.

Lofted behind the oaken throne  
a banner of the splayed bat.  
Black-capped, the high priest sings  
    for his demons  
    his vipers  
    his virgins;  
the tapestries' withered threads at his razor voice,  
the apples rotten at his feet.

And look at the beauty sprung from purple incipits,  
the veined marble of dreamt breast and thigh,  
the sex untouched but sullied by his reedy tenor drool.

He turns the thick-thumbed pages  
– *Compendium Maleficarum* –  
he will sing it all from tongue to toe  
while she sucks out his life with her blood, red, cape.

## PORNOCRATES

*(after an etching of the same name)*

Look at the Muses botching their *bas-relief*  
bums on blunt instruments and fluffed notes  
chiaroscuro by mud and besmirched plinths  
lolling strings twanging by the lyre.

For Pornocrates is abroad led blindfold by her pig  
her diaphanous sash all that remains of imagination  
raven feathers in her hair  
the anaemic rosettes on her mirror boots;  
they will see their own faces that lick.

You may well weep Muses and twist to tinder your Craft  
for what your hand conceals is worthless when all's on show;  
a world spreading them for sure illumination.  
Behold! the swooning cherubs  
clasping the aroused wax of their fall.