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“What I Want Isn’t What I Want to Want” & “And What of the Fleshy Contents of My Skull?”

two poems by Chris Hutchinson

What I Want Isn’t What I Want to Want

I want insomniac stars
the size of sunflowers.

*

I want to dig in, eat fancy-lace polymers
for breakfast, each inorganic molecule
a unicorn in captivity.

*

I want to swap bodies

with my long August shadow
stride alongside Modigliani's
thin-necked women.

*

I want to gather my own bones
wield my ribcage like a rake
sift through my father's ashes.
I want his gold molars.

*

I want to live a Stoic's life, but only once
I'm robed in purple and crowned
in emeralds and amethysts.
Till then, I'll have to hustle
lie, and cheat.

*

Who doesn't want to snatch victory
from the jaws of a circle
with no circumference
no center?

*

Who doesn't want to know
if they're sleeping when they're awake
if they're dreaming when they're at home
or if they've become insane
in the vicinity of riches?

*

Some confessions are penned
without a single point of punctuation.
Wanting for nothing, some lives are sadly blessed.

*

I'd rather be cursed like night
by a field of sunflowers seething
with seeds of antipathy
toward the stars.

* * * * *

And What of the Fleshy Contents of My Skull?

Above, cumulus clouds appear

with the sound of empty thought balloons
in a comic book about life
in the eternal present no one
has time to read.

Beneath the rust-
red trestle bridge, the river froths
and foams, pale green like the flesh
of the honeydew melon (*Cucumis melo*)
I tried to eat this morning, but too soon
before its name had fully plumped itself
into being's
beatitude!

But it's noon now, and I'm walking across
the river, perpendicular to the rushing
water forever whispering its way
into and out from the mind's ear-shaped
estuaries and bays.

Just moments before, my mind —
which still isn't working
right — had rippled along the shore
along with summer's late surprise
at all the crumbling eyesores, the extant rows
of redbrick cottages, vacant now, and half-
concealed by unkept groves of linden (*Tilia americana*)
whose luminescent leaves I want to say are like
the fat, curvilinear eyes and cheeks
of Renaissance cherubim!

All I'm saying is, everywhere
there's empirical evidence
of empyreal design, there's something
to see, something to know, something
to live for! Or maybe

I've just been duped into thinking
this way, ever since the morning Adam
first awoke, feeling denotative, proprietary
and vaguely American — how, before he begot
or bit the fruit, his mouth was already full
of worldly appellations!

And maybe I'm wondering
if all this naming didn't also colonize
our imaginations, slowing the swift-
flowing waters of *kisiskāciwani-sīpiy*
into the "North Saskatchewan River"
curtailing its current of syllables, soothing
its spumy vowels into something easier
to ignore? But this is not your river
and not your place
to say, whisper the clouds inside
my head. They're telling me the epistemic joke
that language likes to tell itself
must eventually fall
flat. They're saying this bridge will rust one day
and call it quits, along with the fleshy contents
of my skull — *kersplash!*

But not before
the linden's protean leaves yellow, almost
redden, then come fluttering down
like so many clever hands severed
from their wrists —
yet still trying to write, spinning around
their quill-like stems as if to inscribe the air
with a few last words before
they either hit the ground
or skim the water's surface, find purchase there, and let the river take them ...

CONTRIBUTOR

Chris Hutchinson

Chris Hutchinson is the author of four poetry collections and the speculative autobiography-in-verse novel *Jonas in Frames* (Goose Lane Editions). Poems from his forthcoming book *Lost Signal* (Palimpsest Press, 2025) have appeared in *Hobart* and *The Cincinnati Review*. Chris holds a PhD in Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Houston and presently serves as core faculty in the English Department at MacEwan University on Treaty 6 Territory, in *amiskwaciwâskahikan* (Edmonton, AB, Canada).

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