

# RAWART

GALLERY

## WHAT DREW ME ON

### 1. *The Vision of Er*

What drew me on in my own faltering  
summoned in due time to rise from the damp meadow

the journey begun? The unfolding ambit a whiplash  
of looping paths, quick vanishing sightlines

I knew not whether earth or air cushioned my walk  
and plodded on, but whose words – “the stars shine

through the holes of my cloak when I spread it out in the pitch  
dark of night for shelter” – had wandered

into my mind, the future more vivid (if true  
I shall be humbled) *a sieve to sift wheat*

*or barley*, while on either side scratchmarks, indigo dimples  
beckoned, and I thought I saw a canister

floating above me like an asteroid, or was it a trapezoid?  
Stenciled shapes, charcoal fisheyes, amidst

a column of light, more radiant, purer than cloud-borne Iris  
spanned the heavens and plunged to the sea-floor

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Get a move on, I told myself  
 as iridescent light blebs  
 rained on the lime-  
 washed field, the slant, stippled  
 plane, cutting a paper  
 trail, dark, snaking footpaths  
 for one lately snatched  
 from the pyre, unfettered

setting out to a place  
 of forks and windings  
 chalkline byways, groundless  
 vistas – *with no thread*  
*to mend its gaps* – once again  
 lines flung back at me  
 from light years away

I, Er, of the tribe  
 of Everyman, lately revived,  
 am cradled in a vessel  
 of unborn song, swaddled  
 in my overcoat: “Oh god  
 won’t you exchange it  
 for a robe of glory?”

\*

Gazing up after another day's crossing  
I beheld light beams fastened like a ship's undergirders

that kept the constellations from dispersing  
where the Spindle stretched from bottommost heights

and all the orbits rotated on their axes  
“How so?” I shook my head, chalking the tongue-tied

wonder with a free hand, peeling the coalface  
skyways back, “How so?” hook and staff darkly

lucent, and its huge whorl, hollowed and scooped  
enfolded, one hoop nesting within another

airbrushed, spangled, alternating speeds, in reverse  
orbit to the Spindle that spun on the knees

of Necessity, and a Siren leaned over the rim of each orb  
releasing one sound, one note as the spheres

whirled in concord with the Fates, Necessity's daughters – *Spin*  
*Twist*, and *Sever* – singing of what was, is, and will be ...

2. *Again Placing the Patterns*

Who would have believed your return.

The terraqueous globe ringed in florescent green –  
but there you are, making fresh tracks

on the still wet ground, dappled  
with anticipation, casting your lot with the wind-buffeted  
silver bush (*Calocephalus!*), the diamond

frost, the wavering stem of the wand flower  
paying out, winding you in, dawn lifting the urban  
drek around you in its rubbery arms

sticking its sticky fingers into bills raw  
with song, dawn walking you through the Way  
of Seeming as you rub your eyes

and fix your gaze on the ruinous  
splendor taking hold of the dangling, aerial  
roots sucking at light dawning

\*

These are the materials

to construct your inflammable

bark and hoist the shroud

of being: paper, scissors

stone – Weigh anchor! My bantam

weight anima, my feathery tres-

passer – off you go now

over ignitable, rag paper seas

of fancy – how many knots

have you chalked up, akimbo, a kilt

afore mast, my tangled, runaway

shadow on your maiden voyage

(every voyage a maiden)

Stone. Paper. Scissors. Sing

\*

when you lie down

and when you rise up from the bed

of leek green and rapeseed

of red hibiscus and slaked lime

whiting, of Tyrian dyes

secreted by sea snails – *argaman*

and *tekbelet* – when you lie

down and rise up, unpicking the blue

from the white, the sun  
 at its zenith, and the sea's polished  
 mirrors leveling the city  
 on its mounds, and you behold neither

sun, nor sea, nor mirror  
 nor anything other than them.

\*

I wasn't familiar with the Hebrew  
 for rhombus and heard  
*threatened*

rather than suit of diamonds  
 when you spoke of  
 its emergence, the words

barely  
 distinguishable in my ears, but hadn't it none-  
 the-less suited us,

to speak of the need  
 to ward off the slant, nagging  
 threat of losing  
 it?

though I wish I could say where *it* lodged,  
 tucked under the temporal  
 lobe?

The pituitary gland?

Hai ben Yaqzan –

The Living Son

of the Wakeful – surmised  
 what ever once occupied the cavity  
 of the heart

he'd removed from the dead doe  
 who had nurtured him was It,

(“where had it gone,

through which outlet  
 of the body had it taken leave?”)

Did you know

rhombus once stood as well  
 for a whirring  
 string instrument  
 used in

the ancient mystery cults  
 called in its day  
 a bull-roarer?

Might we have come  
 a full circle, did the oblique  
 figure portend more

than meets the eye?

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Again placing the patterns of life on the ground before us  
(this is Er speaking) far more numerous than I might have imagined

how were we to read the lots flung at our feet? How choose  
from the sundry shapes, free hand cut-outs: what lives, what tyrannies

what strange, earthly comminglings; penuries, riches, whether whole or atomized  
lives stunned to a standstill, and those that kept running on ...

stared back at us with mimic force. Had I been there, or not? Every-  
man. Winged out-of-the-body, I'd watched my betters

draw their lots. Swan. Nightingale. Lion. Eagle. Ape. And the wiliest  
of them all, alighting on Nobody lying in some forsaken

corner and minding his own business, proclaimed the poor fellow  
he alone had been chosen to step into his skin.

It's a hazardous business choosing a new life. Keeping your eyes  
fixed on the just calling, undaunted by the undisclosed

brushing against the daily, unfinished spectacle, for it will save us  
if only we believe it, and we shall safely cross over.

### 3. *Belle Imago*

First came sooty beings shinning up walls  
 gulls on the look out low-circling the grotto  
 off port Levanzo, the Paleolithic shoals –

then came the potter's shard, the calcined logo  
 dustbowl spindly sparring partners, crooked up  
 or flat out, sow and reap, and ready to go –

then came the hand-coiled, fretted drinking cup  
 the gift, the barter , the lingua franca  
 celebrants, rounding the cape in festive getup –

then came the wheel-made Lady of Phyla-  
 kopi, tubular priestess in polychrome  
 O unearthed belle Imago, belle Alpha –

then came (under the hippopotamus) full blown  
 in the papyrus thicket a little man with straw  
 blond, sticky hair, punting his reed boat home –

then came winged gigantism, leonine maw  
 or else the kilted procession, minuscule frieze  
 on the cylinder seal, part of the jigsaw –

then came Kouros stepping into the light breeze  
 on the road to Thebes, dimpled under-lip  
 softly beveled in a smile meant to please –

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then came birds to peck at will-o'-the-wisp  
 grapes clustered on the plate, uncanny likeness  
 for the famished, before spitting out the pips –

then came tall tales apace on a broad canvas  
 in manifold drafts where anything goes  
 (see how they dash into the arms of trespass) –

then came bawdy scenarios, household curios  
 the reading of bridal mysteries below hot  
 thinly smoking fumaroles as the cock crows –

then came aureate Byzantium, shot  
 through with semblances, ivory caskets, vellum  
 and tesserae, all is *theosis*, or else naught –

then came the arabesque in rapid-sum  
 defile, out of Arabia curling round the heart  
 of every dome its calligraphic rerum –

then came the stonemason wheeling his cart  
 of grotesqueries, grimace of faces under  
 the weight of a capital, rent apart –

then came silent vows, and nothing (sweet plunder  
 of faith in Assisi, preaching to the bird-  
 covey of little sisters) short of wonder –

then came portraiture in full dress, spurred  
 on to strip the heart bare, the dark surround, glaze  
 upon glaze probing the gaze, undeterred –

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then came a window onto a prospect, haze  
 lifting over cypress and stream, and deep within  
 a birth foretold, the betrothed in a daze –

then came the Campagna, a rustic inn  
 sunlight washing over the nut-brown broken-  
 down aqueduct, taking the long view in –

then came costumes, Odaliskes, token  
 charms, a blotchy palette soaking up the bustle  
 in the souk, as tonalities beckon –

then came the plein-air rambblers to rustle  
 up the show, chemistry kit for a paint box  
 sunburst and vapor in atmospheric tussle –

then came the toss up: how outfox  
 the rule of thumb as the eye beat a path  
 across the abrupt divide, pine and rock –

then came the sleepwalkers: in wrath  
 tearing down the scenery, and opening wide  
 their mouth and eating what they find to the last –

then came belle Imago once more with the tide  
 lapping full fathom as she put forth  
 her phantom hands and said: paint the dark side.

#### 4. *Light Years*

Shake, press down, watch color appear.  
 You'd read in Benjamin how parables bud  
 into a blossom like the margosa outside your window  
 or unfold like a paper boat into a flat sheet  
 of paper, to smooth out and decipher  
 in the palm of your hand. The margosa  
 with its bitter bark, though it's now almond

blossom season, midwinter flare-ups  
 on the road to the coastal plain – shake, press  
 down, and watch color appear, read the instructions  
 in small print, but when you pick up your terra  
 cotta marker, it's not like you're asking "What does  
 the man behind them mean, the one who blows  
 the trumpet?" or, "Why all the citations

anyway, don't you have a mind of your own?"  
 A snarl in the traffic I can't see the end of  
 drives me out of the bus crawling down Ibn Gabirol  
 and onto the street: if you strip away the scenery,  
 one prop at a time, what's left for the eye  
 to latch onto? I loop around the movers van

blocking the sidewalk, sidestep a bulging carton

crayoned Handle With Care: Nothing, it's like  
 the inside lining – Benjamin again – on the nether  
 side of that “nothingness,” feeling my way  
 around the furniture, I recognize the neighborhood  
 by now, the park, the kiosk, and, yes, a scatter  
 of margosa trees and in the distance the tapering  
 casuarinas we're always mistaking for pine,

it too imported from the subcontinent, when  
 would that have been? Prussian, cerulean  
 baby blue, an ever-errant azure, a Jonah-thrive-  
 and-perish-in-a-day blue, is it any wonder  
 your predecessors kept clambering up drab, unlit  
 stairwells with their portable easels to take in  
 the rooftop view, light bouncing off

the wash, water tanks, and rigged up  
 antennae, and hadn't it been the same with you,  
 no sooner back in town, you'd found a poky  
 rooftop shack, and, undeterred by the *vroom*  
 of the jumbo jets low-flying overhead, scrawled  
*SUMMER IN TA* arched over the sleeping  
 figure scribbled in back and a dab of yellow.

The girl etched in the rays of the midday sun  
 in a billowing dress swinging on a trapeze outside  
 a turreted, walled city (circa '65), is back  
 in her natal city, built on soft, red *hamra* soil.  
 And it's not like you're asking, “Are those wings

etched into the copper plate? And is that the head  
of a dog in the right-hand corner?" as you shake

press down, and watch color appear from the tip  
of the jumbo, garden craft marker, and the possibility  
of a new clarity hangs in the air where a child leaps  
once, twice, thrice, to grasp the fibrous ends of an aerial root  
dangling out of reach as I cut across the park, the point  
is besides the point, a little to the left, dark dwindling  
to a vanishing point beyond which the city

encrypted a hundredfold, stages its own vanishing  
act, folds into itself, blossom to bud, in reverse  
slow motion, and the garden paths unspool  
in the concourse of the mind, and there you are  
two flights up, the streetlamps lighting up the margosa –  
purged by fire before descrying the stratosphere  
and Ibn Ezra's cloak hardly bearing the weight

of a fly, through which the stars pulse, recall  
your own charting of the heavens with drawn blinds  
and swift, random strokes in our sublunary world.  
Light years, light years! Gauging the distances, how  
your body tracks the stark, emerging shapes down  
slanting without mercy from nowhere, and the line  
swirls you round as you enter the current.