

Beard of Bees  
**#105**

# ***OCTAVES***

*by Daniel Bosch*



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Oh dainty triolet!  
Oh fragrant violet!  
Oh gentle heigho-let  
    (Or little sigh).  
On sweet urbanity  
Though mere inanity  
To touch their vanity  
    We will rely.

W.S. Gilbert  
*Princess Ida*, Act I

*For Lisa Lee*

**“The bereaved cannot communicate with the unbereaved.”**

*—Iris Murdoch*

We never have more than one bar.  
Our server is usually down.  
We over-interpret each star.  
But I never see more than one bear  
In the lights of an oncoming car  
As I walk from the bar into town.  
We’ve never had more than one bar.  
Our server is usually Dawn.

**“... the velvet leash of sleep.”**

—*Elizabeth Bishop*

Do children in footed pajamas  
Fast in dark cribs and dark beds  
Replay, unrestrained, each day's dramas,  
Or do children in footed pajamas  
Recite to themselves, “*Amo, amas...*”,  
Dead language astir in the heads  
Of the children in footed pajamas  
Fast in our cribs and our beds?

**“Experience is a revelation in the light of which we renounce our errors of youth for those of age.”**

—*Ambrose Bierce*

The neighbors call the cops over the noise  
A four of clubs clipped to your Schwinn's forks makes,  
But they can't catch you. Neither can the boys.  
The neighbors call the cops over the noise  
Of your F-4 Phantom—it's one of your joys,  
The fists of napalm blooming in your wakes.  
The neighbors call the cops. You hear the noise  
A four of clubs clipped to your Schwinn's forks makes.

**“...youth is an ambush.”**

—*John Donne*

Nobody walks through middle school  
Who doesn't hear the roof joists creak  
Under the weight of something cruel.  
Nobody walks through middle school  
Who doesn't know pain and ridicule:  
Dodge ball, acne, boner, tampon leak.  
Nobody just walks through middle school.  
Didn't you hear the roof joists creak?



**“I got the blues thinking of the future, so I left off and made some marmalade. It’s amazing how it cheers one up to shred oranges and scrub the floor.”**

—*D.H. Lawrence*

When I move my index finger,  
My index finger moves me.  
Who dare say I malinge?  
I move my index finger  
And in seconds, any thing (or  
Image of a thing) appears to be.  
I am *moved*. My index finger—  
My index finger!—moves me.

**“The great day of the Fire-eater—or, should I say, the day of the great Fire-eater—has passed.”**

—*Harry Houdini*

The labyrinth-builder Borges seems to say  
The past is present now, and now, and now,  
And there is air enough for just one day.  
But the labyrinth-builder Borges, who seems to say  
A lot of things, never singed *his* brow  
Spitting butane in a sideshow or on stage.  
Only labyrinth-builders like Borges are amazed  
By how the past is present now, and now.

**“Burn something. Use the ash.”**

—*Anne Carson*

One never steps in the same river twice  
With a box of one's mother's remains,  
The water redundantly cold at one's thighs.  
One never steps in the same river twice  
With unpoped kernels of teeth, and white rice  
Of bone, and bone dust's sifting grains,  
And one never writes the same line twice  
In the box of one's mother's remains.

**“I feel, against the stupidity of my time, floods of hatred which choke me. Shit rises to my mouth as in the case of a strangulated hernia. But I want to keep it, fix it, harden it; I want to concoct a paste with which I shall cover the nineteenth century, in the same way as they paint Indian pagodas with cow dung.”**

*—Gustave Flaubert*

What if what it is is not  
Love—earth’s iron-nickel core,  
Ever cooling, solid, hot  
As the sun it’s not?  
What if we’ve got  
It wrong with metaphor?  
What if it is what it is?  
Love earth’s ironical core.

**“Better is always less good!”**

—*Thomas Hirschhorn*

Do you want to make a killing?

Do it cleanly. Be efficient. Show some style.

Fuck fashionable deskilling.

If you want to make a killing

Do it well. It's fucking thrilling

The way a sucking chest wound winks and smiles.

What do you want? To make a killing?

Do it cleanly. Be efficient. Show some style.

**“I confess to some pleasure from the stinging rhetoric of a rattling oath in the mouth of truckmen & teamsters.”**

*—Ralph Waldo Emerson*

I love a longshoreman who alliterates,  
But don't care for the writer phenotype.  
Anacoluthon in dark cabs obliterates  
Lesser loves that long-winded literates  
Gin up in me with syntax that reiterates  
Cant lessons their hidden kernels hype.  
I long for the love of illiterates  
With whom I can write genotype.

**“All the time he’s boxing, he’s thinking. All the time he was thinking, I was hitting him.”**

*—Jack Dempsey*

Unlearn’d astronomer,  
Where I see blow-by-blow, do you see bling?  
Is there a paparazzo any dumber,  
Unlearn’d astronomer,  
Who in bright constellations without number  
Sees only stars? Do cauliflower ears not ring?  
Unlearn’d astronomer,  
The blow-by-blow’s obscene, and so’s the bling.

**“I quote others only in order the better to express myself.”**

—*Michel de Montaigne*

Power concedes, like, nothing, dude, without, like, a demand.

The, um, revolution, will not, like, um, be like, televised.

I have like, been, like, to the mountain-top. I have like seen, dude,  
the promised land.

Dude, power concedes, like nothing, like, without, like a demand.

All I'm like, saying, dude, is like, give like, peace, like, a chance.

Don't like shoot, dude, until, like you like, see, like, the like whites of their eyes.

Dude, like power, concedes like nothing, like, without a demand.

The revolution will like sting, dude, like a bee, and float, dude, like a butterfly.



**“Tears at times have the weight of speech.”**

—*Ovid*

Nothing and nothing and nothing at all—  
The unshed tears that pool  
And ever grow heavier, and never fall.  
Nothing and nothing and nothing at all—  
Words we would recall,  
Words that betray fools,  
And say nothing, and nothing, and nothing at all  
Of the unshed tears that pool.

**“So this award is only mine in trust.”**

—*William Faulkner*

John D. and Catherine T. and Solomon R.,  
Who's buried in grants? To whom?  
With fifty-dollar bills, I'd light cigars for  
John D. and Catherine T. and Solomon R.  
With five hundred pounds a year and a room,  
Ulysses S. would lead the avant garde.  
John D. and Catherine T. and Solomon R.,  
Who's buried in Grant's Tomb?

**“It is not the last sentence that poses a problem, but the next-to-last.”**

—*Jacques Rancière*

Say “Earth”, mean “globe”.  
Say “gavel”, mean “hammer”.  
Say “gown”, mean “robe”.  
When “Earth” means “globe”,  
In every slammer  
“Joe” means “Job”,  
And every earth’s a globe,  
And “to gavel” means “to hammer”.

**“When a thing disturbs your peace of heart, give it up.”**

—*Muhammad*

I try to call my mom and dad for *Eid*,  
Misdial, and get instead an i.e.d.,  
Then watch the clean-up via live news-feed.  
I try to call my mom and dad for *Eid*,  
But my fingers are wet. Goddamn a goat can bleed.  
Then *Reuters, Al-Jazeera, BBC*.  
I try to call my mom and dad for *Eid*  
And I misdial. It’s a recurring dream.

**“All the news that’s fit to print.”**

—*The New York Times*

His blue bag reads “*The New York Times*,”  
But will it, then, hold history?  
Like a good fence, he ties Caesar’s crimes  
Up in blue bags that read: “*The New York Times*,”  
And with each warm, fresh scoop, he climbs  
Back up the stoop, toward privacy.  
His blue bags read “*The New York Times*.”  
Behold, the end of history.

**“The work is the death-mask of the concept.”**

—*Walter Benjamin*

This—she—is Shirley. Once I adjust  
For the weight of the cooling wax,  
The lips are hers. The brow I trust.  
Surely, this is she. Once I adjust  
I see how facial musculature must  
Flex, and contract, and relax.  
Surely this was she. One’s eye adjusts,  
If one waits, for the weight of the wax.

**“It is easy to get a thousand prescriptions, but hard to get one single remedy.”**

—*Chinese Proverb*

Symptoms outnumber diseases.  
Consider Venetian Blindness,  
Like a slotted spoon. Consider Tiresias:  
Her symptoms outnumbered her diseases  
And she frightened the bejeezus  
Out of her obstetrician. Kindness  
Wears a lab coat and holds a pair of tweezers.  
Symptoms outnumber diseases—  
Count the slats in a Venetian blind.

**“Perhaps a bird was singing and I felt for him a small, bird-sized affection.”**

—*Jorge Luis Borges*

Come spring, I'll build a nest  
Of knotted hair.  
On my bare chest,  
Come spring, I'll build a nest  
That you might rest  
Forever there.  
Come, Spring! I'll build a nest  
Of naughty hair.



**“MARRIAGE, n. The state or condition of a community consisting of a master, a mistress and two slaves, making in all, two.”**

—*Ambrose Bierce*

I called to the Great Emancipator,  
“What do you get, Abe, if you split a rail?”  
He said, “One stick called ‘The Liberator’,  
And one stick called ‘The Emancipator’,  
And a house divided.” An hour later  
Abe tweezed a bloody faction from his nail,  
And I called to the Great Emancipator,  
“That’s what you get, Abe, if you split a rail.”

**“In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath.”**

—*Samuel Johnson*

The time it takes to write it all in stone  
Implies a corresponding thoughtfulness,  
A taking pains, an ache within the bone.  
For all the time it takes to write in stone  
Is time for thought about the one who's gone,  
And how to injure truth a little less,  
Given the time it takes to write at all. Stone  
Lies rely on such a thoughtfulness.

**“We Muses know how to speak falsehoods that resemble real things, but we know, when we will, how to speak true things.”**

—*Hesiod*

As one cat finishes her solo  
In the alley, another, at my elbow,  
Listens, leaning toward her sister’s slow  
Finale, toward that longing and that sorrow  
She, too, has known, but will not know  
Again, except in revery, *con sordino*,  
As now, with both eyes closed, she looks as though  
She has just played her *concertino*,  
For all cats study cello.

**“Up betimes, and shaved myself after a week’s growth: but,  
Lord! how ugly I was yesterday and how fine to-day!”**

—*Samuel Pepys, September 17, 1666*

When I revise my palimpsest,  
Raising a new and smooth and pink  
Flesh, on which I’d write a long day’s text,  
Then I revise my palimpsest  
As I revise a text: simplest  
Is best, excepting where red ink,  
Scratched upon my palimpsest,  
Erases “new” and “smooth” and “pink.”

**“There is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown.”**

—*Sigmund Freud*

So many tourists have touched the Botero's dick  
It gleams like a ship's brass bell—  
Its patina circumscribed by an adoring public.  
Why have so many touched the great, bronze prick?  
Some long for home; some drive a stick;  
One-stroke, one-cylinder engines cast their spell.  
I'm touched by Botero's schtick,  
Sound as a ship's brass bell.

**“If you understood everything I said, you’d be me.”**

—*Miles Davis*

The last time I saw a Queen’s rook  
And a King’s  
Shake hands, that King’s was shook.  
The last time I saw a Queen’s rook  
Take a King’s, that Queen’s was took.  
Can a Queen’s rook tell a King’s rook anything?  
One last time: I was a Queen’s rook  
And a King’s.

**“... the American college student of today, so docile, so trustful,  
so eager to be led to any bright hell by an eccentric teacher...”**

*—Vladimir Nabokov*

My grandpa says he pushed a daisy  
Into a rifle barrel’s oily mouth.  
Great grandpa called him lazy.  
My grandma says she wore a daisy  
Crown at Woodstock. Things were crazy—  
Like Kent State, like the bus ride South.  
Great grandpa said he cursed the day she  
Met my grandpa and his oily mouth.

**“He who would not be idle, let him fall in love.”**

—*Ovid*

His milk-wet lips let go  
The tender nipple.  
When will he ever know  
So soft a pillow,  
Or feel half so  
Sure what is possible?  
Milk-wet, his lips let go  
The tender nipple.



**“I’ve done more harm by the falseness of trying to please than  
by the honesty of trying to hurt.”**

—*Jessamyn West*

The tongue lies next to teeth  
And each tooth knows  
Not to believe it—that underneath  
The tongue’s lies to the teeth,  
Truth is hard and sharp, and never sheathed  
In wet, pink, eely, osculating prose—  
That lies only speak in tongues  
That the truth knows.

**“Thou hast counseled a better course than Thou hast permitted.”**

—*St. Augustine*

Through the windshield of a martini,  
Glazed with tiny knives—  
An icy, fern-like glade—I see  
What, when the wounds heal, will become of me:  
The world is my womb, and a hysterectomy  
Is under way, and one of the surgeon’s wives,  
Olive or Ginny—I wish she loved me—  
Flays me with tiny knives.

**“Healing,’ Papa would tell me, ‘is not a science, but the intuitive art of wooing nature.’”**

—*W.H. Auden*

He got run-over by a car  
At twelve, and during his recovery  
He saved his scabs. It wasn't hard.  
He got run over by a car,  
And he filled albums, pried raw bark  
From faint pink limbs. The mystery  
Of being run-over by a car  
At twelve? Enduring the recovery.

**“The body tries to tell the truth.”**

—*Jim Morrison*

My brother, Narcissus, you never reflected  
On a loose, pale double chin  
Under a buttocks long neglected.  
My brother, Narcissus, you never rejected  
Your own ass in a mirror, nor, dejected,  
Did you ever fail to suck your belly in,  
But my double, Narcissus, this is what's expected—  
We who live, lose, and take it on the chin.

**“All of the dreams you show up in are not your own.”**

*—Gil Scott-Heron*

A fly is loose in Plato’s cave.  
The fire is stoked. On the far wall  
A fly-shaped shadow seems to misbehave.  
Desire is stoked by what’s on the far wall.  
Chains, pulled taut, relax. But neither slave  
Nor master turns away from all  
The lie lets loose. In Plato’s cave,  
A fly is down.

DANIEL BOSCH'S poems, translations, reviews, and essays have been published in journals such as *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *The New Republic*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Slate*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Daily Beast*, and *Agni*. His collection *Crucible* was published by Other Press in 2002. He teaches Expository Writing and Introduction to Poetry at Emory University in Atlanta, and he is Senior Editor at *Berfrois.com*.

