

a light heart,
its black thoughts

By Gnoetry & Eric Scovel

Beard of Bees Press
Chicago, Illinois
Number 60
March, 2009

Contents

Preface	iii
<i>Imagine the feelings of a whole...</i>	1
<i>It was like this. I must say it was...</i>	2
<i>You were discolored just below...</i>	3
<i>I cried with wild crowd of my heart for the...</i>	4
<i>I could not see the glitter of...</i>	5
<i>It was possible to have any image...</i>	6
<i>He wasn't rich enough or something.</i>	7
<i>What was to know? You know, nobody...</i>	8
<i>I was just as the men in her, the...</i>	9
<i>I had a hankering...</i>	10
<i>The manager appeared silently...</i>	11
<i>I had to affirm the village was...</i>	12
<i>These parts, I had no learning, and...</i>	13
<i>They said hang, bearers of the new...</i>	14
<i>It is not what I had judged.</i>	15
<i>It made you creepy all over...</i>	16
<i>I had the idea, almost black...</i>	17

*For Kay,
without whom this work
would not have been*

Preface

This project began as a simple experiment. The chosen text had no particular significance to me at the time, nor had I even read *Heart of Darkness* when I started; I chose it primarily out of its central place in the Western canon. Working through these early attempts at using the Gnoetry 0.2 program, I found that, curiously, this text yielded more consistently engaging results than others. Also, as the series progressed it became increasingly serious and historically aware, turning from expressions of personal failure in love to postcolonial scenes of violence and sexual domination.

My choice of a loose sonnet form—fourteen line poems of (usually) between 7 and 11 syllables per line—was due mostly to the discovery that the variety of regenerated output increased at this syllabic range. I cannot ignore, though, the influence that such classic sonnet sequences as John Donne’s *Holy Sonnets* and Ted Berrigan’s *The Sonnets* had upon the user-side half of this collaboration. I became more and more pleased with the shapeliness of the form and the sense of wholeness that it brought to even the most erratically assembled lines.

I do not think that this work has avoided what Slavoj Žižek has called, referring to the schizoid extremes of Western fantasies of the Other, “the split attitude of the West itself, combining violent penetration and respectful sacralization.” However, I hope that it succeeds in capturing and exposing this failure of the Western imagination rather than merely perpetuating it. The series is at its core intensely concerned with love, failure to understand and, ultimately, reconciliation—with how this might happen on the personal level as well between fallen empires, their former colonies, and those ghosts of the past that still haunt us all.

Eric Scovel
Dec. 23, 2008

Imagine the feelings of a whole
continent, I said. A sheer blank
space of delightful mystery, its black
thoughts, its body
at rest in the middle of blessings.
If such is the meaning
of a French steamer, and it was, were
we who had pronounced a judgment upon
the whole population cleared into
the heart of an unknown planet? We could for a
while, of massacres, of
craven terror, of burning noble words.
It was very grave, were we
who had gone mad, completely.

It was like this. I must say it was
sinister. We had plates that would shake
the air. We had plates that pleasure.
We had plates that would provoke
the most dangerous thing in every
detail of life. Black shapes crouched, they leaped, they
faced the company, very hot and
everything. Yes, and would you
believe, massive, naked breasts, legs,
waving long black arms, heads, and men going
to, glaring eyes, and how they got on, almost
no restraint, no man does, by
heavens! Not in the jungles, in
the mold of primeval earth. We were kings!

You were discolored just below
the ribs; the dusk fell on the upper
reaches, became more somber every minute,
as if sorry for suffering. There is
a way of resisting without moving a
limb, without clamor, without even
taking the trouble to keep them off. We are all
done for, what shall I say, sometimes. The sun was
low, the sky. . . but it is the speech of a
rainbow. You were discolored, but you have
in you something that is really mine, the
old river in its unceasing service, crowded
with memories of men taking possession of
this blazing sky, overcast one another.

I cried with wild crowd of my heart for the
climate under a woman. I was lying flat
on the hillside. Yes, my mouth wide, and down, oh
down, she carried her down
and let things slide. Yes, and I lapped out of
scruple. She was shaking; the administration
was sincere. Growled the equator, inviting,
red, good to see. The pilgrims looked up. She came
upon me, and all that wild mob took
in the sea of blessings. I thumbed
the wide opening, glaring at the outlines
of red round the still bends, the
pulsating stream of longing, absorbed in the pose
of contorted collapse, as long as I may live.

I could not see the glitter of
blessings. I sat generally on
the earth, the woods went out such a little. How I
used to have such a false idea of the
unknown, the most exalted and peculiar,
which is of the fog lifted, and more
blinding than the shadow of a heart, its body
at rest in the bush. I am a simple man,
but in that bush, man, who can tell? I was lost, but
this was not a raid into the fog. The
bushes shook, swayed their scarlet bodies, they
shook towards the river. I saw my mistake. The
current thickly, and becoming expansive, the
gift of the unknown, a question.

It was possible to have any image
with it, no doubt it was dangerous
to inquire too much. It was very
clear, a dark blue, a kind of blind,
white cases, piled up, crested, ready to
work with an air of taking an
immense snake uncoiled, with dark
gleams on the untouched expanse of their wars
going on. A narrow white line
of absurdity, a lake too,
not at all surprising. A
tiny projectile would give it up, over
the image of desire, following
the shoulders of the native women.

He wasn't rich enough or something.
Everything belonged to him. He was just
robbery with violence,
and sorrow, dishonor, and varnished boots.
So he comes here, you know, to the profound
darkness of his heart. The flies buzzed in a lofty
portico. I was only
a thing. He thumbed the messenger, invited
me over. "It's really profitable, and
rather less pretty in shape, but you never
forget the uncle." Afterwards I came
upon him alone. A continuous noise of the drum,
regular and muffled like the closed door
of darkness, claimed him forever.

What was to know? You know, nobody
seemed to have a body
and rest, don't you think? We live and shall not
wait, as a ripple on an
earth that wears the interests of conquest, of
trade, their words, that such details would be
done. We exchanged a few lumps of
some sort of purpose, an act
of bodies, it was not very clear.
This strange world. Not a blank
space of delightful mystery, a light
heart, its black thoughts, its body at rest.
Were we men enough to affirm
the whole universe? No one knew.

I was just as the men in her, the
wild crowd of men, men who come back, like a
running blaze on board, in a
haze. Horrors! I saw the horned shapes stirring
at her, all smiles. I said to myself, what
can be done? They were written in her, white flames,
white men, heavy, white cuffs, a
mass of them in the passion of empires.
I saw her weeping; she had taken
a caravan of bodies. They shouted, as
their bodies streamed with perspiration; they
shouted, leaning on the tip of her sorrow, as
big as a desert, and there was nothing
but a white fog and the hate of the wilderness.

I had a hankering
after. I had failed her, like
a stick of love in a heap of
embers glowing fiercely,
I nearly burst into a cemetery,
bearing the sword, and did, with an air of being
afraid, I admit, I would be shot down in the
midst of the white men rushing out
of the long grass, with its wheels in
the moonlight, the foreign faces, so to
speak of, but rather too
late, and I withdrew quietly. But I
didn't do badly
either, trying to excuse or club.

The manager appeared silently
in the air. His face was falling,
a steady droning sound of many
voices issued from the recesses of the
earth, more than voices, all the
gnawing devils of the damp earth on
the wind. I wished him a harmless fool. Now I
can't help asking what I meant by
going there at all, if only
it was to see whether
this man suffered so much, that
swayed and drove men under his bare feet. I
did not want to stop him. He is chief of
this pitiful Jupiter.

I had to affirm the village was deserted. The sun hung over it, all of it forever. A blinding sunlight drowned all the earth. I saw a smile, a head that had been a couple of years already out there. A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, hollow, with sounds, incomprehensible, serene, something like the speech of a rainbow. A whole minute passed, and I did not move. It was impossible to know all about them and about me. I did not seem capable of insight.

These parts, I had no learning, and
no fear, and I was wasted, and no desire. It had
ceased, and in its right
proportion, like a
ruled line, far away, vibrating, not because it
could be seen, inexplicable, but
let us say men who come out here should have no great
thoughts. I sweated and fired up. Perhaps she
was not so impossible. I did not want to know either. I felt
as though we had to drive a distance that was
the greatest possible tenderness, repeating
the phrases we pronounced,
then still less in their curved and
imperceptible fall, the signs of hesitation, of resting.

They said hang, bearers of the new
forces at work, no doubt like a whiff from
some corpse. Imagine the opportunity. But with
every word spoken the
tide seemed to me the shadow
of the new forces, which seemed unearthly.
The north pole was awake. It seemed
to settle, a butcher round one corner, waiting. All that
had swept by us on the whole,
the reality, for belief, for something,
it is like a wink, like a match, an
ax, something like an empty
stream, and in every man's life, a butcher in a
whirl of black feathers, a fool as I would be an ax.

It is not what I had judged.
It is the gift of desire absorbed in
itself. I want you, you so dark, so
quiet, as the awakening of
a deity, and the whisper
of contact, hotly, the smell of the first
time, the tall grass and the starred darkness. A
door opened, closed. And we crept on,
and looked about. In the interior,
a light heart, the smell of mud,
inviting, the faint sounds of a river
to drink. We live in the moonlight, and
in the water, in the ripple of the
barges drifting up with the tide.

It made you creepy all over,
the empty land. I thought we would look
for ivory. We looked on, towards the
margin, my goodness! We had made out there,
with bows, with gleams of ivory,
jerked the hillside. Joy, silly, I don't want
any harm to happen to
myself. Perhaps it was borne upon me
in the work of exploration, the
consciousness of death; it is
amazing, I said. She looked at me out there,
land in silence. It was as natural
and true as everything to her,
the interminable miles of partnership.

I had the idea, almost black,
thick, choking, startled. A wilderness,
a rolling wave of drums, an exuberant and
entangled mass of naked, breathing,
quivering bronze bodies. Yes, it seemed to shape
itself without human lips in
the opaque air. Two youths with foolish
and cheery countenances were being laid,
to treat the white men, with a large shining map
marked with all the hearts that beat in the
rush of thieving. My dear boys, what I wanted
was frightful, to be almost black, oiled, smiling and
in harness, hugging the white men with
the ships whose names are like lunatics.

ERIC SCOVEL is originally from Polo, Illinois, a small town of about 2600 in the Northwest corner of that state. He is currently completing his thesis, *Five Chapbooks*, for fulfillment of an M.F.A. degree in poetry at Purdue University, where he also teaches Google-sculpting to his creative writing students and post-colonial theory to his composition students. This chapbook is his first published work. He blogs semi-regularly at *what light already light* (wlal.wordpress.com).

Beard of Bees books are freely redistributable, and are produced with Free Software.

Copyright © 2009 Beard of Bees Press
Chicago, IL

www.beardofbees.com