



Volume 10
Issue 1
2014

The Allegory of Melancholy (After Lucas Cranach, 1514)

Janette Ayachi

A Venus twin slumps forward
in her tangerine dress and turquoise wings,
peeling a hazel branch with a slumberous stare.

An apple tree bears its jackpot fruit,
the rounded ripeness palpitates like desert suns.
A silver platter hoards darker offerings
marbled grapes and nutshells,
chalices of wine to quench delirium.

A spaniel hides, fearing the bullying torment
of barnacled boys and their array of arsenal,
they wrestle a greyhound to the ground
and cry falsettos into false echoes.

The Venus twin works without flair
she is both haunting and luminous,
like a chiaroscuro woodcut
lit under the lantern dawn of the golden age.

Her eyes are averted from the knife
blood boils melancholy,
hunger has faded, fruit is left to shrivel.
If there were a mirror here

it would fill with mercurial tears
and drip post-natal black bile.

This mother is denied dream sleep,
tortured by her waking visions
her soul is numb and demons approach-
she is prevented from seeking
the paraffin light of God.

The night is near, twilight promises
despair and desire, rapture and vultures,
and Durer's nebulous moonrise over the sea.

Her temples crash together like symbols
a coven of witches ride the fury of fog
stampeding the sky on wild animals,
sneering and whistling for her attention.

But she is lost in labour
of the mad musical requiem.
The mud of motherhood cracks to clay
she is left bare to dry gripping a knife,
carving wood and deciding its purpose
whether it should serve as tool,
or wagger as weapon.

Poison and Paralysis

Janette Ayachi

In the end you whispered, “it was my skin that helped me suffocate”
your last comforts were: my hand, the moon, and your claustrophobia,
so I watched the epidermis shrink over your muscles and laminate.

Your perennial tears of snatched years caused your pupils to dilate,
but soon the visions came and mocked your old-age myopia.
In the end you whispered. It was your skin that helped you suffocate.

Under the bulb of pendulous stars I watched cells proliferate,
as I heard you hold your breath searching an after-life utopia,
so I watched the epidermis shrink over your muscles and laminate.

You were stubborn and refused any cure for your contaminate,
you even convinced yourself that you had served your time in suburbia.
In the end you whispered, ‘it was my skin that helped me suffocate’.

I felt so helpless only watching, with you in such a state,
you could hardly speak, my words shrivelled, nothing left but pain and inertia,

so I watched the epidermis shrink over your muscles and laminate.

It was the moon's mouth that broke the silence and bid you elevate,
she cut you from the cancer and your heart had a hernia.
In the end, you whispered "it was her skin that helped me suffocate,"
so I watched the epidermis eclipse over the sun and laminate.

•

Los(t) Angeles

Janette Ayachi

All she wanted was the chloroform moon
to anesthetize her hordes of aching bad feelings,
at night she waited sedated at the sleep-station
for her chugging dream-cargo to tug her forward.

Every roguish curvature of elastic light
bound her thoughts or made her nervous
and she clutched her stash of sea-chests
as if they were remnants or relics of a lost love.

We pulled the panther-coloured Mustang

in to the parking lot outside the Medical Centre
alongside all the other pharmaceutical fiends
who rattled screw-top bottle beats like maracas.

She glided through swing doors, swift as a javelin,
incognito behind iconic black shades and a red beret
she was the perfect con artist, a cool cat,
a mute pirate, a lost angel, a vagabond God.

Her fake prescription was folded like a treasure map
she autographed her crime with her doctor's signature
and left me alone, the engine running without music
so I felt like an amateur sniper accomplice.

When the white night came we fed each other
goblets of grapes, chalices of beer and words
so when the vesper bell serenaded then cleared
we feasted under stars like unwedded Queens.

Somewhere at an altarpiece in the future
she is pushing passed acolytes to light a candle
it flares, twitches then stills, burns down the wick
like an upturned hourglass, all heat is emptied
from the body, in the distance her baby cries.

Il Piccolo Paradiso

Janette Ayachi

When we walk into her house
 it is as if autumn has swept
 in through the windows
but it is always the heart
 of summer when we visit
 each year for an hour.
Nothing changes over time
 the detritus of plants litter
 dark corners, acorns line
the skirting boards scattered with dust.
Shoebox junk spills over tabletops
 a Blackadder design replicated
 into Gothic, China Dolls
seated upright on moth-eaten
 cushions like well mannered
 children they face straw witches
and Burlesque puppet clowns.
She sits closest to the door
 scratching the table for scum
 in the conversations silence
it was the summer of funerals
 after all, when you are old
 death is as familiar as the ache
in your bones. She is deafened
 not by time but by her treasures
 collected from life's cobwebs
the stonewalls plastered
 with fading photographs

of her only grandson.
Her husband bed-bound for years
regressing in age, brain-dead
but body living, kept alive
by her care, monitored by machines.
We always visit his room
just before we leave,
she lifts his curled hand to salute us,
the stench is always sour,
the air unbreathable.
His mouth retracts around gums
the insistence of his jaw juts out
like a cliff, he is aware
of nothing. His face moon-polished
like a veterans medal. We all unfold
into the garden, fill our nostrils
with flowers, she has created
this small paradise for herself
landscaping space to live
alongside the dead.

Hessian Lungs

Janette Ayachi

I have been ill for weeks
my health is anchored to the oceans bed
and I am nailed to mine
muscles ache in symphony
my chest purrs its wheezy percussion
these lungs no longer trust me
they deflate like an old Hessian sack
released of its coal or potatoes
a dead weight lined with dust and dirt
as if I had been buried alive.
One virus floods my system after another
my left lung fills with pneumonic fluid
how the body betrays the fit mind
tricks it with fever induced dreams.
Unhinge the door to the next dimension
of analgesics, opiates, and antibiotics
where I can walk without my mouth agape
make decisions without the capsize of vertigo
answer questions without a front-line cough.
Let me wake tomorrow
parallel in the mirror, no holes in my cheeks,
eggs in my womb, released from my oxidized bones
ready to rise out of this skin, this tenement skyline,
like the balloon that escapes a child's grip in the street
so you stop to watch its flight
until colour then shape is just sperm then speck
and no one ever knows whether it will combust
or where it might choose to land.

Janette Ayachi (b.1982-) graduated from Edinburgh University with an MSc in Creative Writing. She has published in over fifty international journals and anthologies; is the editor of *The Undertow Review* (an online Arts Journal) and author of poetry collections *Pauses at Zebra Crossings* and *A Choir of Ghosts*. She likes whiskey and wild women. Email: janetteayachi@gmail.com .Website: www.janetteayachi.webs.com