

1976

The Desert of Melancholy

Lewis Turco

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“Immediately
he left the knives, the vague, gray
shapes of the wolves
turned solid, out of the darkness and the snow,
and set ravenously
to licking blood from the honed steel.
The double edge of the knives
so lacerated the tongues of the starved beasts
that their own blood poured
copiously forth
to replenish the dog’s blood, and they ate
more furiously than before, while Kantiuk laughed,
and held his sides
laughing.

“And I laughed also,
perhaps in relief that Providence had delivered us
yet again, or perhaps—under conditions of extremity,
far from Connecticut—finding these creatures
acutely ridiculous, so avid
to swallow their own blood. First one, and then the other
collapsed, dying,
bloodless in the snow black with their own blood,
and Kantiuk retrieved
his *turnoks*, and hacked lean meat
from the thigh of the larger wolf,
which we ate
gratefully, blessing the Creator, for we were hungry.”

The Desert of Melancholy / Lewis Turco

They have myriads in their mouths.

—Robert Burton

It is not far from here to
nowhere. Merely across the furniture.

We are experiencing
technical difficulties; please

do not adjust. If there were
ink in this pen, it would be different.
However, it is not. This,
then, is a poem written among

furniture, on paper like
a glass screen, pen like a stainless steel steak
knife. It is a poem made of
mirrors. In it you will see, if

you look technically, small
creatures dancing on the head of a pin—
any number of them: I
have myriads in my mouth. They

do not know that they are there—
no more than we know they are watching us.
Well, quite a charming place, this,
wherever: Chairs, tables, the smell

of meat in the air. No one
will wonder at this devastation of
syllables. Who is to be
awed? It is my devastation,

and I am past wonderment.
It is at this point precisely that the
cactus must resume blossom.
If it does not, words will have no

point. Expect nothing. You will
be disappointed in other things. The
desert does not flower.
It is the flower that flowers.