2010

Narratives

Brian Swann

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview
Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.6846

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.
"Narratives are one sort of trace we leave on the world."
—Gary Snyder

“Stand in front. Here, hold my bag.” She reaches under her skirt. Digs a hole with her heel in the gravel of the taurobolium. Buries it. “Joining all the blood down here,” she says.

Upstairs, on the way out, she rinses her fingers in the basin by San Clemente’s great doors. “They were all over the city,” I say. “Churches were built over them.” “Tertullian says Mithras was invented by the Devil to mock Christ.” “More like the other way round.” “That’s history for you. One big puticolo.”

By the time we get to the Largo Argentina for a 64 bus the sun is overhead. Where Caesar was stabbed in Temple C a cat is licking himself. “Do you think that’s where we get the word ‘understand’?” she says. “You stood—” “Not you. Men only.” “You stood under the grill and the blood of the stabbed bull poured over you and you under-stood. Immediate, unmediated transformation. No blood of the lamb there.” “It’s certainly something you’d remember.” “All I remember from last night is too much Frascati, three young nuns dancing, and we were in love.” “Still are.” The bus comes at us like a chariot out of the sun. On board I say, “Remember Rtis in the chariot leaning down and saying to Mithras:

The Iowa Review
‘Step up closer. Bend down?’ “I do.” “And as he does so his loose Mede trousers ride up. This embraces him and says, ‘You have such handsome calves.’” “They marry.” It’s the wrong bus but somehow we still arrive at the Vatican. “It says here St. Peter’s was built over a cave.” “Mithras,” I say. “He was everywhere.” “This place is too big and too much. It tries too hard.” “Somebody said it would make a great bronchitis hospital for those with delicate lungs and delicate fantasies.” “I prefer the solar bull to the pale Galilean,” she says. “The world has grown gray from his breath.”

We get another wrong bus and walk back home through the Campo de’ Fiori. She pats the base of Giordano Bruno’s statue, where he burned.

That night, on our balcony in the ghetto, we stand looking up over the city’s lights at the sky’s coronal loops, the power of each part of sunlight. “All those stories in the sky. Who’s your favorite?” she asks. “You mean the magnetic field of the sun’s fusion, the pure force of the Milky Way, the inner necessities of the Virgo Clusters? Do you know that ‘myth’ and ‘mouth’ are related?” I say. “It makes sense,” she says, “but I’m not sure I like your latest story.” “It’s not mine. And it’s not really a story. It’s science.” “How can you tell science it’s got nice calves?” “You can’t. And who would want to anyway? There’d be no point. It wouldn’t understand.”

Brian Swann