



SINA QUEYRAS | EXPRESSWAY

I

THE ENDLESS PATH OF THE NEW

‘Wait now; have no remembering of hope ... ’

Wallace Stevens

‘If you can’t see the finish line in the near distance, don’t get frustrated – turn around! There you’ll see it, miles behind you.’

Daily Horoscope, January 18, 2007

SOLITARY

1

What sympathy of sounds? What cricketing
Of concrete, what struck rubber, what society
And shifting birdsong sweetens spring's tumult?

She walks near the expressway, a patch
Of emerald turf besieged by doggy bags,
Where frolicking hounds squat to pee, crimson

Cellphone at her ear. She is calling home,
Calling the past, calling out for anyone
To hear. She is waiting, she is wanting

To be near, of flesh, of earth, on foot,
And this is her perspective: the 1-95, its
Prow of condos, the Delaware's sunken

Ships and artillery shells, now *the idea* of
River, so many years since any live flesh
Could be immersed. Here the expressway

Smoothing each nuisance of wild, each terrifying
Quirk of land, uneven, forlorn paths; wanderer,
Wander, lonely as a cloud, dappled, drowned,

A melancholic pace and nowhere untouched. Nature,
One concludes, is nostalgia. Now, two hundred
Post-Romantic years – the Alps bursting into flames,

All the way to Mont Blanc, incendiary air. How far
Auschwitz? Darfur? Are we a hopeful people
Yet? She follows her uncle's gestures, paced

For lungs, each strike of stick to stone, recalls
Wordsworth's dog, the solitary path unwinds below.

What sympathy of sounds. Her father
 A bag she carries in a bigger bag, lighter
 Now, having scattered him across two

Provinces, up a goat path, where these
 Struck peaks, a starburst of contrails, German
 Songs like silt, and tiny woollen cathedrals

Whose bells mark the hours. Have we suffered enough?
 Her uncle bends his century, a creeping juniper
 Under which lies a tiny tin cup. *Doucement*,

Doucement, the water another source, a
 Knowing (even without language) where
 To drink, or how (and where) one foot

Should fall well before it does, recognition of
 The stone's slice; that even rock is not solid;
 Such knowledge a long-time companion rarely

Of any use other than to remind: be open, flexible,
 Eye on the horizon, thumb in air for change,
 Change; history with its multiple pathways.

It is not her first time here, though, in truth,
 It is. But what is truth? Fact? Body? Idea?
 Word? The heat waking up now, a new century

Ahead, and at the top, a bit of bread and cheese,
A cellphone out, *Ta mère*, he says,
Tell her your father is laid to rest.

3

But is anyone at rest? She traces roadways where
In occupied France her father rode his bicycle
High above the Durance, finding – as we all

Wish – a smooth path between rivets
Of the newly erected metal bridge, his hands
High above his head, or so one version

Of the legend goes. What balance, what
Lack of fear, what shock of hair, what finesse
Of foot and pout of mouth, what eloquent

Dismount, his aunts below not daring
To call out for fear of distracting he who
Like Christ could turn gravity on its head,

And for whom two sisters would devote their lives –
If not in flesh, then in suffering. What
Sympathy of sounds? Do tell me his pain

Was not in vain. Do say the bees will return,
And with them, seasons.

4

What sounds, what sympathy, what silence, what
Creation? What recompense? What word? What land?
What river bottoms once muscular, tracing lifelines,

Deltas, flood plains; what land bunching, ruffling,
What stones rolling, what wheels (wooden, steel,
Rubber), what riding out on horseback, what

Flick of wrist, tug of tether, blast of rock,
What melting of rubber, what extension of self, what
Squeak of progress, what eye, what level, what

Parcelling and flattening, what neatly bundling,
What legacy? What future? What expressway? What
Goat trail on steroids, what native path, canoe trail,

Wagon train, trail of tears, what aggregate composition,
What filleted history, what strata, what subplates,
What tectonic metaphor, what recoil, what never

Having to deal with the revulsion of self, only
The joy of forward, the joy of onward, the endless fuel:
The circles, the ramps, the fast lanes, the cloverleaf,

Perspective of elevation, the royalty of those views,
The Schuylkill, the Hudson, the Niagara, the skylines,
The people in their houses, passing women, men

Dressing, men unearthing, smoke pluming, what
Future? What the apple tree remembered? Not
Even the sound of fruit. If a body is no longer a body,

Where is memory? If a text is no longer a text,
Where is body? If a city is no longer a city, what road?
If future no longer has future, where does it look?

She snaps her cellphone closed: no one. Alone.
The century is elsewhere. She turns her back,
Swallows her words. She will do anything for home.

A MEMORABLE FANCY

At the toll booth she stopped to ask who was in charge of the expressway, or future, the words slipping back and forth in front of her. A large-headed woman, her hair roped and lashed about her head, looked up and held out her hand: *George Washington. Seven times.*

I have no money, she said, suddenly aware that this was indeed a fact, as was the yoke around the woman's upright neck. Her nostrils flared, her body strained against it, Al Green in the background. *Are you a poet?* she asked, meaning do you feel that tug? *The roar of tires is the rhythm of my day*, the woman said, *every fourteen cars a sonnet*. Behind her the city slickened: vehicles everywhere, idling, honking, revving, stiffening themselves against her. The braided woman did not flinch. *George Washington, seven times.*

I am lost, she said. *Can you tell me where to start?*

The braided woman's thumbs smoothed the air. *You can try Port Authority. But I wouldn't hold my breath.*

In response to the woman's kindness, she shared her latest vision: Louis XVI is alive and living in Washington, a staggeringly blind man filling his frame with BBQ ribs and glazed ham. Under his bed he keeps a rifle, thinking a cattle rustler might show up in the night. Deeply suspicious of his dreams

he hires a young woman to stand in the corner and lash herself all night as he sleeps.

It doesn't matter if I see her, he said, it's knowing she is somewhere lashing herself.