

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/2

Ruth Holzer
At the V&A

The torn lining of my raincoat drags
as I hurry in a winter drizzle
through Kensington to take another look
at the Beardsley drawings
before the show moves on:
the lewdness of Lysistrata on full display;
and Princess Salomé swirling her peacock skirt,
then, as often happens,
disappointed in the prize,
kissing the lips that did not kiss back.

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The Sun in Leo

Labor and torpor throughout Puglia,
a land burning into sleep,
edged by the bitter sea. Heat fells
the elderly and the docile herds.

I weather on black bread and wine
cool from the neighbor's ice house,
drink a salutation there and carry home
demijohns knocking in a sack.

The shepherd dog pants at my heels
through ancient olive groves, past
a roadside shrine with thick red candles,
summer's dust and sweet nothing doing.

No one else abroad as I go
dizzily back, hearing archaic cries
and cicada delirium.
The white road dazzles.

From the sun like a crouched lion,
from drystone walls holding for good,
head bowed to all-accepting earth,
I learn the extant force of the chalcolithic.

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Questions for the End of Days

What's the name of the general
who is buried in Grant's Tomb?

Does a sleek Dalmatian
still live in the firehouse,

alert for alarms? Will your flushed baby
alligator become a sewer Leviathan?

Does the full moon pull
on the tides of your brain?

Can your hair turn suddenly white from shock?
Can you hear the radio playing in your silver fillings?

Will the man in the caboose
always wave back to you?