

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/4

L. Krisak

On At Last Looking Into Chapman's Homer

I've traveled little, but whatever realms
I've seen have seemed a little less than gold
And goodly: elsewhere often underwhelms.
I mostly tend to read what I've been told
Are great demesnes—now, Chapman's *Iliad*
And *Odyssey*. (God knows these couplets bowled
Keats over, and let's face it: that's not bad.
Fourteeners have been known to stop men cold.)
But as for planets swimming into kens,
Well, no—not one has robbed me of my breath,
Though some small comets blazoned what are men's
Poor truths: "*Then fell they to the works of death*";
And thickly fallen in their armed chatoyance,
"*More sweet to Vultures than their wives*": the Troyans.

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On Having Just Finished A Translation Of *The Aeneid*

Words? *Water* begs a welter of them. *War*
And *weapon* cry as well for synonyms—
Apt substitutes—until there are no more;
Until the blood-red tide of slaughter dims
Its dyes of crimson, scarlet, purple gore.
To name *cloud, storm, plain, plow*: how many ways
Before exhaustion? Till the war is won.
This struggle bore it out two thousand days—
Ten thousand lines since battle was begun.
Now Turnus goes down bitterly among
The Shades, and I look back. What Virgil's sung
Has strained my lexicon till it's been strung
Out on such scant resources that there seemed
No hope. And still I've done what I have dreamed.

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**PHOTOGRAPH:
Ruined Spanish Church Atop A Bluff On The Mediterranean**

The foreground of a fallow field, oblique
To ruined walls and other, farther fields,
Suggests no crop. It offers not a clue
About the gabled stone façade, its peak
Struck off, scooped out, or better yet, punched through
So that the deeply distant vista yields
Us up a mist of graduated blue.
This hazed horizon's keyhole mezzotint
Achieves its revelation by decay,
As if the noon-light-burnished pediment
Had thought its penance were to cast away
Its own rough stones as though they stood for sin.
Now like the bridge of some great violin
Unstrung, it opens to the eye of day.

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Revelation

Once he's on board—in gauze-thin running shorts—
Few eyebrows rise. One hears some silent snorts
Perhaps, but eyes stay buried in the *Metro*
For the most part. Moving down the car
To where the wheelchair space extends a bar,
He takes up his position (first). One half
Expects plié, and then . . . he bends and dips.
A runner's hamstring stretch. Then, hands on hips,
He offers first one stringy, hairy calf
And then the other: scissors; turnout; splits.
Why ride the "T" in such a getup (it's
An outfit almost Richard Simmons-retro)?
Then, deep downtown, de-trained, he bounds upstairs,
Balls bouncing. No eyes follow; no one cares.

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Rising To Byzantium

As day begins to prise the world from night,
The dawn light sets off all its false alarms.
A half-a-dozen mimics make their mocks,
Taunting like six poseur wake-up clocks:
A rusty hinge squeaks we should make it right;
A kettle speaks of intermittent harms
Its start-stop whistles do not specify;
Somewhere, a damsel shrieks, from time to time,
As backing dump trucks beep their steady rhyme.
A trilling land-line says, "I'll never die,"
Which is just what some failing smoke detector
Seems determined to achieve—and soon,
Before all warning ceases, and the vector
Of the morning points the way to noon.