Beate Sigriddaughter

The Emperor's New Silence

The emperor
is bold and naked
everything is out
in the open
nowadays though
whoever points
this out
child or otherwise
beware
vengeance is
the devastating
order of the day
silence seems safer

There was a time

when the opposite of jealousy was authenticity,
when I believed in surprises being categorically good,
and I wore my life like a necklace of hope and beauty,
when I didn't ask rivers to bend elsewhere but studied them just as they were
rushing among the people with cell phones and eucalyptus smells and camphor smiles,
when Vivaldi or Scarlatti played in the elevator,
and someone complained about the irritating cheerfulness.

I felt safe then with fireworks reassuring me that people did not just gather
for accidents and executions but came from far and wide for beauty.
Cluelessness was my season's ticket to innocence.
I led a soprano life, always in the lead with alto, tenor, and bass as harmonious support.

There came a time, though, when not lying and not being entitled to say the truth,
there wasn't much left to say.
For a while, I put my secondhand romances in the trash
and only kept respectable literature on my shelf, sympathizing with John Berryman
over finding great literature boring,

One day, seeing an old man with long white hair and a small pushcart,
I realized it had been easier to be arrogant when I was young.
Suddenly I missed how I had naively imagined my lover was actually in love with me.
I gazed in disbelief at people who fell in love with their own hatred because it distracted them
from having to look at their own contributions to the evil of the world.
I felt my mouth burn with accusations I never wanted to make.

I want to fall in love with the world again.

The Wanderer

The cat was busy eating her breakfast when I left.

I am not too old to wander again or pray in any other way
as maple leaves float down in mild November blaze.
Sometimes I live nowhere. Even in winter.
Sometimes I am hungry. Even when breakfast was ample.
Sometimes reality lets go of maple leaves.
Night always happens so quickly, especially now.

When you linger inside evil, you don't notice it so much.
It looks so normal with its tall benevolent belittlement.
A nice intellectual welcomes you with hardy handshake.
Not quite a communist. Not quite a misogynist.
Warning you mildly, acknowledging that, yes, you may bring
your gifts but, sadly, no one wants them. Best move on.

Elsewhere joy strikes unexpectedly, like lightning.
A sudden fox, busy with his own priorities, gives me
a passing glance, judges me loosely irrelevant
here where no political distractions flicker,
where only birds compose their current song
and desert flowers dream tomorrow's scent and colors.

From time to time, an unfamiliar cat slinks around my leg.