

SHOWING CHICAGO TO BAUDELAIRE

You were always attracted to city nights, monsieur.  
I own a copy of Les Fleurs du Mal in French,  
ripe with urban musk, erotic alliteration, the patina  
of impacted space. This should have been a good venue  
for your verse. Too bad so few people came  
to the reading. This venture leaves me broke, Mr. B.  
Leash your strophes, hang your demons backstage;  
you can walk the Loop with me and Jack Daniels.

Lake breezes flutter the curtain of Diesel fumes,  
not a smell you would know. The phallic towers  
of the powerful probe the high haze, challenging  
low-flying angels. You can see the aura of millions  
of lives for miles offshore-- part light, part heat  
and motion. The old termagant's broadened  
since dragging her ragged petticoats through black mud,  
Indian twilight and the evil stink of skunk cabbage.

Michigan Avenue fires millions of rounds  
of electric white ammo from oblique angles.  
You can't escape the shrapnel of light, incendiary  
shards of it, imparting no illumination,  
no warmth you can hold, sucking out what you hoarded.  
Infecting you with a virus that keeps you  
coming back for another pelting, another piercing.  
--Do you wear a wry smile, Mr. B?

Now we're in the outback, still in sight  
of magnificence--magnanimity--maggots.  
The lower level is pocked with puddled reflections,  
shimmering shades of lust and logic, business  
as usual, obligatory beauty. The trumpet  
in that storefront retreat is tonguing out blues--  
a color, a condition. Some of the mop-and-dust people  
rehydrate inside, jockeying their barstools, betting  
on hot-lipped riffs to move them higher.

Giant tools are at rest, teeth slightly bared.  
The metal traffic never stops; the motorized moving  
from somewhere to elsewhere scores the dark,  
never out of reach of hands that open, caress,  
point, make a fist. Simmering grease sounds like rain,  
glass clinks; small machines gritch, whine,  
and mostly close hard on your cash. Neon viscera  
surround the collage-- geometrics of red beef,  
opaline fish, potato pyramids, miles of newsprint,  
wood, fabric, fabrication, fable. The man dozing  
in the cardboard box waits to eat from upscale garbage.  
The city honors and trashes, adores and ignores.

You nod at parallels to 19th century Paris. You  
were the brilliant rebel, doomed genius, the damned.  
Does the city make the artist or defile him?  
Maybe both. You were like that building on the corner—  
meticulous brick and polished balustrades— fronting  
a brothel. Your poems seethed behind formal facades.  
Your lines wept under carriage wheels, chimney soot.  
Mine are free— wrinkled with racket and smear.

Chuffing semis gather now to disgorge at sun-up.  
Nothing is blossoming wicked and wild in rusty cans  
on cracked stoops, only forgotten cold-burnt geraniums.  
The city's sleepers roll over, restless before rising  
relentless to track across her not-yet made-up face.

Look there-- a night-blooming cereus opens ghostly rare  
in a florist's window. To the west, the top floor  
of that steel and glass lance is open to new arrivals,  
all hours. Steaming or frozen, the city is a womb.  
The city incubates death. It has character  
but outgrows its soul. The city coughs, spits, curses.  
This city is a phoenix.

Like your poetry.  
Maybe it'll fly in spring. Come back.

Glenna Holloway  
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day or nite

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Nothing is blossoming wicked and wild in rusty cans  
on cracked stoops, only forgotten cold-burnt geraniums.  
Sleepers roll over, restless before rising relentless  
to track across Chicago's not-yet made-up face.

Look there-- a night-blooming cereus opens ghostly rare  
in a florist's window. To the west, the top floor  
of that steel/glass lance awaits new arrivals,  
all hours. Steaming or frozen, the city is a womb.  
The city incubates death, despair, discovery, desire,  
greatness. She has character but outgrows her soul.  
The city coughs, spits, curses. Still, Chicago  
is a phoenix-- amassed ashes not her blight  
but fuel for her strength.

Like your poetry, Mr. B. Maybe it'll fly in spring.  
Maybe I'll find an old fashioned angel. Come back.

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