

while the radiator
threatens to explode

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FRESH BREAD
FRESH BAIT
the coast like a line of chalk
turns to meet us

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gravel grins
to meet the bitumen
black, sleek silk
rumbling into distant hills

CHRISTOPHER HEFFERNAN

THREE MONOLOGUES

1.

Pop Guitarist:

Ah, the unplugging of amplifiers
And the unhooking of brassieres . . .
We were as arrogant as you could be
On three chords and two beers
What mastery
To piss in a crowd's ear and go scot-free
And the prettiest butterfly in the beer garden on your arm

It had its charm
And I shouldn't have strayed further from the Tivoli

Than the length of a G-string
But there I was at John Williams

No make-up, no hair-do, no jump-suit, no light-show
He said he'd play for us
Something called Asturias
And that snarling, snapping arpeggio
Bit my ankles all the way home

2. Actress:

New plays float or sink in my bath.
Power enough for us who ride
Changing tides in changing pools of eyes . . .
But God, of all the bedposts my bra's hung on
There was only ever one . . . Ah, the wine and the epithets
Were warm those nights . . .
Warm winds of words in my ears,
And my lips soft on the lobes of his ears,
And on his chest my heart was soft . . .
You could strike matches off it now.

Stage, applause, garlands:
All these I would throw over,
All these I would desert,
If I could wind me into his scarf,
If I could weave me into his shirt.

3. Feared Academic:

A lady student said to me:
"Let's knock the neck off a bottle of beer."
There was sweet icing on her lips,
Her shirt was unbuttoned, her hair was unclipped,
Her lips were unclosed, but the hard beak of pride
Pecked into my eye; I saw

Myself, absurdly, lovingly
Impaled upon a Cutex nail . . .
“Come on,” she said, “we only get
One sip of our year.” And I sneered
“Strong metaphor you’re sipping on, dear.”

A first-year boy showed me a poem.
It was a playground for words to play on.
Charming as freckles on a nose,
The errors stood out from the rows
Of words, but the hard finger of pride
Bored into my eye; I saw
The ancient knuckles of my hands
Reflected in his dental bands . . .
And so there at his thonged feet
I let fall the precious sheet,
And, toying with a marking crayon,
Said: “Find another leg to pee on.”

I’m an old man and thin.
Not for me the words
To raise a child’s chin.
Never to form the words
That lick along a lady’s ear,
My tongue’s a blade, sharp and sheer:
I cut a slice of raw fear.