THE DOGS (First Agaricus Ode)

for Lissa Wolsak

Peter O’Leary

Blood-gushered mountainside a brass parapegma of noon
Specterless
differentiation. Glad day zodiacs augur. Awl of insight; hunters’
blades. Actaeon: and the spirits of motion. Actaeon
uttering:

::invisible solar stellatum : blue daytime::
::chalcedony, hyacinth, opal, sapphire, slate::
::Crystal. Ash. Hyacinth::

Lads. We’ve had luck our nets and spears
are dripping with. Fortune’s thirst for blood quenched.
The chariot’s an auroral throne dawn radiates from,
a furnace of ruby ore noon roars out from. We’re done.
We’ll kill again tomorrow, tracking board through these
trackless wastes. Let’s go home and roast these hams.

Actaeon’s men. Dragging together the nets to bind them. Ceasing.

Diana’s holy retreat. In whose hidden Arcanum a grotto.
Creased green with shade. No hand could have made it.
Soft tufa. Effervescing source. On the left. A stream—
waving, lucid—sounding out. And pooling. Where
spears of grasses natter. Here’s where the virgin of the wild
woods bathes. Crystal waters. Green shade. One nymph
holds her hunting spear. Holds her epic bow. One nymph takes
her robe. And two nymphs unbind the sandals from her feet.
And one Theban nymph whose fingers are nimblest quickly knots
Diana’s unbraided hair streaming in the swishing cooler air. Of the
grove.
Other nymphs bring the urns. Steaming with water. Let’s call them:
Wooly Milk Cap. And Velvet Stem. And Elm Oyster. And Slippery
Jill. And Black Trumpet.
And Titania bathes. She’s splendid. Completely. Unlike any other
being.
But Cadmus’ scion—Actaeon. There he is. His senses relaxing,
Dilating.
Stepping uncertainly. In woods he doesn’t know. Entering that holy 
grove.
Fate’s firebrand his torch. Flare in the vernal shadow. He’s there. 
They see him.

Furious percussions on the air. As they thrum their breastbones. 
Helicoptering sound. Arms in shocking, sudden motion. All of them 
ululating. Shrill pitch sirening atop woofered chopping. 
They’re all nude. Quick—they try to cover Diana with their bodies. 
But she’s immense. A towering beauty! Like Dawn’s incoming 
redness.
Light sunlight’s silver-tipped spears. Like a new unanticipated 
thought.
Eternity’s 

involuntary taste. It shocks him. She’s unarmed and can’t kill him. 
Water: she flicks it at him instead. Sprinkles him with wicked doom. 
Look at me. Sound of several octaves. Sounded at once. A deity’s 
fantastic vocalizing. 

Tell someone. What you’ve seen. I dare you. In his skull’s protein’s: 
the water’s 
tendrils root their curse. Actaeon’s head—it aches. A migraine’s 
lightning 
actualized as antlers. Stag’s horns. His jawbone narrows, extends. 
Fingers 
harden into hoofs; hands densify, tighten. His arms—slender legs. 
His legs—tremble with a frightened gait, awakened. 
His body—a maculate, velvety hide. At last she adds 
to his heart startled fear. At that, he rips through the woods. 
So nimble! So fast. Time vanishes. In his freedom. 
A shimmering pool. Vision of his rack of horns. “Misery!” A word 
as animalian moan. 
Weeping. Lachrymose tantrum of his unchanged mind. Its shames. 
Flowing into form. 

His form—charging on in fear. Impeded. Timorous. Running. 

Dogs. Hexagons of sunlight they shatter in their mad dash. 
Dogs. His fucking dogs. On the run. First comes Black-foot, 
an elegant Spartan deerhound, lunging in strides his anatomy’s 
hippodrome urges; and next courses Helltrail whuffing like a 
Cretan mare. Velocity’s roar. Humming aura of lurches and panting. 
Next, the Arcadians: Born of Thunder; Faux Pax; and Torrent. 
Fumerol. 

Like a fresh gush of thought, like a havoc of inspiration: Earthstar, 
Death Liquor.


Piercing every inch of flesh. Havoc of vulnus. Garish of wounds. Sound he makes:

no stag’s, no man’s. His buckled knees—a glimpse of prayer.
A master’s supplication. The futile petitions of his crew.
Actaeon’s absence: His mind’s mad terminal dancing. And the dogs. Throning him on every side. Thrusting their muzzles in his flesh. Mangling their master. Under the stag’s false form. Only his wounds quench the moon-goddess’ murderous luminous rage: rumor’s ambiguous violence. Summer rainstorm’s incessant hiss and thunder.

After Ovid

Peter O’Leary recently edited John Taggart’s Is Music: Selected Poems (Copper Canyon 2010) and published Luminous Epinoia (Cultural Society 2010).