

aMUSEing Myself

by Helen Maston

Living with Balthus
meant living with his mother
although she always wished she were
somewhere else
with someone else.
Reclining naked on cushions, guitar plucking,
cats purring on my chest
gazing through curtains held open by goblins
I mused on the naked form, pubescent.
Luckily I had never been buxom.
Hours before mirrors
gave me time to gaze
inward
whilst he searched in cellars
calling endlessly
denying abandonment.

Loving Ernest gave me time
to misunderstand what he wanted.
I never knew where I was with Papa,
snatching limited moments before
he shot through.
Trekking over a vast silent landscape
I thought I was intrepid, brave,
hoping he'd have more time after
one more kill.
Autumn brought us to a different
watering hole.

As he changed, so I,
hair shorter blonder

skin browner
body thinner
I became a brother
not a lover.
Unsure of my role
I overplayed
unable to hear the bell.

Meeting on Brighton Pier,
Grahame showed me danger
taking me to the heart
in heated countries I had never
wished to see
Intrigues spooked me
into wanting
an end of the affair.
He took me south
to heat waking mornings
reaching out
feeling him gone,
the sheets uncreased
unmarked
cleansed
as though never having felt the warmth of him
or the weight of his dreams.
After eleven, and four thousand words, he would
come to me
wandering in vine covered archways, hung
heavy with trellised fruit
island colours absorbing me until
I bleached white.

We ambled down stone ways to
sit always at the same table

met by the same faces
drinking ritually
he to talk
I to listen
his English being better than mine.
Though I knew he needed me to stay
he was no comedian and
guilt drove me away.

Coming only to remove money from my account
I withdrew the teller,
though nondescript, unoriginal of feature
he had an intensity, a humour, which
appealed to me.
Smiling at the situation
I took him on loan.
Late into the night
we read voraciously,
huddled in hot smoky Paris cafes
I longed to understand their talk
only catching fragments
leftovers
enough.
Walking huddled against each other
in certain half-deserted streets,
taking strays from alleys
to our cheap hotel,
laying saucers of milk on windowsills
I hoped I had found peace until
glancing to the street from our window
I caught the strength in his despair

climbing the third stair.

Henry led me, meandering, through
foreign streets, allowing me
time
to rest to watch to understand,
an ambassador.

He never hurried me,
he gave me everything
all sights
sounds
sensations.

He was as in love with tradition as I
though able to see its limitations.
He showed me a sacred fount
a golden bowl
from which I drank
growing stronger as he
grew weaker
at length retreating, understanding that
although we were both invaders
I had never stood in open doorways
having been born to open space
in a country where flies take every opportunity.

Oscar made me laugh
earnestly delighting in
his own importance.
Slightly slug like
yet beautiful for all that
he mesmerised me,
seeing only stars
in his patch of blue.
Though living rurally

he took to city jaunts –
I never knew where he was
who he was with
professing devotion
showering me with presents
a Lady's fan,
boxes from railway stations,
to be stored in an attic to which only he had the key.
I could not visit Reading afterwards
only recently returning to L'Hotel
feeling the decay
of ultimate loss.
He never needed me
only my cover.

Henri brought brilliance
into everything we did
I could not withstand
offerings of highly wrought fare
abundant cakes and goodies
light came from everywhere
our window to the sea
always open, inviting more.
Heavily woven intricately patterned cloths
covered our walls.
Nightly he would return
carrying new adornments
new pleasures
I ate unselectively
unreservedly
gorging
grotesque to my eyes
beautiful to his
odalesque.

Rolling plumply naked on oriental carpets

he captured me
stroked me
brushed me
into shape
until
breathing pattern
I smothered in colour.

Though beautiful as a young man
cold climate gave James an edge
on which I balanced uneasily.
Encircled in cold stone above
a sludge grey isle
I turned rigid watching him shave
in cracked mirrors
he travelled in ancient barques
leaving me to dreams of heated situations
wishing I might never fully wake.
Foundering unbuoyed
in time unreachable
unmindful of usurpers
he sank from my view.

Needing something more
I went to the source.
So much older
Pierro felt safe.
Disciple like I dogged
his slow progress
he always ahead
completing perfect walls of beauty
before I staggered into his shadow.

I followed him through mountains

of the moon

climbing

towards an unknown destination

unseen

coming home.

Struck silent

I saw mathematical precision

meet perfection

whipped into shape

on checkerboards.

Gazing into double depths

I found him waiting

as he always had

knowing in truth

I would reach him.