

Poem

by Paul Quenon

Hermit's Yard

for Fr Louis Merton

Sleek grackles
slink past
black
one stretched
neck
oil-slicked
blue
checked out this
dude

dead set
one white-ringed eye
on him
judged him
one dud

too wooden to slide
tip to tail
one slippery wave
sheer rhythm
high-stepp'n in grass
made smooth as wax
on jazz club floor

one up-beat
leap
and off he flew
dropped behind
one white
scat
to tell: for me
that's enough of you

and for you
O Hell
that's enough of that.

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Little Scribe*

Each instant at my desk
lays down an unwritten line
in some psalm undisclosed
~ the quill and scrape
on parchment, rough on my palm,
the faint click of a latch far
down the hall, and silent lamplight
watches on.

A moment to go, or two,
and the bell must tell me
the spell is broken and shall
cast itself larger yet in choir.

The instant, suddenly shortened by half
precludes my writing more ~ O

fear not, little scribe,
obedient, distressed,
you'll return to the rune
left off on the page,
its uncompleted O
gilded with silence.

Precious the gap
that arrests the line
from circling to a close

the curve suspended
from completion in time
where every instant,
its circumference hesitates,

breathless, to complete,
its script

in the timeless.

** A legendary Medieval monk was a scribe, diligent for his work and for obedience. When the signal for the Divine Office rang, he immediately laid down his pen before finishing the illuminated letter. When he returned, he found the letter was completed in gold by an angel. In Zen calligraphy when a circle is drawn, the brush is lifted before closing the form.*

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The Un-named Cat

A radioactive atom
unobserved
is in a state of decay
and non-decay
at once

In the black box
Schrodinger's cat
dependant for its life
on that atom
left unobserved
is dead and alive
both

Two stone Buddhas at
Polonnaruwa
the one awake, standing,
the other lies asleep.

Both, when you are jerked clear
out of the habitual,
half-tied vision of things
are one Buddha
asleep and awake.

Unpublished photograph
in the locked archive cabinet
of the monastery dark-room:

two monks, one prone
cottonballs blocking nostrils,
another standing by at watch.
Black and white image:

Fr. Louis dead, Dom Leclerque alive
both, one monk,
dead and alive both
when

left
unobserved.

Brother Paul Quenon OCSO has been a monk of Gethsemani Abbey since soon after leaving high school in 1958 and was a novice for two years under novice master, Thomas Merton.