

KARL ELDER

from Z Ain't Just for Zabeceдарium

American Bovary (The Cosmetician)

Zip code sans abode: for one, one won one
yet lost all heart in Cleveland, where Madam
X, one's spouse, made it big to then make off
with a dollhouse manufacturer from
Versailles. "Forsooth," her lover crooned to her,
"you learn how false true love when you face the
truth," truth being the manufacturer
sooner than later would fracture his skull,
ramming headboard to topple wall, crying,
"Qui vive!" over his living doll, her rouge
powdered cheeks, those coarse, horsehair lashes
open suddenly, as up she rose, too
nonchalant just for lust, but wantonness
more blind than a pair of glass eyes combined.
Looking down, she loathes her frog prince's drool,
kit, and caboodle; knows she ought haul tail,
jiggle and cleavage, to Cleveland; recant
in grand style to an emasculated
husband; then don her own wand for love of
green bred of her black magic, instead of
funds bled pure white, the spit and miss of spite.
Economics masked in histrionics,
dogged with life in a mirror, poodle turns
cat staring back as if groomed to scratch the
bitch, her itch gone south, home, to her own kind
à la KY, where, for one, one ate one.

A Disappearing Act

Zowie, word in a hummingbird heard—gone.
“Yikes!”—what it seems to say with its lofty
exit, its scaredy cat, peek-a-boo play.
We the peephole to hell, perhaps, remain
virginal in terms of maiden flight to
unparalleled heights, but on unchaste chase
to unearth heaven here, I say, “Holy
scat, no angel if not Tinkerbell’s soul
rates wings like those.” Still, should time come for res-
cue—fire or ice—would I kowtow? Does the
pope in his garden clamor for ladder
overhead, that bee-line and blur in the
noise of the hummingbird, thin rope of hope
more like from a toy helicopter and
less a flying saucer? I don’t *think* so.
Kaput means kibosh, ash for balderdash,
je ne sais pas. Dare one stare dead in the
eye of the beholder seeking beauty
here with mirrors, or does one shudder,
gnostic who pictures black behind the glass?
For fortitude—out of fortune, fear or
egress—is faint ally to existence,
dawn the round nemesis of time’s eclipse,
cyclical as it is, as is the coy
buzz, the quick charge, the discrete retreat of
all muse, that, game won, song sung, vanishes.

Love in the Time of Quantum Mechanics

Zircon cons, but not even a pendant
yea long cons like a diamond—Saks or Brand
X—carbon hardly being forever.
Water, more genuinely speaking, *is*—
vaporized ice. Hold a glass to the light.
You shall possess insight, shall partake of
the spirit world of diamonds, two rungs of
separation from the nether world of
raucousness that is the nesting grounds of
quarks, of squarks, of leptons, of sleptons, of
photons. Photinos? Photons you've seen. Say
"Hola" a Los Photinos, new to the
neighborhood. It's no surprise that with a
million million million atoms known to
live in a teaspoon of water there are
Kilkenny cats, that quarks are quirky, that
just as there are sleepers there are leapers.
It's the whang on Yang that makes for squarks.
Here he lies in the oral embrace of
good time Yin, the marriage's darker half,
for which its design is homologous,
each of two embryonic states of grace,
deaf to our deft imaginings: Is this
cosmology or numerology?
Be it two, three, four dimensions or ten
a cosmos of sparticles is no gem.

Making History

Zero gravity or depravity,
yogi or yokel, Roman numeral
X or I, you think you've got a shot and
what you've got is exactly that—one shot.
Victory? Nowadays it's victors' vice,
underwritten by Nike, and we're not
talking goddess but stylized "V," that
"swoosh" so ubiquitous as not to be
read as logo, symbol, or word but a
quip on equipment that doesn't bear it—
phantom confetti. What we need is an
old-fashioned future where what is won is
now to be earned. "You wanna fat loan? Give
me a lien," Nature says, witch that she is.
Likewise, if you want a forest, plant trees.
Keen on poetry? Read. One whose action
jives right with carpe diem sees the day
in his sleep, before which the sheep he counts
have profiles less of lambs, more like mountain
goats, and a proper number of iambs
for that climb to a dream of the sublime.
Every good boy does fine, scales his way back
down inclines where history's his story,
crescendo or no. Absent plot it could
be you: airy obit writ by Mort at
Acme Mortuary, who came up short.

The Rookery

“Zero-zero,” says the tower to the
yo-yos, their flight plans in hand, those junior
execs who, through windows of palm pilots,
weather the lousy weather in want of v
isibility. Similar’s the tale
untold of those flown-to-never-return
tiers of grounded angels in which entire
squadrons took refuge, that sanctuary
rank with a darkness so plumb one cannot,
qua imagination, let alone thought,
perceive to what grave degree is less than
obvious: no unbound limb, no free hand,
no crowbar to pry open a hymnal,
much less concordances to Bibles as
likely squeezed unreadable with all knees
kowtowing to appease the word within.
Justice? It turns out she’s one of them, an
interloper who, feigning to right her
halo, undoes the knot of her blindfold,
goes gray as a ghost at a vision of
fowl most foul she cannot tell from feathers
everywhere—condors’, vultures’, ravens’, crows’—
decomposed, no hint, even, or glint of
coal, no diamond shaft, no gravity, this
black hole where the soul goes, sold on itself,
as if, in the first place, there was mercy.

Urban Denouement

Zombie on the left. Zombie on the right.
You know you're no scarecrow, let alone Christ.
X, nevertheless, marks the spot, the cross-
walk where you stand on the median, that
vicissitudinary attitude
undomesticated creatures are known
to show, perhaps a tooth bearing snarl, when
shit of the pigeon targets the skull and
runs down the nape of the animal's neck,
quietus, as if flesh chose not to crawl,
poised, posing as if for a photo of
one impervious to it all, although
needlessly so, already part of the
mural on the tall glass wall across that
looms in this necropolis such that a
Karloff—Boris, that is—spine erect and
jolly well asleep, bores us, you and me,
I see, with me being the third here who
halts and, like Frankenstein's monster there, stands
glued to shoes tucked in his lead galoshes
for now and in perpetuity,
erstwhile the light turned green, turning us dumb,
dullards in a stinging rain of hail hell
casts up like cinders at our shins for sins
born of omission—player and no part,
auteur and no art, hero and no heart.

The Watchers and the Watched

Zeitgeists like this mean more museum heists,
yule logs the size of toothpicks, and a Rol-
ex on all our lists instead of Timex,
which, as Christmas wishes go, is not as
vain, not as opulent, oddly, as it sounds
utilitarian, the greatest good
the grandest goods for the greatest number.
Somehow somewhere sometime something almost
rococo burrowed in the soul not to
quaff from an empty vessel but, like a
psychological corkscrew, take hold, pop
open the bottle to release from its
nascent state the desire to be fulfilled.
Meanwhile, there are culture's accoutrements,
like rescued tapestries of the past or
K rations in the form of film cans for
Johns and Janes Doe, who, in contrast to an
infinite number of names for numbers,
have not known nor sought the dignity that
goes ink in pen with an identity.
Face it, with film as the mirror of our
era, only the faceless can save face,
drawn to both sides of the proscenium,
characters like actors actors portray
benighted with pseudonyms for a blind
audience that cannot tell them from them.

Shining

for Joanne Lowery

Zapped in the back with a Rayovac beam's
yards of teeming mist, this live planetoid
X (that might as well be light years from us)
wedged in a fork of paper birch (inert
victim of blind, benign voyeurism,
unfazed by the likes of us lowlifes) lies
the cub porcupine, whose guise at dusk, a
scrub brush turned up (sans any chance in a
race from us, tortoise, or tamest of lame
quadrupeds), but with a gorgeous hue of
pewter so rare as to be the sheer form
of itself that (in urgent fervor to
name in order to more perfectly re-
member) a Plato might call angelware—
light the gown angels wear, their gossamer
karma aura's alloy in the ideal—
jerry-built, as is always the human
idea of the beautiful, when our
history has yet to happen on some
godforsaken, lopsided moon on the
far edge of the farthest galaxy, where
eons from now sparsest particles rain
down in a mist of emptiness here sensed,
coveting the porcupine's seeming o-
bliviousness to angst and bliss alike,
as hid in its caterpillar crawl—wings.