

David Wheatley

MOCKER



Gallery Books

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M O C K E R

Diamonds

Diamonds are this girl's
best friend, one beaming
from her midriff,
its fashion statement rife
in this twin town of Freetown,
Sierra Leone.
Children of Freetown,
diamond town,
your cries on a loop
in the slave museum:
shine as it will,
the beam in my eye
refracts through a dark
more dazzling still.
Disarmingly so,
children of Freetown,
stump town:
forgive us the hands
that give to collectors,
forgive us who do
and do not know better,
our jeweller's shop
where the belly-pierced girl
will stop to look,
the stone in her navel
a harmless fake
dazzling its
transparent rebuke
as I follow her down
Freetown way,
her vanishing form
a mote in my eye.

The Owl

after Baudelaire

Owl at my window, window owl,
under the sycamore's midnight eaves,
alien god whose red eye roves
while he sits tight and plays it cool.

No police copter or car alarm
can budge him from his airy perch,
unflappable, who must keep watch
until the hour of perfect calm.

Look and learn: don't just do
something, stand there! Stand still and be wise.
Be the owl who does as he pleases.

Drunk on every passing shadow
man will always pay the price
for having wanted to change places.

Trade Winds

A passing St Brendan traded a sign of the cross
for a native's airborne lump of burning slag
and pronounced Mount Hekla the gates of hell.
Fire is tree-foe, gleams-of-dread that other
fire called gold. Cut me, I bleed it, fire,
a lava-flood in every vein. Snorri
Sturluson traded a witch a rotten
flounder for the two extra letters of
the Icelandic alphabet, one symbolizing
hero renown, the other a reindeer's bladder
speared on a stick. I trade you an arctic fox
and a reindeer for a hollow great auk's egg.
Buried three months before the midwinter feast
a rotten shark is not to be sniffed at, and goes
down well with a little Black Death spirit.
When offered these dainties at my table
you will know better than to refuse, though
a stranger took hospitality from Greppur
the Grim and killed him afterwards in his sleep.
Flosi and Skarphedinn traded insults
at the Althing, but Gunnar and Njal
remained friends. And yet Gunnar died.
The chess players of Grimsey island
would fling themselves into the sea in ecstasies
of disgrace when defeated. Fischer and Spassky
traded pawns in Reykjavik, each rocking
back and forth in his chair 'like dead men dancing'.
The sea, that knows all about dead men,
traded Iceland the island of Surtsey
for an eruption that lasted four years
before cooling to basalt, lichen and moss.
Now, thinking better of it, Surtsey's tephra
covering is borne away on the breeze

and only the gates of hell themselves
reopened could make it return. Afloat
on the Blue Lagoon's volcanic waters,
I feel the underworld's hot breath on my ankles:
Won't you have me back, it asks?
I would not trade it for anything on earth.