

Par Delicatesses

by Bill Yarrow

I.

Rimbaud said,
"Par delicatesses
j'ai perdu ma vie."
In the delicatessen,
I have lost my life.

I know what he meant.
I also have wandered among the smoked
fish, lean pastrami, marble rye, have
stood by the wicked pickle barrel, have
stared longingly at the crumbly halvah.

II.

Dante said one day he found himself
in a delicatessen ("selva oscura")
not knowing which aisle to walk down,
not knowing which meat to choose.
He too felt that he had lost his life.

I know what he meant.
I too have suffered paralysis
in a plethora of possibility:
belly or Nova, herring or tongue, chub or sable,
kreplach or kishke, kugel or blueberry blintz...

III.

Fitzgerald: "In the real dark night
of the soul, it is always three

o'clock in the delicatessen."
O lost! O lost! He lost his
compass in the schmaltz.

I know what he meant.
I've been in the 3 A.M. cream cheese.
I've known the hole in the bagel.
The potato knish is doughy. My life?
A shmere in someone else's appetite.

