

portraiture

by Peter Schwartz

I've built portraits with my time
native portraits, rattled portraits
idle and forced portraits that hung like masks
over my more fragile portraits

I've dressed and redressed
my limbs in the necessary chemistry
to give each portrait its ration
of sunlight; I've hid my fledglings

like black teeth beneath my housepillows
praying for magic, practicing my small private
language as the expectation of fluency
printed newspapers in the dark

words that flooded the pavilion
and often broke into sour grain.

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I've spent my time taking
potent portraits, toxic portraits, make-
shift portraits; portraits that gnawed
at my jaw like parasites

I've folded and unfolded them
to make wrinkles to hide little bits
of hair and bone in those grooves
to remember and forget by

they've been everything

at one time or another -
parables, valentines, diaries
letters, deeds, notes

medicine for sins
dark as roots.

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I've tried to fathom the nature of these
portraits, how they collect like moths
sequels to what was
never clear

to begin with; I've hung my
arms out like bridges and tried to
analyze the grindstones
we grow from

but never found handles
to make this any easier
I've tried to box the very weather
for later, but

can't resist such
openings.

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this is the portrait effect
the raw gone raw again
a slight pull making the
reservoir curve just so

an arc of light

rabid and naked; half-translated
but never bronzed; fatal
and fugitive

leaving us with
lesser portraits:

seeded portraits,
shrouded portraits,
riddled and rationed portraits,
quiet portraits;
sleeping portraits.

