

## MAUREEN PAXTON

### Four Poems from *Ordeal's Calendar (A Monologue between Eros and Thanatos)*

#### Dream #33 Bosch-Drawn:

It's night  
and Eros flies terrified  
through nightmare's metropolis.  
This is Europe, the Middle Ages.  
In a Bosch-drawn dream,  
grim houses pitch and sway;  
the earth quakes.  
Narrow streets are arranged  
on a drunken grid  
so intersections  
are fluid and changing.  
Hands over their faces,  
other runaways ricochet  
off walls like imbecilic marbles.

She is naked. Her robe  
has turned coat and taken flight  
as a bat. The traitor garment,  
no longer is yellow but black.  
Sweat streams and freezes  
on her fevered body.  
The bat will kill  
everything it can; it's out  
for blood and everyone flees  
to a field beyond the city  
for safety. In a hurried grid  
the hunted lie down.

Yellow tarps, blankets, cloths  
are hauled snug over bodies.  
The colour is crucial —  
the covering, more so.  
The predator can swoop  
and pluck lives from sockets  
as easily as a thumb flicks  
a snail from its shell.

A child in tow,  
she arrives on the field  
with salvation's yellow pall.  
The other she can hide  
but not herself and so lies  
exposed from the waist up  
as vulnerable as a rotten melon  
under horror's primal foot.  
Trembling, she peers up and sees  
not the bat but its shadow.  
The sky itself becomes flat  
and opaque. A projection screen  
perhaps with the bat  
not real but a shadow cast  
by hands that masquerade.  
They flap in simulation  
of flight. THANATOS!  
Thanatos teases civilized sleep!

#### Dream #38 True Love of Death's Life:

Bitch woman! Human ditch!  
Water of my blood! Mud of my gut!

I am bereft, do you hear?  
Baby put to sea on a punctured  
palm leaf. Infant floating  
to the world's edge, snug  
as a duck in an oil spill.

I WANT MY MAMMA, NOT THE WANT!

I'd sell my head  
for her home-baked bread, waxed  
eyebrows and fluttering hands.  
But who took she as the beach away?  
Who murdered the bank in the night?  
Who grabbed the womb from my sleep  
and left this crawler no choice

but to leap? A greased pig,  
life eludes, its runaway rot  
oinking as it ruts —

She was the garden,  
the gardener. The pointillist,  
the point. She lived as bread  
to her bairn; meat to her little man;  
hand holding down the beast by its knotted mane.  
Athene  
to centaur, she proved guillotine  
and honed civility on my skull'.

I NEED THE GNASHING! I NEED THE PAIN!

Lapsed queen, thorny witch,  
love's whiplash; get your ass back to Baby,  
brat hooked on habits of death!

### Dream #39 A Call to Arms:

Eros sings:

Make nice!  
Heal the rift!  
Build bridges over hellhole's  
width, failsafe and muscular.  
Drape its rails  
with triumphant lilies  
and orchids erect  
with loveliness. Stalwart,  
  
come, kiss iceberg's tip.  
Chilled lips an inch above

arctic waters call to you,  
hot-blooded ship. Intrepid  
friend, our hold must leap  
in order that embrace might seal.  
Come, span death's abyss and caulk  
that horrid glory hole.

Forgive then —

mouth meet mouth. We two  
buffing cloths, chamois cheeks,  
are Brasso to a quarrel's rust.

### Dream #40 The Sting:

When Eros talks in her sleep,  
I hear muck, exquisitely tooled;  
jewels and gold, blender-puréeed.

This self-willed deafmute desires  
quiet but the bed's burbling half,  
Eros as Motor Mouth, badgers yet:

'Face it, Deathie,  
you, King of the Tied Tongue,  
Dullest of the Dull, are the only  
match in town left unstruck.  
You possess no talents and no  
imagination. Like a gerbil  
nervous in the crypt, you crave  
the cage's relative liberties.

I am landlady to its shell pink key!  
Sinuous custodian to all that breathes!  
*Your* recreations however, are cheap —  
claws repetitious on the wheel;  
senseless shredding of Kleenex  
and tissues otherwise human.'

The diatribe stings for I know  
she won't acknowledge that the sweet  
perversity from which she rails  
is sleep, a minute sleight-of-hand  
performed by myself. A dose of Death,  
immunization against and final  
invitation to. I am subtle  
with the batten that accumulates.

## P. FLECK

### Summer Thoughts (for Margaret Laurence)

An uneven day —  
little clouds, sun and shadow  
and sudden sun.

The sky is breathing for us  
— long draughts of light and the shadow  
is sadness breathing in — and blowing  
cloud-puffs at the snow-cool  
peaks of mountains. A cloud island  
atoll turns into a harp,  
unstrung, a swan rampant, a white  
hound high-tailing across an azure field,  
—a child-smiling kite-flying  
innocence of sky.  
Deck-chaired, hat over face, head  
full of fractals, geometry of natural  
repetitions, endless interweavings,

— Gaelic cross in the Book of Kells —  
I am lost in that maze  
looking for,  
finding,  
defining, divining  
real words for things,  
sous-text of the universe.  
It begins to come true.  
World is shifting into word, poets  
into priests or prophets, or  
diviners.  
No,  
Shadow plumb-lines to the heart  
The sky stops breathing,  
and shows what  
sunlight  
is.