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FOUR POEMS

By HARRY BROWN

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The Story of an Hour

thin
is in
today
but be
ye not
distracted
thin will out
and fat
will in
(and out)
again
for outting
though all
the rage
today

is always
in
just in
different
skins

circles

anyone

Old Scratch Meets His Match

"So long as he walks the earth alive,
So long you may try what enters your head;
Men make mistakes as long as they strive.

.....
And stand ashamed when you must needs admit:
A good man with his groping intuitions

Still knows the path that is true and fit.”

- the Lord to Mephistopheles in Goethe's Faust

1

Mephistopheles inhabits a box;
Like Wagner he's wrapped in rules: he tells Henry,
His victim-to-be, "You must say 'Come in'
Three times, or I'll have to leave." Later when Old Scratch
Is hot to drop the latch and catch the Doktor
In his trap, the devilish pedant
Begs of Faust a drop of indelible
Ink to sign their contract with, hoping
To make Henry a permanent-press,
Fire-red shirt. Mephistopheles
Is a lawyer at heart.

2

When Faust asks who his new
Acquaintance is, Old Harry brags, "Why I'm
Emperor of Deny! I'm King
Of Emphysema- I battle breath! I preach
'Abort!' One of my favorite pastimes
Is following fire trucks to the flames
I set. Bang's Disease is my miracle."

3

Mephisto pushes Henry to lech after Gretchen:
"Sup on her twin roes until they glow!"
That he'd love to watch (the Devil can't,
Of course, say love).

"I'll ply Faust with just
Enough of my best burgandy to raise
His learned tool and pickle his soul.
A piddling feat for a fellow like me."

The Devil

Drops to his knees and opens his arms to the heavens:
"Oh Lord, how I lust to feast on that German dessert!
See Henry soused and humpin' his little virgin
While Mama Dear but a room away--
Pop-eyed, unable to say a syllable--
Heaves her last with my 'sleeping potion'
Given her by Daughter Dear, no less,
Who got the mix from my pahdna Faust."
The Father of Lies rises from his knees.
"And ol' Romeo will present his Jule
With a livelier, kicking gift."

Our voyeur's leer
Spreads like a ripple in melted lard.

"Then

I'll have not only Henry, I'll own his silly
Scullion--camp in her noggin and cook her conscience
Until the brain's ablaze and she drowns the little

Bastard to douse the flames (but later
They'll roar like hell!)--holds it under the swamp
'Til its lungs can't pump. Then I can rest
And let the law take charge. Thank the Lord
For the letter of the law! They'll plug the breath
Of that Catholic slut so I can entertain
Her soul for a while, 'til Henry's half of our
Contract starts and the gooey lovebirds enter
Their long, sweaty tryst." He swaggers about
And all but beats his chest: "I'm Lord of Lies
And Dies as well as Flies! I'll swear to all
Save lo . . .breath and truth. Haven't I proved
To Martha her faithful spouse is dead? Shown
He'd left what little loot he'd plundered and hadn't spent
To some young wench who struts the streets of Venice?
Those small fibs gave Madame Go-Between
A pang or two--and will give Good Doktor a little 'tang!
My greatest victory in years!"

4

Though much he hopes for comes to pass,
Old Scratch is hardly omniscient.
He's a better comic than prophet.
Though guillotined
For mother and child,
Gretchen isn't damned.
The Lord was right,
The Devil foiled;
Faust strives, foggy truth
And Gretchen's love prevail.

One Lovable, Mongrel Soul; Or, Buddy

for Alice

is all body--with tail and soul. Sort of a Lab at bulldog height
with half Lab, half bull face and snout, every time I come home
he leads me slowly up the drive; I crawl along, straining my neck
but often unable to see the fat black brockwurst with Dumbo ears
wagging his full being in samba soul to tip of tail,
gift in mouth, truck and I in tow toward the house.
A savvy mutt who knows big is not better, Buddy offers
on various afternoons a walnut, twig, or leaf
barely seen outside his lips; a six-inch stick or three-foot long
limb, the latter scraping the door jamb, sometimes breaking, as he enters.
Size matters not; Buddy knows his Whitman. Giving is all;
Buddy knows his Homer--knows we like Zeus and Odysseus love gifts.
And knows Saint John: it's more blessed to give than to receive.
We laugh and grouse picking up a walnut, leaf, or stick
in the foyer or dining room--actually any spot
Buddy happens to drop his treasure or plop to chew on it awhile
before slipping into nap; we further chuckle and fuss when having
to check come morning porch and steps, sometimes the yard, for a sock
or bedroom slipper Buddy picked up in the dark as our gift to him
when let outside at two or three in the morning. Again, Buddy knows
his Homer: gifts are far more honor than chattel. Like us, he covets honor,
like us wears warts, endearing and annoying.

When thirsty Buddy comes

to the kitchen or bedroom for Alice or me, or rudely pushes open the closed but uncaught downstairs bathroom door and stands by the tub till she or I turn on the spigot; and after drinking so long we fear he's diabetic, leaves without so much as a Thank-you wag, dripping a trail across the foyer tile onto the ash dining room floor.

Having more than once stolen my lunch from the edge of the kitchen table, my breakfast off a tray beside a lawn lounge chair, Buddy seems all belly—eats anything from okra to bananas. Quite affectionate, he will wash my face if I'm sitting on the floor. According to Sue he's smiling when his front teeth slightly show. But—a warning: when visiting don't bend down to greet him, for this friendly, impetuous sausage may sprin like a solid Texas gusher to meet you and crack your nose or bruise your cheek with his short thick snout! Yet, logical as life, Buddy growls when petted while trying to sleep, and threatens any hand that touches his paw.

In the coldest months we worry because he doesn't own a heavy winter coat, and try to entice him to stay in the cellar or dog house when we're away and cannot leave him in the house. But Buddy, stubborn, refuses: it's the brown braid rug near our Jotel,* the carpet at the foot of our bed, the front foyer, under the rose love seat in the never-used-except-by-Buddy front living room, or, especially, in the dark anywhere Alice or I might stumble over his black, invisible self and break an ankle or wrist—in short it's a favorite spot in the house (impossible when we're gone, of course) or else the concrete stoop in back to catch the southwest wind in January and give us greatest guilt.

When recently his collar batteries died, Buddy realized his freedom, escaping the hidden fence into the pasture to feed his soul by rolling in cow pies, rubbing with all his muscle his head in mound upon mound till dung caked every hair and pore of his head and neck along with both collars! And till Buddy, feeling transformed and perfectly perfumed, finally returned grinning jowl to jowl and making the largest twelve-foot ceiling room of our 1835 home smell like a feeding shed in April after a winter of serving pellets, hay and corn—damp, singeing the nostrils with an acrid attar from months of manure slowly layered, continually wetted, stirred, and packed week upon week by thousand-pound cows jostling for close position at the table. I scrubbed Buddy and his collars for an hour in the shower till all smelled like Dial, transforming him again from lovable to lovable, after which ablutions I mopped the bathroom floor and disinfected shower walls and tub.

After two transfigurations Buddy strutted about the front yard all afternoon. Once when Gandhi, the Kelleys' large German shepherd, trotted down Lancaster Pike at the foot of our drive, Buddy, perfectly safe of course, first barked and threatened like a boot camp sergeant with a bull horn. Next he ran to the edge of our yard, a football field away from the road, stood steel stiff and defiant with hackles high, tail rigid and quivering at sixty degrees; and then pretending he's Elmo, our eighteen-hundred pound Angus bull that Buddy watches court his twenty-cow harem and hears bellow and toot his brags in the pasture north beyond the yard, he pawed the ground with vigor throwing dirt and grass high into the air.

**Norwegian wood stove.*

Everything Its Opposite; Or, And I Ain't Lyin'

for bill bailey

much failure predicts success
as drought hints clouds
and doubt digs fertile footers
for faiths seed
to drop deep roots
sprouting biceps to the skies

Harry Brown holds an A.B. from Davidson College, an M.A. from Appalachian State University, and a Ph.D. from Ohio University, and have taught in the English Department at EKU since 1970. I co-edited *God's Plenty: Modern Kentucky Writers*; and have published five poetry collections—*Paint Lick Idyll*, *Measuring Man*, *Ego's Eye*, *Everything Is Its Opposite*, and, last fall, *Felt Along the Blood—New and Selected Poems* (ed. S.R. Cope).

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