

Empathy for Fat Elvis and Notes Toward the Impeachment of Dread

1.

Thing is, you absolutely have to conjure
the dirt-poor kid from Mississippi
who sucked up gospel, country and blues
till he bled them, a bruised-eyed boy
with blistering talent and near-giddy energy,
and certainly not the sad man
of bizarrely elongated collars, peanut butter and bacon sandwiches,
and don't even get me started
on the cape.

Of course he had no idea he'd usher in
one of the goofiest eras of human god worship
ever known to our species. He couldn't see ahead to the look-alikes,
no inkling he'd be studied
in university courses
as a Distantly Emergent
Posthuman Cultural Artifact.

(In death, of course, he's all proto-metamodern
Jesus
coming soon
to a dying planet near you).

Anyway.

When the King sings the Dixie trilogy, very very late,
when he's the Elvis no one voted for,
the Elvis who never made it onto a stamp—

you believe him. That song is way
too sad as he intermittently and obliquely
apologizes for his bloated drugginess,
unseemly giggling when he forgets the lines.
He is mourning his own
and everyone's golden beginnings,
even as he sees his own ignominious
and nightmarish end
clearly coming down the pike.

You can hear it in his voice, those final shows.
He was preparing.

2.

I've heard it said that to live a good life
you must be ready to die a good death;
in fact your life should be spent
getting ready to die.

Sounds pretty godawful, yes?
My own dread shoots through the roof.

But I know that Tibetan adepts, for one, flat-out practice.
Right down to the instant
of letting go. They are always letting go. They spend half the day unclasping.
They are completely aligned in life
with death, and yet more alive than the rest of us
because focused and clear and still.

In meditation they feel cool air actually warm
in the mouth, all the way down the throat and into the lungs,
and back out. They observe every thought
precisely when a thought
emerges like a slow liquid arrow and crosses through
and out of the mind, and they do not cling
to a self. To a story. Certainly not
to some retrievable, gold-plated past.
(Please do not cry to go there.
It is both a sentimental
and fascist delusion.)

And some adepts die sitting up. Cessation
is ambiguous; the flesh does not even degrade. Tap
a monk's corpse and it bursts into—what? Conceptionless
nonpermanence. Rigpa shunyata dharmadatu, so many damned
formulations, so many words
for wordlessness—
or just the next hungry body.

3.

Elvis's long-heralded return
in '68, I think, after all of the hideous movies,
was a moderate shock. I don't know, I guess I thought
his hair and clothes
would be mildly hippified, at the least,
what with the Summer of Love and all that.
But he dressed like a retro cartoon teddy boy, a fifties rocker
shellacked in black leather, a superhero whose superhero brothers
wore tight outfits too but could fly.

Elvis couldn't fly. He had to manage on the ground in secret.

For all of his ironic self-inflation,
they say he was a humble and kind man, always.
He would never hurt a soul
down here.

And he had such a time singing
his self-spangled comeback. For some of it, the band was seated
in a casual circle on a very small stage, an intimate live audience,
and he kept grinning at his bandmates
like they all knew the world's
most acutely sweet secret. They all knew the world's most acutely sweet secret,
and were letting us have it,
one quarter teaspoon at a time.

Like there wasn't a single note
he wouldn't die alive for.

4.

2019. People are walking around in near-cryonic
states of the soul,
when not boiling over with anger and stress.

It's this other king, a tabloid celebrity ratcheted up
to hugely puke-worthy, banana-republic con.
Might as well say it again. *Fascist*.

Donald, if you really want to bully us
with your ongoing freaky, petty, and vindictive tweets,
if you want the media scandal of all scandals,
just remind us in your daily belches
that we are all going to die. Think of it!
You can get back at anyone
who has ever called you a goon or a fool
or pure moral slime on MSNBC.
Just tweet out to everyone DEATH
DEATH DEATH DEATH just whisper it
in one-hundred and thirty-nine characters
plus a tiny emoji skull.

But you won't. I know you won't.

BTW, you are too stupid to breathe.

*

BTW, I'm not intimidated by any of your tweets.
I'm strong. I can talk about all
that I don't have in this life

and I can talk about all
that I will someday not be. I've been preparing
for awhile, ok? Even today, right here.

*

Maybe we should turn the whole ugly thing
back on you. Maybe we should march in the thousands or millions
to the White House and erupt
in one glorious voice *Donald Trump you are going to die!*
Someday, Donald Trump, you really are going to die!
Fool yer already dead and don't know it!
Think about it, Cheeto!

At which point they'll arrest me and put me in Gitmo,
where they'll torture me till I talk.

I won't know what to say. I will only manage to squeak, *Viva, viva*
Las Vegas! and then they will kill me.

That's ok. I'm prepared.

*

Well, I'm preparing. I'm trying.

Friend, if you're there, it would help
if you could whisper any tender,
mad truth you hold close to your life.

What I mean is, let's collaborate.
I'll tell you my nightmares
If you'll tell me yours.