

Browns and Rusts:

Meditations on
J. Kirk Richards
(Part I)

Poems by Tyler Chadwick
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Reaching for the Hem

(On *Virtue Hath Gone Out of Me*)

Pressed into shadow
by the pulsing throng,
her back against twelve years'
eternity, a crimson emptiness
draped around her like a womb,
a hollow in God's universe
shorn by the gauzy pool
of her flesh, she unfolds
from her yoke, stretching
through the crowd
to sear her wounds
with the Physician's styptic hem.

With his smoldering tassels
in hand, her blood burning
white with apocalypse,
she sheds her ashen drape
over the crimson sea
of his words
and, flesh lanugo blonde,
crests their flame
into the velvet folds of dawn.

Harvest

(On *Every Knee Shall Bow*)

Beneath the sweep of the harvester's touch, the crowd folds
to the right compositional third like a sea of wheat bent
to draft day from its clay vessel. As he surveys the waving

heads, each tongue breaks across the coasts of his flesh,
leaves the froth of identity in question marks over his
wounds. I've tried to locate myself in this tide, to keep from

surfacing too near the edges of mystery, from searing the prints
from my soul in the post-apocalypse flame still working its way
across the horizon. And I've risen into the ash

draped around him like a robe, held tight to his crimson hem
while the currents flirted with memory and the flagellates
that caressed his back traced through layers of skin

until the universe finally confessed that his blood was enough
to quench God's violent thirst for harmony, to seed the darkness
kicked up by Adam and Eve with embryonic tendrils of light.

Two Variations on *Cherubim and a Flaming Sword*

Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne.

—Ezekiel 10:1

I. Sentinels

Drawn inward by the gravity of light, figures trim
beneath sinuous white robes, their point of communion

is clear: hands in line with the flame—its blade toward
the unhealed wound in the earth, the fissure through Eve’s

flesh—they warm themselves before a gilded Tree, clinging
to the stories God told them before he’d given his charge

and left them alone at the far end of Paradise. Their vision,
seared clear as John’s stone by the flame’s quartered eye,

expands with their tresses across the firmament, entangling
the horizon as they watch for survivors of Earth’s crimson epic

to come through the forest line, to greet their command
with the language, the tenor, the touch of victory.

II. Harbinger

The others have withdrawn from around the mercy seat,
retracted their wings though their bodies still fume

with the glory of God. Their incense draws a third from
the canon's shadows. She stands with her back to the Tree,

its vein of branches posed as her gold-leaf wings, its trunk
an umbilical binding her light to the crimson ground. Her body

divided by flame, her hands at its core, fingers straight,
the palms an open circle around her secret parts, she blooms

through cycles of apocalypse, compressing the weight of mystery
into the sinuous field of her skin, the harvest behind her robes.

Grown heavy as the shadows in Genesis, she falls from the Tree
into a panorama dripping with flesh as rich as divinity.

Landscape, with Livestock

On *Pond at Thompson's Station*

The sun has been misplaced.
Or, if you'd like to get more
Biblical, it's returned

to the dove's abyss—or
was that Milton? I can't be sure
as I dance so near the beginning

with words so supple they
bend into themselves until
only the landscape remains:

the field flushed white, hills
seduced into bed
by cloud vapor so thin it will

barely last past the break of day,
the trees an erratic screen
against the sudden emptiness.

Consumed in association,
their teeth tight to the grass,
the livestock nearest the water's

point of clarity absorb this light
in slight movements of jaw and
tongue, slowing the arc of day

as it reaches to nest
in the foreground
of this slowly digested vale.

Speculations

(On *Winter Sunrise, Maury County*)

There's nothing spectacular, really, about a morning
waiting for light to seethe into the bark of empty birch,

to ripple the pond just beyond a twin-based tree,
just behind a tuft of crimson grass, with the arc of day.

But maybe somewhere in the brush an animal stirs—
a squirrel, perhaps, or a grouse or a house cat lurking

near a mouse nest, instinct taut against the smell
as rich, almost, as the scene's silence, as full, perhaps,

as the artist's palate had been when he'd finally trained
his brush to subdue his blue with the careful strain of red.