

Blaze VOX 2k9

Late Spring 2009

Travis Cebula

Agnostic

Urgently I burrowed in. The city.

Not intending to condemn, I have
demolished the beauty of boulevards—dust
eclipses the gorgeous glimpse:

revolving glass doors
trimmed in brass.
Hot steam rises from quiet streets.

Eventually details overwhelm me.

Sarcasm ensues, goads me,

*knock flat any
yearning for exuberance
that I might have been nurturing.*

λ

Here's something to chew on—

employment breeds contempt as surely as any
yellow impulse in time of war.

Lurching blind and dead every morning.

In a city no longer screened,
tragic overcoats trail attachés.

λ

Can I possibly ignore executives

in favor of
the few poppies

interred in concrete boxes? Periodic

episodes of color dot grey
sidewalks.

In another city flowers flourish in rows, white or even blue.
Nomadic gardeners clad in coveralls plant them.

Three walk by; their clanking
echoes off buildings as they drag hoes and Japanese
reapers in hooked curves behind them. I swear they look
just like men here, fixing potholes in mesh—
even down to the leaning. They
crouch now in the shade of a locust
tree the arborist says
is resistant to pollution and constraint—

or maybe just resistant to
nothing in particular.

λ

*Archangels, despite lofty titles, are actually lowest...
nearest to earth and cities. We know them—
dread trumpets of fire and plague.*

Taxonomy in guise of hallowed choirs.

*How do we defer to a heaven split?
Even angels fall, shunted into categories. They
ripple and yearn strong by stronger for proximity, light.*

*Even on the blackest night of December
wretches stretched for the gaze of a father.*

*Endemic filial jealousy—our common heritage
rends sisters and stars alike into
endless sprawling.*

λ

Steel lines galvanize
to shine earthward in rows, perforating light

round as the wheels that roll under them
every night, they
evolve colors, polychromatic by
turns—sometimes blue, sometimes a shade
less appealing.

Inspid in its growing utility,
gas burns, growing broad—
hair on swayed backs. An aging horse

turns west, away from the gathering
storm.

λ

Over the viaducts I found entry,
forgotten now as the tracks they spanned.
Below them railroads, switchyards were
lost under a crush of lofts and bars.

Utility is temporal in such places,
enduring only so long as
money and industry hold out.

Endings come here not in a whistle,
rather a curtailed bleat
caught in wind and throats of sheep.

unhinged by the steepness of a chute,
redolent of cinders that trains belched before
youth and desire rendered all obsolete.

People had always gathered there,
ordinary,
in their hopes,

so simple—a roof, a meal
or just a boxcar out of the rain—
nowhere better or darker left to go.

λ

Grist is what the city clamors for now.
Everyone wants texture,
original artifacts of a failed industrial past...

like scales and concrete and meat hooks. Look
out through triple-pane UV glass.
Grime out there is dipped in lucite

in a vain attempt at preservation—
canning a city in dread of winter.

λ

Inspirational dioramas and Santa Claus heads
nod in shops at Christmas.
Fa la la la la deck the halls—we went to see them.

In a storm with the avenues silent,
light formed a nimbus around streetlamps,

tickled by snow that sped up down alleys, then
ranged wide in twirls at intersections.

At the corner of 18th and Broadway was a church,
Trinity Methodist lit with tapers.

In the parking lot I remember slush,
on the sidewalk salt,
nativity scene propped in the snow by heavy doors.

λ

Out on the edges the city of memory thins,

frays into purple threads.

λ