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Poems

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Elizabeth Pallitto

Katabasis

Maundy Thursday, the night of Dante's descent
into hell. In the middle of my life. Derailed. Off the track.
Just so this tender anemone blossom that was love,
or might have been, is crushed, bloody petals
along the via dolorosa. *O Adonis!* said the goddess.
That's what you get for loving a mortal, sweetie.
Poetry is no help, Dante. The dark forest. Error.
I wallow in it. A strange man desires me after one drink.
Old love seeks me out. But I will have none of it.
To Carthage I am headed, burning. I see my destiny:
it looks like Dido's falling into a pyre, but wait:
on closer inspection, it is just a bonfire of the vanities.
"Vain silly girl, puella aeterna, what is your problem?"
said my alter ego, this is not a tragic age just a violent one.
Words exploded into piles of paper, and burnt in the sun
as under the magnifying glass of too much analysis;
while in the cool dank cave of the heart you create images,
move closer to truth through shadows on the wall.
Tonight, now showing in Plato's cave, *Shades of Reality*,
the primordial movie.

Repossessing Love's Bolt

(after Lucian, Ovid, Dosso Dossi and the bombing of Yugoslavia)

Quick as a flash

of lightning, your guarded smile dropped its guard
like the March sun winking as it passes through a cloud.

These days the skies promise sweetness in their smell
but deliver tempests from Jove's frowning brow,
and thunderbolts to underscore his rage.

From the Olympian safety of CNN, targeted areas read as red patches,
a Jove's-eye view. From the ground, it is as if Jove's bolt
was unleashed to destroy mankind—even smart bombs can't tell

hospital from weapons factory, school from church, or a medieval
Serbian landmark from the battle of 1389 against the Turks.
Every culture has an epic, a story in which they are the heroes.

Now Jove is occupied with butterflies, with cucumbers,
with creating a less disappointing race in this age of iron,
while we are the ones fashioning bolts of fire hurled from the sky.

Meanwhile the king of gods bides his time in painting, but
he has not forgotten the bolt by his side, in case we piss him off too much.
Lycaeon thought his could outsmart Jupiter, and ended up

with claws, electric bloodshot eyes and a fanged snarl,
howling at the moon.