

I'M ON A GIBBET, FONDLING MY FINE WORKMANSHIP

In the brume
of hangover
I dog-paddle
day. The oasis
of convalescence
appears solely
via nostalgia.
At the node
when I rake
back damp
hair, erosion
ratchets my gut.
Who's tut-tutting?
The bile
rinding my skin's
benign. In
every pang
a bullet of yin –
wine's its own
antidote. Beyond
its obvious notes,
oak, fog, neap
tide, daily bread –
alone at night,
I Sandy the bed.

MOM'S SISTERS' DAUGHTERS

Navy blue in the hall.
Five and five doors
and blue navy rising,
rising under the underslots.
Five and five doors framing ten rooms,
each with a woman in bed,
each with a woman sleeping.
Each with a yawning
window, each with a lamp, doused.
Across from each, a mirror.

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The navy's loud as wheezing. *Ah aha.*
Mountains climb beyond the window.
Ten and ten arms circling pillows,
not other bodies in their beds.
Ten and ten hands frigid with sweat.
Oceans rime beyond the window.
Women solo, tucked into themselves.
Rooms drenched in exhales.
The navy sounds, their breasts.
On thermals, birds beyond windows.

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A pug scrubs himself along carpet.
Room to room he marks
spurts of darkness
under each underslot.
Women's cheeks pillow-creased,
ten women ferning themselves.

Mouths *awe*
to navy tongues.

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Navy blue thick in the hall
as navy grackles, clotting. They hoist
their wings, gaw and fuffle
against each other, thick as piss
flooding under underslots.
The doors are slick with their cud and shit,
their tide under underslots.

»»

We women now bathing.
Off the hall, five and five knobs
to ten rooms, each with a woman in tub.
Ten women nailing mosquito bites,
scrubbing resin under ten and ten feet.
We sink into upside-down longing,
shave navy plumes off mounds.
The baths grow cold. We rise.
Our bodies rise to face mirrors.
Five and five mirrors,
twenty women facing ourselves.
Five and five mirrors now,
twenty women facing ourselves.
And through the walls
we face each other.
And through the walls
our backs to each other.
Aha. And in the mirror
twenty women. *Me?*

¹In rare cases, tightly cemented sandstone constricts a stream, forcing water to carve in the only available direction: straight down. See Devil's Bath tub (post-Christian system of terms), Hocking Hills, Ohio.

²*Times Star*. Upland, CA, Oct. 30, 2007. Officials from the California Department of Food and Agriculture arrested a couple on felony cheese manufacturing charges after they were found with 375 pounds of illegally manufactured soft cheese at an outdoor market in San Bernardino County. They seized a variety of 'bathtub cheese,' as it is known on the street, including *panela*, *queso fresco* and *queso oaxaca*. Such cheese is a known health threat. *Listeria* causes miscarriage and stillbirth, premature delivery or infection of the newborn if ingested by a pregnant woman.

³The Mayans believed a woman's womb was a washtub that must never grow cold. If a chill in the uterus occurs, Mayan medicine advocates a hydrotherapy technique called the vaginal steam bath. Oregano, basil, marigold and rosemary are combined with boiling water and placed under a slotted chair. Naked from the waist down, the woman sits on the chair and covers herself with a blanket.

⁴A man becomes unclean when he discharges semen, whether asleep or awake, in large or small quantities, in lust or disgust. If a man has sexual intercourse with a woman and his penis enters either of her secret conduits up to the point of his circumcision, both people become unclean. If a man has sexual intercourse with an animal and semen comes out of his body, this is sufficient reason for him to take a bath.

⁵250,000 bacteria per square inch: worn-out bathtubs are not only unsightly but also dangerous. Filth, microorganisms and pathogens cache in millions of tiny pores that pock porcelain. No matter how vigorously you scour, it never comes clean.

⁶Bathtub Madonna (also known as Mary on the half shell) is an artificial grotto constructed by upending a clawfoot tub and half-burying it so that the exposed rim frames the virgin idol.

⁷*Time*. Cambridge, MA, Sept. 24, 1965. Prof. Ascher H. Shapiro, head of the Department of Mechanical Engineering at MIT, has finally proven that water drains counter-clockwise in the northern hemisphere. He constructed a perfectly symmetrical tub, filled it to the brim, applied a clockwise swirl, then let it sit for twenty-four hours in a void. Carefully pulling the plug, he filmed the results. Using Shapiro's technique, five persistent investigators at the University of Sydney have now duplicated his experiment,

demonstrating clockwise drainage Down Under. ‘With the proper tub and reasonable patience,’ Shapiro proposes, ‘humans could have proven the rotation of the earth 1,000 years ago.’

⁸Much is made of the rental apartment’s ‘heinous pink bathroom fixtures.’ Unable to extricate the basement suite’s wretchedness from her own grief, Willa writes at length of her muddled creativity: ‘My mind, too, seems submerged in the tub’s brine and I cannot see what lies beyond the confines of its husk. Even monsters are only recombinations of things glimpsed lurking in the drain’s eddies.’ Later that year, after beginning a long-distance affair with Joseph Klein, the German photographer, her emailed letters rediscover the kite-flying tone characteristic of her juvenilia:

I couldn’t wait for you to get the mail! Has Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus finally arrived? It flew across the world to be with you. From its past (unknown), to the UK book dealer, to my desk, to your bedchamber, its journey from copyright 1961 was arduous. You’ll now read it in the bath.

⁹*The New York Times*. Montreal, QC, Jan. 31, 1892. A sensational suicide occurred here to-night. At 8 o'clock a man named Thomas Bell left his family at supper and went up stairs to the bathroom, where, after locking the door, he laid down in the bath-tub and cut his throat from ear to ear, severing the windpipe and the left carotid artery. He was discovered by his ten-year-old daughter, who fainted at the sight, falling on the floor. No reason can be given for the mad act, as the suicide is supposed to have been in good circumstances and was not a drinking man.

¹⁰ 70% of accidents at home occur in the bathroom. Drowning, burning, falling, poisoning, electrocution – the smallest room in the modern home is a veritable asps' nest of peril with its many electrical appliances near water; above-sink stash of prescription and over-the-counter drugs; under-sink horde of chemicals; slippery surfaces; and unforgiving materials such as ceramic, chrome and tile.

¹¹ One does not usually employ the bathroom to illustrate principles of mechanization, yet the exquisite transformation of plumbing facilities into their present proliferate variety aptly demonstrates human obsession with efficiency, aesthetics and automation. We shave over the sink, browse the soggy pages of home-reno magazines in the tub and sometimes have sex in the shower. Skin and hair leach down the drain; urine, vomit and feces flush down; our tears and red edges spiral, clean.