Four Poems · Robin Behn

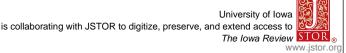
Etiquette

The man and the woman enter the bar in that order: male, fe-male, the root word and its bud. From the way he strains to hold the heavy wood door for her—his chapped, heroic arm jutting out from the impossible fulcrum of his groin where his body will not bend,

(not like the Victorian lady outside who bends forever, always about to enter the man-made harbor and leave her impossible tail still carved into the prow of the boat like a root marooned and drying in the hot salt air that the hero rehydrates with kisses in the novel the Victorian lady would

have written in golds on the water's surface, that would have made the tourists bend over the guardrails to read, our hero among them, would have made the whole shipload finally enter the sea to decode the text—the roots of shifting, womanly surfaces, the possible

layers of meaning in water, and the impossible cold where the lady's words settle on the bottom among wooden relics of this and that—if she only had a pen, if she knew the route to fame—); and from the way the woman, the human woman, bends beneath the man's arm, her spine like green wood as she enters the bar, its black wave of noise, divining what she can't quite hear: oh's



and *ah's* from those of us who glimpse her ohso-recently tossled hair and think of the possible poses in which he tossled it, no doubt entering his name upon the deepest ledger of her body where it would count, or so we think she must have told him as she bent above him saying *now yes now* and he digs like a mole for the root

he thinks he left in her, and makes their small boat rock, nearly uproot

the anchor. On the prow the lady remains a tightlipped hero.

The boat tosses with their motions and the lady bends

like the stirrer in the drink the man just bought the woman. It's possible

they'll go on like this. Probably the wooden

lady will stay mute. Tomorrow they'll sail on, anchor, do what's called *love* and then enter

-enter what?-a harbor bar? the "world"? with the same heroic motions. At each watering-place along their watery route, she'll bend and make her entrance through his proscenium wood arm. See, their bodies say, how love's nightliness is possible?

LETTER VIA STARS

How hard it must have been for you-no roof, no body overheadhow hard to learn to count by counting stars.

And how hard it will be when you outlive them all, since they were born, and so have life-spans, star-

spans. So do the whirls born in different hemispheres one like sand, one like black earth—

who would have been your parents. I am writing for us both, you know that.