
Pro Rege

Volume 38
Number 2 *Fine Arts Issue 2009*

Article 2

December 2009

Paradise in Wal-Mart

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Recommended Citation

Dengler, Mary (2009) "Paradise in Wal-Mart," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 38: No. 2, 4.
Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol38/iss2/2

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Paradise in Wal-Mart

Mary Dengler

Tired as Odysseus after razing Troy,
I steered my basket, big as Noah's ark,
Through waves of Wal-Mart air to isles
Of tiring fruit and gaudy, plundered piles
Of sweatshop-manufactured goods.
Hungry now, I slowed my bark to read
The signs, ingredients, promises of health
And life concealed in every bite. Then like
A shaft of sunlight unexpectedly at dusk
When night is settling in, a gaze from somewhere
Drew my vision through a maze of carts
To rest on two large pairs of eyes, as dark,
Deep, and quiet as the River Lethe in
Virgil's underworld.

Solemn as priest and mourner at death knell
Or daily prayer, they sat, heads bowed,
Eyes raised, hands round the bar of mama's cart,
A tiny girl of maybe four, a tinier boy.
Mirthless, motionless, they stared.
They didn't smile—they simply stared
Into my eyes, not at my clothes
Or shoes, not critically assessing, summing up,
Not to appease, or please, no categories—
gender, race or age—just sage-like interest
So profound, so deep, it pulled my thought
To ancient days in books and dreams, to dew
And hush of giant scented ferns.

Forgetful, in this Yeatsian faeryland,
Of task and time, I turned away. In look,
They hadn't felt the Fall.
Unable to resist a backward glance,
Not unlike Eve when all her way was barred,
I found the eyes, like ancient guardians, attached,
Inured to shoppers, baubles, aids to sin.

One inward look, from months away, restores
The faded features of an aging day or face,
With all it might have been.