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Still Dancing

Mary Dengler

I slowly waking see my plant in static dance.
Its arms reach upward outward toward the sun
or downward in a graceful sweep
of slender pointed leaves
named “mother-in-law tongues” by those
who, having met the sharpened points of wives’ or husbands’ mothers’ wit,
recoil
and think they should reside in hothouse soil
restrained,
since they, with deeply sunken roots,
have gained a foothold and
tenaciously live on
untended and neglected
but a force among the younger shoots.

By roots restrained, atop my desk it bathes
in sunlight, leaning toward the cardinal’s liquid song
and pulls my vision down along and up its strong
and bent or standing leaves
in rapid ride behind my waking eyes.

Imbibing sun and moisture for its food,
it synthesizes these with carbon-dioyed air
to make the carbohydrates of its fair
and lighter-green-framed slender leaves
and fill my room with oxygen it breaths,
its work in silent tandem
with the thoughtless efforts of my blood and lungs,
the two of us in harmony,
with nothing spare.

Its mindless work—
producing leaves and air
that move toward ceiling, window, walls and floor,
although it stays in one small soil-filled pot for years—
upbraids the changing lodgings of my thoughtful
and less graceful
but still rooted toil.

Upon its stage of one large book,
whose print awaits the reader's mind
to dance, though frozen still
on leaves of paper bound
between their hardened sheaths,
the plant awaits the human eye
to dance its rhythmic form.

This static dance evokes aesthetic yearning
for transcendent realms in one
like Keats, who having wandered through an ode
embroidered on a Grecian Urn,
transferred its fleeing maidens, gods, and pining youths
still warm and frozen
to his page.

And as the figures of his ode
remain from age to age
to “tease us out of thought as doth eternity,”
the static dancing
of these pointed green-flamed tongues
remains to chide us into thought
for all eternity.