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The Mantle: A Meditation

Mary Dengler

Just a quick trip, I reasoned, to shop
In a large Midwestern city,
Not far, only one hour's drive away,
One more hurried necessary prairie drive
On roads through seas of ripening corn to shop
One last late August day.
I saw the cows chew lazy in waves of moving summer grass,
The heat move heavy on the browning liquid plain,
My hair, like spirits, rising high, released
With freedom in my hurried flight
Along illusion's road
Of endless summer peace.

 "Just one quick trip to town, not far"
I muttered toward the trinity of thunderheads
Like three amorphous gods,
Their shrouded glory outlined by a dazzling light,
Emerging from Olympus' crown
To look at Iowa's thirsty sod and check
The rites of country swains
Oblivious in air-conditioned tractors,
Rigs of helpless sacred cows
And pigs, their fearful unreflecting eyes appearing from between the metal siding,
Staring at my speeding car.

 Soon leather, lace, and DVD's,
Like hot-house blossoms ripe
For plucking in the mall's eternal summer light,
Benumbed my urgency til, shaken
From my summer dream, my will
Was borne on currents of departing hordes,
From dead light to living dark of rain
The other side of exit doors.

 Awake, I ran a darkened sea of shimmering darting black and silver steel,
Then fumbled at my own red craft and dove inside,
My water curtains flowing toward my bow.
My moorings vanished with my summer play,
I launched into the traffic stream
Mysteriously alone
And headed toward the misted interstate
Of now uncharted seas toward home
Vast distances away.

 Above, the trinity of massive heads
Had melded into one vast-domed pate.
Its billowing locks, like Zeus' angry nod,
Or storm shield wielded by Achilles
To the anguished knights of Troy,
Flowed toward a now awakened passenger,

Her hands trying to guide Toyota's aging toy.
 Immersed in Reformation thought,
 I traveled through the workings of a law-bound world,
 Where storm responds to need and need to storm.
 "The mantel of the Hebrew-Christian God
 Brings life as *well* as death,
 Just not indifferently, like Zeus,"
 I whispered wryly to my doubting heart, my hands more honest
 In their gripping fear.
 As hailstones' living teeth, like unexploded bullets from an airborne gun,
 Bit chunks of glass and metal from my aging bark,
 I blindly steered, too much at sea to move ahead
 Or stop, enchanted by apocalyptic visuals of doom.
 That mantle swept me under folds of black,
 Then covered me with living threads of dancing gold
 Unraveling from a pulsing bolt of light,
 Defining diamond chips and swooning raging trees.
 Evoking all my helplessness and awe,
 It resurrected Noah, that first just man
 Protected by a just avenging God
 Whose bolts and waves and chips,
 Reduced the world to endless churning seas.
 "But I'm no Noah, just an unjust patron of this ghastly show
 Of rage or power or love," I clarified.
 "Is God indeed around, above,
 Or am I driving Iowa storms and planet Earth alone
 Among "indifferent flows of heat and cold"?"
 Like Tennyson, to whom Nature "red in tooth and claw"
 Made sense but who still
 To his God stood childlike "crying in the night,"
 I felt connected to the storm by science, art, and faith,
 My fear and penitence as real as summer hail to steel.
 The Mantle suddenly parting, shrinking on my left and right,
 I drove beneath a stippled ceiling, bright with orange, red, and pink,
 Which cast its glimmer over stylish blue-green prairie shag.
 I laughed, "Oh Lord,"
 Then saw a thousand dents and cracks
 And upturned cars and broken trees and glass.
 My question of God's love or rage
 Surrendered to the dying summer breeze.
 Then Noah spoke:
 "God does his work with Nature
 As he promised in a timeless past;
 We run a risk with Nature's God
 As running prairie roads or city streets,
 We make too great a thing of rage or love,
 Too light a thing of law,
 Or for the mastery of law,
 Discount the rage and love
 In one quick trip of grace."