

Joan Colby

Signature Rerum—Jacob Boehm

*This is the language of nature
Whence everything speaks out of its property.*

The bifurcated manroot prized
As an aphrodisiac. Hunted
In the hills of Appalachia.

Signature stands in the essence

As a rhino's horn restores
Sexual prowess.

*Inward form is noted in outward form
As in a beast, an herb and trees.*

The overwintering liver leaf,
Its dried blood hue signifying
A tea for hepatic ills.

*Everything as it is inwardly
And outwardly signed.*

The rattlesnake master,
Foliage like a diamondback's
Addendum. A snakebite cure...
How many died in that belief.

*Evil to good, good to evil, it has
Its external character.*

Similarities root in the brain's hardpan.

*Nothing that is created or born in nature,
But it also manifests its internal
Form externally.*

Thus: the beautiful woman must be
Pure. The noble profile denotes
Wisdom. The sly eye a thief.
In such lordly pronunciations
Mankind embraced grief.

Nature in its form is a dumb essence.

Small Ironies

So much had been survived, the children drowned
In the Seine, the lovers here and gone,
Those who mocked her routines
Flabbergasted by the legacy
She had begun. How carelessly, she
Flung the hand-painted shawl as the ignition
Caught, the wheels gripped, the spokes spun.

Picture books tossed off casually
For fame and flowers, a courtship
With the Prince of Spain, lesbian tryst
With Michael Strange. Prolific, dauntless, she
Sought to astonish the surgeons
With jauntiness, performing the Can Can,
One ravishing kick that shot a clot
Straight to her heart. Goodnight stars.
Goodnight air. Goodnight noises everywhere.

Diarist of deception, she believed herself the glue
That sealed her lovers. Miller at his desk or fucking
Her, June, anyone. The Peruvian with a sick wife,
Her guileless husband, incestuous sire. Bigamy
A bi-coastal trapeze is what she called it.
Spy in the House of Love composing
Erotica for cash to keep her various men
In whiskey and typewriter ribbon. To end
Like this: cancer of the vagina.
That portal which provided access
To the Book of Love, the Book of Pain.

Coon Hunt

Squatting in a circle swilling
Whiskey while the hounds
Find the scent. Darkness
Full of yarns and choked
Laughter till the chorus uphill
Resounds. *Bright as a deer's eye*
In a midnight coon-lamp beam
That's the redbone music you admire
As we struggle through underbrush. The kid
Shinnies up to shake him down
To the pack's jubilant greed.

Later, getting maudlin, you lament
The loss of that filly,
Broke down, spent, but could've
Made a broodmare if it weren't
For that two-bit horse-trading
Slaughter-wagon Amish.

Finish off that bottle, honey
And help me call them hounds.

Aseel

Clash of brilliant feathers,
Slash of steel gaffs.
Dust praising yells,
Fists full of money.

Not cash but pride.
Fields of agave,
Sleek thoroughbreds,
Hands caressing
Vibrant bodies, the pure
Antagonistic eye.

The last stall of cockerels to teach
How battle is vermillion,
Gold, necessary. Preach
The gospel of tradition.
One amazing bird
Unfettered as the holy spirit.

Joan Colby has published widely in journals such as *Poetry*, *Atlanta Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *the new renaissance*, *Grand Street*, *Epoch*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Awards include two Illinois Arts Council Literary Awards, Rhino Poetry Award, the new renaissance Award for Poetry, and an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship in Literature. She was a finalist in the GSU Poetry Contest (2007), Nimrod International Pablo Neruda Prize (2009, 2012), and received honorable mentions in the North American Review's James Hearst Poetry Contest (2008, 2010). One of her poems is a winner of the 2014 Atlanta Review International Poetry Contest. She is the editor of *Illinois Racing News* and lives on a small horse farm in Northern Illinois. She has published 14 books including *Selected Poems* from FutureCycle Press. *Selected Poems* received the 2013 FutureCycle Prize. *Properties of Matter*, Aldrich Press (Kelsay Books). *Bittersweet* (Main Street Rag Press) and *The Wingback Chair*, FutureCycle Press. She has two new chapbooks *Ah Clio* from Kattycompus Press and *Pro Forma* from Foothills Press as well as a full length collection *Ribcage* from Glass Lyre Press. Colby is also an associate editor of *Kentucky Review* and FutureCycle Press.