

Rack of Want

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sumptuary law

we live above our station as a rule,
the styptic tang of longing on our tongues,
our precious mettle burnished to a brittle film,
our wisdom purled in lazy ruffles
riprapped to restrain our worth
from leeching like diluted wine
unearned, unmerited, uncasked, until
the plainspun fabric of our fine lives frays,
worn shiny from the rub of gorgeous ornament,
until our stores of hoarded spice and silk are sacked,
our gems and jewels, meats and massive headstones sundered
in our rush to draw fresh cards,
the flush of fortune cankering our cheek,
the play of want denied indulged,
like hoarfrost leaving whiskers

child in a shopping cart

bound like Odysseus to the mast,
caressed by soft brand chanting,
wispy filaments of antiphon
responding to her heart song
yaw of yearning,
her ardent earnest
echolalia of longing,
she sways against the buckle
eyes aswivel as she rocks.
resist, her mother whispers,
just sing back,
absorb the stories,
join them to your own,
sing back the lull of buy
each tour of lure,
turn every song
back to its primal hearth
and it is yours.

tantalus

steeped in sweet water rising to his neck,
lush branches brushing softly on his back,
he longs to lap the lake and pluck the fruit,
to feel sweet nectar dribble down his chin.
drooped boughs rock back and dodge his grasp,
the lake recedes each time he stoops to drink,
forever parched and starved he still must strain
to slake and sate, and savor why he can't.
sacrificing sons, devouring daughters
must always end in feasting thus deferred,

with our sad habit halving any hope,
our awful wanting waving in the wind.

In Medias Res

We find ourselves in the middle of things,
Thrust into warm middens or spare lairs,
Left to thumb our way to wisdom
Bearing stuff sacks full of kit.

We blind ourselves in the middle of things,
And cauterize a dream of second sight,
We win no second chance and no sixth sense,
But hooves of clay and cloying fantasy.

We mind ourselves in the middle of things,
Juddering like a cart with one bad wheel,
Condemned to cruise each cramped and crowded aisle
Till we recall what we've left off the list.

We bind ourselves in the middle of things,
Gift circuits breaking only to be tripped by trade,
Sharing what we've stolen, stealing what we shared,
Hoping to be seated when the music stops.

We grind ourselves in the middle of things,
The ache of endless replay in cold eyes,
The rack of want, the cost of keep,
The final futile act of breaking bulk.

We wind ourselves in the middle of things,
Shouldering the shroud like a mantle of rank,
Caressed by silken whispers
Of a hundred hungry ghosts.

Author Biography

John F. Sherry, Jr. is the Raymond W. & Kenneth G. Herrick Professor and Chair of Marketing at the University of Notre Dame. He studies brand strategy, experiential consumption, and retail atmospherics. He is the President of the Consumer Culture Theory Consortium, and past President of the Association for Consumer Research. He is a Fellow of the American Anthropological Association and of the Society for Applied Anthropology. His work appears in numerous journal articles and books.

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