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4 poems

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4 poems

robbing peter

they argue for hours, carping over coupons
and rebates dated just before the mortgage,
dunning letters littering a tabled shimmed
with inserts from *the weekly shopper*,
red ink seeping from each column of the checkbook,
cracked plastic cover scuffed and scored,
hiding scrimp and kiting, debt demanding
more than might be wrung from turnip, spun from flax,
until, imagination lapsed, they withdraw, spent.

holy days

i spent the solstice wintering in the aisles
 of wal-mart,
rounding endcaps spruced with plastic pine and balsam.
 intending just to browse
i stopped to forage,
 dissolving class allegiance
in the crass commercial call of christmas.
 i plucked a random ornament,
orphaned in a ransacked bin,
 a solitary santa,
foot poised on an unhoued chimney
 as if stepping to a bar rail,
about to down another
 sooty shaft.
emblazoned on the bauble's base
 the middle kingdom origin of its making
a fortune cookie oracle:
 all gifts return to china, from whence they mostly come.
ibought the ikon,
 wrapped it as a present
and gave it secretly, and with a guilty thrill,
 to some unknown friend.

retail benediction

it happens to you, i know.
you trade up your truck,
upsized your cell,
amped your flatscreen
and before you've fled the sales floor,
beyond the thousand yard stare,
cool hand clasp,
one-stroke-arm-pump-practiced-smile,
between catch and release,
invoice and invocation,
the merchant coven blessing is conferred:
"CONGRATULATIONS."

do you marvel
at this mercantile hosanna,
feel unworthy pride,
or simply cringe?
"let us give thanks
together to the gods"
the incantatory literal
intent, the prophet motive
of its chanted cant
a tribal affirmation of
our primal tie to goods,
exalted, exchanged, expunged.

your having is affirming,
each buy a milestone,
a millstone,
the tournament of value
your most holy call,
dog's breakfast of champions,
stronger than dirt,
possession, enthusiasm,
one and the same,
a sacrificial goad compels belief:
the owned now owner
and the owner owned.

trickster at howe and helmcken

a palsied puffing on a scavenged butt,
erratic jangling of a few cupped coins,
parked outside starbucks in a battered wheel chair,
cardboard caption like a pillory post
(or signboard from an old morality play,
perseverance perhaps, or faith)
proclaiming diabetes,
nodding to another nomad
wheeling trash-bagged treasure
in a borrowed shopping cart,
observing caffeinated customers
like belugas in a seaworld window,
like ahab sans the spanish ounce,
and all the while two ravens
tap dance on an almost empty avenue,
hopping on and off the curb,
they skip a pas de deux about
a smear of maybe burger maybe fries
pounded to pemmican and pressed
into coldpatched pavement.
the smaller, finally shamed to flight,
the larger with a bolus gleaned from tar
takes up a vigil on the curb