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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 unhoused 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