

## DALÍ IN FLORIDA

(Salvador Dalí Museum, Florida)

I could swim in this light  
forever, the blown-glass sky  
and mother-of-pearl water of  
St. Petersburg harbour. Too little breeze  
for Christopher Columbus to come ashore  
with his shipment of crosses,  
banners and armour for the sprawling  
malls; so his descendants' armada of  
yachts loll and quiver  
in their impressionist moorage.

What in heaven's name are Salvador and I  
doing here? Florida the bad taste  
haven for Canadians whose clocks have  
frozen and need melting. True, roseate  
spoonbills prowl the marsh, a long tail  
of seashore flicks behind the dragon  
fire at Cape Canaveral, an asphalt tongue  
licks the Keys, along which our rental  
car pitches its voice, chord modulations  
so far out on the ocean

I can see the Christ of St. John of  
the Cross towering  
forward from Salvador's old world  
crisis of faith to his well-healed  
Florida patron and museum home. At a loss  
for reasons for being  
here, besides: cheap  
vacation and my wife's yearning  
to blend her childhood and my young stoned  
adult memories of the Magic Kingdom.  
How her father said he wanted to return

as a pelican on a wharf post.  
How I became, behind the wheel  
the inimitable Toad, oblivious to  
commodification: the dominant theme  
parks we've escaped from into this  
motif museum, the glare from Dalí's barren  
landscapes, pinging off a cranial harp,  
an autosodomized virgin,  
clipping his father's Freudian beard,  
disintegrating memory.

I have never been attracted to his carnival  
of atonement before, but now

my wife, seduced, stands behind  
Dalí's wife, who leans out their villa  
window overlooking the water, a sailboat

in the distance, Gala's back to her husband's  
brushes and canvas; the landscape beyond  
could be Florida, but the light  
emanates from Gala's blouse and skirt,  
the ripe aplomb of a woman who knows other women  
will unenviously adore her in the presence of  
their dumbstruck and delirious men.  
This painting is old-fashioned, pastoral,  
tender, serene.

The rest is cannibalism, apotheosis,  
extravagance for posterity, conquistadores  
lunging ashore to convert  
their caravels into carparks  
centuries hence, Christ staring down  
from the cross at golfshirts and Wonder bras.  
Some epiphanies epoxy you  
on the spot, you can't move and  
you know there's another stained  
glass window framed in the walls  
through which you gawk at the world

and which rainbows your room with revelations.  
Not the presence of Dalí in Florida:  
startling, at first, but just another conquest  
of the irrational, no more surreal than  
Pirates of the Caribbean, Gater Bowls,  
and weapon-in-the-glove-compartment paranoia.  
But outside the museum. I know young Salvador  
painted this harbour, in The Tower Mill studio  
Ramón Pitchot provided, before the break  
with his father, the Church, the softer  
impressions of forerunners who saw too much

in pastel waters, hazy bathers, shimmering  
smokey afternoons, commerce distanced and  
stilled. Before all the amputated  
symbols, and before God the prosthetic.  
I am brushstrokes on this canvas,  
my back to my wife. Bemused to be so  
placid in this milky affluent sublime,  
gazing at tax shelters, and photographed  
beside his monied benefactors' monument  
to a fountain of eternal enigmas  
of flamboyant desire.

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