



# Humoresque

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\* a dusi/e-chap  
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“It’s like life, son, that piece. Crying to hide its laughing and laughing to hide its crying.”

– from *Humoresque*, Fannie Hurst

What you see in the rear-vision mirror isn’t normal

– from “Sapphics,” Kate Lilley

Sea to sea remembers succumbing to sea

Light horizon's song unmasked forgotten in

Depths of Lydonia's dark canyon itself

As if there, As if —

I, that wear this skin without within my

Root-like holdfasts finger-long fishlets holding

To the Tigris sorely imagination

Giving Sargasso

Swollen figures bellyful figure bound in

Gloomy, samely forbidden catastrophe

Peopled hawklike failures of fantasy

Ghosts that were never

Like water to the gentle cushions wings droop

To their sides – Only a glass while unemployed

The mirror's a mirror while gazing on it –

Wits gone to wander

Drowned out everywhere watching, drawing blanks for  
nothing left while dying an archaic smile

One loves best a warrior's coma, thronging

Empty, whatever



I mean the fear of death, pain meaning one's own

Fierce little coma, deepest dragon of love

Bull's-eye, some say a fleet gathers stones, dust or

Whatever your aim

Silent in this mantle of ocean, What eyes?

What ears? Cushions become the rocks overhead

I am what is bested, the beast and all to

Foreign lands, no sign

Moreso when they fall silent I no longer

Let my body lie where false-bottom boats go

Follow tankers, nor my carriage go wayward

Nor listen to gulls

Cawing, self-same siren to music, clouded

Overhead the listing embodied, vocal

Touch of a blind one – hurried, thorough, whispered

Whispering, wilder

Hands must search when the eye cannot – reduced to

Confidences while gazed upon, the dark of

Earth offers what? When it grows cold or fearsome

Hawks reminiscent

Betrayed or awash in a mere while tides are  
Slow to tempest, slower unleashing songs of  
Tangled instruments and the faceless cries for  
Precision, collapse

Rain to rain terrain episodic sparring

Acres of sirens confounding the warlords

That succumb to deviants' dreams underway

Night that transfigures

I, my only city erratic violence

I, my only direction is into the

Night-like ocean transfigured, seriously

Operatic *I*



Subject of night proffering ex-piration

Bated birdlike promontory's reflection

Echoed movement soundlessly ebbing into

Tidal deception

Waves seem seamless, water of memory comes

Nearer naught if alliteration serves night

Dead ringers delight in favor of muses

Battling sirens

Counting backwards – legion to none – resolve in

Collage laying prone to the times unlit for

Sight succumbing captive to architecture

Bird beating my brow

In me the sea confided, striking the word

In error reflected in leaves diarists dream

Genuflecting lovers return whomever

Feeds the horizon

Forever in arms in a palindrome's shoe

I think therefore I cannot see undoubtless

False glass false leaps to a false promontory

Forever employed

Crisis lyrics thronging in sleep entirely

Lucid ocean thinking it cannot be done

Marking movements tidally beholden to

Prosopopoeia

*Tonight I think I die* untoward advances

Begin with the crack of a crop, the flocking

Hawks or gulls or doves who knows what it is to

Perish in nonsense

author bio: E. Tracy Grinnell is the author of *Some Clear Souvenir* (O Books, 2006) and *Music or Forgetting* (O Books, 2001), as well as the limited edition chapbooks *Leukadia* (Trafficker Press, forthcoming 2008), *Quadriga*, a collaboration with Paul Foster Johnson (gong chapbooks, 2006), *Of the Frame* (Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, 2004), and *Harmonics* (Melodeon Poetry Systems, 2000). She is the founding editor of Litmus Press and *Aufgabe*, an annual journal of poetry and translation. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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author notes: The humoresque, in musical terms, is characterized not by specific formal constraints but by mood, and I take this as an opportunity to experiment with melodrama—adding melody and persona to the unfolding drama. The voice in "Humoresque" is not my own, and not \*not\* my own as it navigates a fluid poetic architecture. Literal form—the Sapphic—altered in transliteration, and the mood-as-form are the architectural elements of this poem and akin to the tension of molecules that forms the surface of the sea.

A poem in series, "Humoresque" is a meditation on Moreau's rendering of Sappho's death—her body at rest on the rocks and her lyre broken. As in Negulesco's film of the same title with Joan Crawford as Helen Wright, the death is watery, willful and melodramatic—suicide born of refractions, false reflections and failed conjectures: "sea succumbing to sea." The deaths of these women captivate the 'I' of these poems, speaking to the mirror and from beyond it: "who knows what it is to / Perish in nonsense." There is a death here, but not a conclusion.