

Beauty Russe

Mary Di Lucia

Poems, says my handsome friend David, must be about Beauty—
children rosy by a fireside,
cherry orchards asleep under moonlight, Hope
a devout peasant with two thickly pig-tailed sisters
walking down a spun-gold road

whereas my own truck with Dame Beauty
has been more like the short-cut snaking home from the Acme
where I trudge between pigweeds hoping not to drop my sacks
of oats and foil bars of margarine in a bargain between
mature comforts in the light of certain unpleasant realities
related to Beauty and its lack and wishing

for a speck of, a caviar egg of, this same Beauty,
the kind no age could shake from say Natalie Wood in *Splendour in the
Grass*
—its brown-eyed freckled flame shakes through me every time I conjure up
that Wordsworth poem, that movie, where Natalie weeps
young and heartbroken and only partly acting
after reading that bit of Wordsworth
about *splendour in the grass, glory in the flower*
and though I resolve to desire the chastened
strength in what remains behind
and feel the beauty in the ring of those words, too, yet I know
given the choice I would take the splendour in the grass any day
whether that means Warren Beatty, or Natalie Wood's eyes,
or Wordsworth's entire shaking poem,

wishing someone would mystify me
with their sudden apprehension of my beauty because doesn't
everyone have a little, even if not equivalent in the magnitudes of radiance,

wishing David, after arguing about all this, would see my beauty
like a back road he does not see at first either,
a shady lane in a Chekhov play

where David plays a dense rube who should go soak his head in a trough
or round up a scraggly coach and four for m'lady
or thresh some half-stunted cereal crop until the swallows veer up
so a tubercular girl in white could point out how the water
droplets gleam in his beard like diamond
or the chaff gold on his shoulders
or his eyes bright like a seal pelt sometimes, someone cut from a finer stuff

except I would not be cast as the frail sylph in this play,
I would be someone whose name smushes with consonants who has married
drearly
or I would play the seagull itself
shot dead, stuffed, stiff-eyed, shellacked to a piece of rustic birch
stowed just-so in the armoire all these years,

the seagull who had never felt quite at home on the inland lake
smack in the middle of those freshwater steppes
in the least brackish part of Russia, flying around lost
mewing for the sea, the waves, other gulls, salt
and all the beauty promised by this and other like-minded poems
as the characters stand around getting old
bickering and shooting themselves
or dying after morally principled and rational lives
folding up their rusty black umbrellas
never even once wondering how the seagull got there in the first place
in her own dumb way.