

Odalisque

MARK SALERNO is the author of *Hate* (96 Tears Press), *Method* (The Figures) and *So One Could Have* (Red Hen Press). *Method* was a Finalist in the National Poetry Series. From 1993 to 1999, he edited *Arshile: A Magazine of the Arts*. He is the recipient of a Fund for Poetry award. His work has appeared in numerous magazines, including *Chicago Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *First Intensity*, *Jejune* (Czech Republic), *sub-TERRAIN* (Canada), *Talisman*, and *Zyzyyva*.

Also by Mark Salerno

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Odalisque

MARK SALERNO



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*Once Again
For
Erna*

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Odalisque

*It is beautiful at any time but the paradox is leaving it
In order to feel it when you've come back . . .*

— KENNETH KOCH

*Butch: Would you make that jump if you didn't have to?
Sundance: I have to and I'm not gonna.*

— WILLIAM GOLDMAN

Argument

To be without believing or fade to the sidelines
as if stranded between cue lines and ordered fragments
a someone until the sex plot wears itself down
or move through another telltale sign of night
my morality she said or lack thereof has gotten me
this far on a set of mile-high heels tits
out to here and an attitude to match
we call it comedy we call it “trade show chic”
because the yellow doesn’t begin to describe
the plunge of white or the light conflict when
his moral is easily defeated by his desire
a scrivener within earshot and an odalisque
they came for the show for the little
gasp of red before it all disappears.

Sense

A summed up light certain inches below the fold
and a despised scrivener washed out of the program
I got lost in my address to persons within earshot
as just about everyone on the squad always knew
so you fall back on your training and work the system
the summer after Biggie got shot I gave up my process
because it faded me a little toward the sidelines
along with countless other beauty school graduates
strolling aimlessly past Frederick's of Hollywood
all because a completely new set of logics was lacking
or a small plastic part that is essentially made of green
like the number thirty only when Rick says Paul table thirty
because the geography may be a little difficult to arrange
scattered as we are across a field of green and daylight.

Summertime

In the next decade of his life he becomes as a lost man
on the six feet of concrete outside of Max Factor
a blue of his own devising a static history
paced for a few blocks by the P.D. in a Crown Vic
out here we're paying mostly for the sunlight
just to be driven mad by the sheer joy of it
while she went on being a suntanned odalisque
of a more suntanned and variegated value system
where repeated words became a kind of gaudy patter
to pull against her tether for reassurance or clock out
granted headlong and farfetched granted betrayal
just to make it through the u-shape of life in time
it's how we came to be portioned out in tv light and shtick
a coin toss of the personal faded toward the sidelines.

Vernacular

She repeated the word free and to leave her alone
because they arrived without the alphabet like poor immigrants
to prove a lead pipe logic among shored up fragments
or buy pieces of afternoon light and flunk out
insofar as feeling and being were everywhere apparent
due in part to muffled threnody beyond the primary system
a strange attractor and a backdoor spruce finality
leaning against the stucco at Mayfair Market or
sitting on the backseat with a cold Orange Crush
and *Tiger Beat* because her mind thinks she exists
in tv light to learn simple vocabulary and speaking slowly
notwithstanding h.p. demands d-cup solutions and shtick
like in a road picture a pile-on of widely held beliefs
that fell prey over and over to the double cross of seduction.

At Large

In the rundown big town for who got where
a pile-on of wan beings and summed up light
or pieces of paper with As and Xs and blanks
all are modes of address deep within the eye
I was M. late of the bomb squad and without papers
cut loose among the boots beside The Wiltern LG
for disobeying orders bra logic and dilatory wanderings
as noted in a few good lines below the fold
while she retained the authority of an out of work odalisque
behind a wizardy curtain of seeming and being
what's left is shored fragments and disparate junctures
or thinking seeing and feeling all at the same time
like two-drink minimum poor immigrants under the quota system
of gaudy patter and shtick of betrayal and the regime.

Orange Crush

In simple vocabulary to understand the sex plot dilemma
because they washed up like two-drink minimum poor immigrants
without the alphabet and within earshot of the gold rush
she repeated the word free in the ruse of bra logic
amid gaudy patter farfetched ambition and the transformative other
as if someone just wrote the word odalisque on her ass
despite being wrong and stalling for time backstage at the Pantages
whore talk and beauty school ethics to castigate the real
as summed up in banner headlines from *The Hollywood Reporter*
she got burned in the afterglow the double cross of tv light
notwithstanding a shrewd handling of seeming and being
when the wildcard of analysis meets the regime of biology
speaking slowly or mouthing off a.k.a. reason and desire
or drown in this lagoon of flop sweat and untested abstractions.

Now This

The shorter second half and too much articulation
certain amounts of daylight in colored Dixie cups
you and your bomb squad ethics she said I'm tired of
interrogatives tunnel vision cooped up or simply waiting
for a God damned Orange Crush and to be near her
couple-y she said another burning coal down all my life
never heard of Buck-Buck never heard of Acey-Five
because of all the parts left out overnight in TJ
only mention the word moon and you're finished
dream time and clinic noise where M. equals the hero
in fact he is a dream man a blind preoccupation
to enjoy movie star prerogatives from the waist up
or be seen pointing his finger like a teacher
up and down the Strip between Gazzarri's and the Whisky.

Iota

Like muffled foil in a kind of spruce finality
or the logical resting place of hedged bets
I make you no I mar you in the strange attraction
she repeated the word free because she told
her soul to leave her alone like on KTLA
take a minute to memorize some Shakespeare
to distract the mind from its catastrophes
in the next decade of his life he becomes
as a lost man isn't that sticking my neck out
to where all the note said was Ingres was here
an apology not an apostrophe where M. is the
hero who dies over and over again in B movie
oblivion it's a job to stay the heavy train
profligate light green over the hills happy or not.

The Orange Dress

Choosing sides or the bank shot and shtick
accord she said and these are my feelings
air beauty breaklight gesturing at the lunch
he was pompously and so humiliated in fact
he was a dream man and used it like a Polish
blueprint to learn how to do the math
listen to me looking listen to me
racing his baggy ass up the stairs
she was practically naked they fucked she was
burnt umber to pedants and lettered fools
just to make it through the u-shape of life
a no-talent peroxide blonde in go-go boots
which she always regarded as minor adjustments
provisional camping out until finally the money
I am telling you this she said and look up.

Skirt Consideration

Integers of breaklight to check the moon
a complicated remapping that spreads over everything
the keep of you she said and are my things
muffled under the money like Shakespeare
first B. shot dead in L.A. and now my process
in the next decade he becomes as a repeated word
to go headlong into that transit to lose your head
for pictures of people for ways to remember
the lost flint in her which meant deeper trouble
choosing sides in the dust up and staying alive
a slash-and-burn Platonism except the sound
just to make it through the u-shape of life
where nothing is less important than words or
a midnight train to palookaville but not yet.

To My Far

To be sure of my tether that I am not alone
the one who knows versus the one who learns
I won't play the patsy for you or anyone
yellow that lights out the green faked light
the failure of talk the talking cure wan beings
"from rag to rich" the same one-stop dream
immigrants in love my new watch my new vest
and a hell of a good country for a backdoor man
until the odalisque and the threnody and the flop sweat
or one day a blonde in a little red ragtop
his diffident salvage job to gather the wind
schmaltzy and foreign sounding and the timing off
like working for the bomb squad over and over
to play the patsy for the odalisque to be sure.