

# New Poetry By Abby Murray



Hercules and Cerberus, 1608. Nicolo Van Aelst, Antonio Tempesta. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

## 13 WAYS TO APPROACH A THREE-HEADED DOG

I.

Those who tell you

to carry raw meat

have never met me.

Bones are better,

they last longer,

but if there's

no bones to be had  
bring peanut butter.

II.

In this analogy  
I am always Cerberus.  
My beloved is inside,  
changing.

When he wants me  
to sleep in his bed  
he comes to me  
shaped as a body  
like yours.

III.

I grew old here.  
Compliment the quartz  
mouth of my cave,  
my heavy collars,  
the bronze of my bark.  
Tell me I sound  
familiar.

IIIa.

I live to be recognized.

IIIb.

My hearing is spent.

Your language  
is a red fruit  
everyone loves  
to chew.

If we lock eyes

I'll stand.

V.

I wouldn't call  
human souls  
delicious  
or even tempting.  
I swallow  
what I must.

Dogs escape

all the time,

cats too, crows

and wolves.

I let wolves pass

because they sit

a while before

they go,

they don't trust

this river any more

than I do.

We watch it twist

around itself together.

VII.

What would I buy

with your money?

Lie down. Stay.

VIIa.

I do not know what a changed mind

feels like. Grass? Maybe sun?

VIII.

In this analogy  
you are convinced  
you are *sui generis*.

You will be the one  
with quick feet.

In this analogy  
the ferryman drops  
your fare into a sack  
with everyone else's.

Bring water.

I'm not saying  
it will buy you  
time  
but I am thirsty.

In this analogy  
you are the one  
who thinks you saw  
the city shimmer

before it split.

You're not wrong.

XI.

My beloved

has built a city

where all the bread

is free.

XIa.

His garden

is free of spiders,

nothing

that can be crushed

is sent there.

XII.

Show me what

a sleeping dog

looks like.

XIII.

Are you the moon?

If you are,

make me know it.

I keep a song

in my throat

for you.



Johann David Wyss, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, George Routledge and Sons.

**HOW TO DIE IN PEACETIME**

Welcome the cancer cell,  
its sense of justice  
more twisted than the DNA  
inside its rebel membrane.  
Welcome its obsession  
with reproduction and division,  
the way it makes a home  
in the left breast and waits  
so patiently, still a pearl  
within a pearl within a pearl.  
Welcome its false history  
and family-friendly values,  
its desire for more and more  
children, the way it butchers  
its own meat forgiven  
by the prayers it sends abroad,  
the way it campaigns for leader  
of the immune system  
and loses gracefully each time  
until it doesn't, until the first  
letter is tied to the first  
brick and flies through the first



window of a neighbor's house.  
Welcome its lavish parties,  
electrons everywhere,  
flags that flicker like emblems  
of peace in the bloodstream,  
welcome its marksmanship  
when it shoots down the doves  
who wake it each morning.  
Your body is a sovereign  
unable to wage war on itself,  
your body is a black night  
rippling with radiation.  
This is peacetime, this is grace,  
this is our merciful killer  
rising like a star in our bones.  
Let us raise our telescopes  
and toast to its brilliance,  
its speed, its true aim.

**ARMY BALL**

You've outgrown the army ball,  
the men I mean, not us, the wives,  
who spend hours buffing time  
from our necks and faces.

We dazzle in our pearls  
and tennis bracelets clipped like medals  
to our limbs: my OIF amethyst,  
OEF diamond studs, SFAT cashmere.

Some new wives miss the mark,  
overshoot the dress code  
and show up in wedding gowns.

They pick and pick at the tulle,  
the crystals, the ruching.

At our table, your jaw is softened  
by gin and a single year,  
the one before Iraq  
when Blackhawks dropped you  
into the unarmed mountains of Alaska  
and you floated down like bread.

We toast the dead and drink.

We howl like dogs for the grog.

Men come forward with liquor bottles

so large they contain entire wars,  
dark rum for the jungles of Vietnam,  
canned beer for Afghanistan.

A bowl the size of a bus tire  
is filled with two hundred years  
of booze and we serve ourselves  
with a silver ladle made in America  
but polished last night, too early,  
its grooves blushing with tarnish.

## **RANGER SCHOOL GRADUATION**

A cadence is written like so:  
wives show up for the mock battle  
at Ranger School graduation  
in heels and spandex skirts,  
some of us threaded into silk thongs  
and some bare-assed,  
some in black and gold  
*I heart my Ranger* panties,  
all of us too late

to hear this morning's march:

*You can tell an army Ranger by his wife!*

*You can tell an army Ranger by his wife!*

*Because she works at Applebee's*

*and she's always on her knees,*

*you can tell an army Ranger by his wife!*

This is how we sway like choirgirls:

America oils our hips.

Rope off the wood chips

and call it a combat zone.

When you're paraded into the lot

beside Victory Pond I pretend to know

which smudge of red is you.

Already I am washing your uniform, your back.

Your mother says *oh, oh!*

and claps: the sound of deer ticks

kissing your blistered necks

before we can.