

If a Lion Could Talk

It was only the dawn
of the Christian
movement, but Jerome
was already wise
to it—he knew
that but for a man
who is not a man
trapped inside books
would latter-day painters
lose their perspective
somewhere along
the vanishing point.

So he tied his body to a
great denial and scolded
his widow patron's daughter
for the crampy hungers
gathering in hers.

Leaving behind his
ascetic theater he let
his rags polish the floors
as he delighted in the
intercourse of a
little night reading.

The dog-faced lion
played along, shedding
the sweaty mane-cape,
rewarded each night
for his loyalty
with a bowl of kibble.

Jerome gazed out
of the casement
at a beautiful scene,
stars fanning the cool
expanse of lapis
desert dome,
and chuckled
to himself, "No one
paints a saint

in a great library
built through the pilfer
of a pious widow's gold.”
A scholar, he knew
that sainthood, just like
good translation,
requires a bit of
finger pointing,
and some ethically
questionable
sleight of hand.

Druthers

I would rather run a butter knife
Through Ruskin's uncut pages
Than under the lip of a stuck tack.

I would rather come under a hand
That's apt to undo me than be
Buttonholed by a walking dictionary.

And the Angels Sing

The burden of heaven
grips me in your bite—
 it's not right
but what can I do? Your
grin plucks such unthink-
able melodies into being
my eardrum can hardly
take it. Tunes that build
sandcastle beauties in
my conch, straight out
of *Architectural Digest*.
I can't afford it, the angelic
judgment of your
distracting smile, without
being thrown out on
my heel, dazed by
trumpet-playing ninnies
in unisex robes who blow

on cue like Xavier Cugat
in *You Were Never Lovelier*.
I'm lost. One glint off
the white of your incisors
and I'm whisked inside
the celestial philharmonic,
deaf to all necessities
of this mortal slip.