

Claire Cowan-Barbetti

*ABEDNEGGO*

Imagine the presence, the dark shape  
Striding the length of the furnace,  
Stark against the white wall of fire;  
The proof, or perhaps messenger of miracle,  
Nameless, unexpected, making three become  
Four to the astonished vision of thousands.

Three men given names twice over,  
The second binding to breaking  
In a dry time courting a king' s dreams.  
In secret, speaking your first names  
That in nascence grew with you, and swelling so,  
Dropped from your mother' s tongue to grace

Your new-born brow until such a heated time  
-- the death decree of the livid king--  
Should shine forth in hot flame once again  
The name given you in the land of your god.  
Proper judgment in the world sets names over  
Naming; the scale weighted to one side,

A necessary path marked clearly. Fire will burn the  
Insolvent, water will drown. Sums have their  
Final answers: something does not come forth  
From nothing, from nowhere. Nebudchadnezzar  
Thought his echoing rule knew finality, but he could  
Not of himself generate green from the axed tree.

And now the dark mute man walks  
With you in diaphanous curtains of heat  
While you, shimmering, sing Covenant and Mercy,  
Each moment becoming more potent and shocking  
Like yellow apples taken out of black coat pockets  
When one would have expected nothing;

But what of that dark figure? It seems  
That it has appeared before: indomitable column,  
In entrances, galley-ways, bedrooms, and

*Gazing silently in the night outside through the window;*  
A presence that never uttered words, alien, not of language,  
Terrifying in an unfathomable colorless cloak--

Not the vivid cloak of a dream-interpreter,  
But one that must ripple and sweep against the ankles  
Of inflamed men who strangely sing to stars and rain,  
Frost, fish, grasses, thunder, springs and soil, outpouring,  
All blessing, names naming. Beauty saves no one unless  
It is sung. Azariah, amidst the darkness and light,

Your mouth is holy! As such appellation issues forth  
The life of the world and finds that all things have  
Voices in this fire, at the inner core of a whole  
People. s sentence and lot lies mercy, a covenant,  
Borne by sound alight with wisdom of words, seraphim sentinel,  
Proffering the burnished apple at the center of the garden.