



REBIRTH OF VENUS + 1

By

Michael Waterson

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...*

Michael Waterson has such a refined sense of the ironic. In 'Big Game' he suggests that Ernest Hemingway, the great outdoors-man-of-letters, was his own last trophy. If it is in dubious taste, it is unfortunately an irresistible observation: "apex predator papa forever...a heady mix / of existential dread and godlike power." Similarly, in 'Rebirth of Venus,' we find Waterson decrying the mythological creature's commercialization: "the goddess has come / out of her shell as viral influencer;" It's uproarious. "Botticelli spinning in his grave / as one more merchandising dynamo"... "overrun by acronyms lol" "lines denuded of punctuation" "an elephant sketched by a blind committee / galloping for an unmarked finish line" I'm sufficiently charmed. (Spacing is poet's own.)

Big Game

You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother."

— The Old Man and the Sea

Up with the sun, grisly-hearted deadeye,
apex predator papa forever
thirsting for the rush of naked kinship
with a beast in your sights, a heady mix
of existential dread and godlike power,
the same cocktail served up by a blank page.
Those moments, stuffed and mounted up on walls
and between covers, whispered to your blood
that every day bestows an empty cup
engraved with the same passage of survival.
While fishing the abyss, angling for time,
you tracked your soul down to the lair of terror,
and, stepping into your own crosshairs, bagged
yourself, one at last with all your trophies.

Rebirth of Venus

Art Critics and Government Officials Slam Italy's 'Humiliating' Tourism Campaign Turning Botticelli's Venus Into an Influence— *Headline in Artnet News, April 30, 2023*

No longer classical nude, but classy,
clad in Gucci, she poses now, renewed
by artificial intelligence,
in Piazza San Marco for a selfie.
Still flaunting those iconic, impossibly
undulate tresses, the goddess has come
out of her shell as viral influencer,
the virtual face of Italian tourism,
Guardians of culture brand her vulgar,
heritage debased for the bottom line.
From their perspective, commodifiers
view Botticelli spinning in his grave
as one more merchandising dynamo
powering our globetrotting postmodern world.

THE POET SPEAKS: *The poem “Big Game” grew out of a writing prompt. I’m in a group that writes poems based on a different (often literary) personage with everyone sharing their results each month. Earlier this year the prompt was Ernest Hemmingway. I didn’t think I had much to say about him, but I had always brooded on the notion that his suicide and his passion for hunting were two sides of the same coin, that with the power of life and death, a hunter confronts his own mortality. That blend of power and terror creates a visceral response, a death wish that Hemmingway often expressed in his writing. The epigraph quotation from “The Old Man and the Seas” is but one example.*

As the epigraph explains, “Rebirth of Venus” comes from the turmoil created in the art world by the global juggernaut of techno-commercialism.

My earliest influences were Shakespeare and the usual suspects in the Norton Anthology: Frost, Yeats, Eliot, with a special place for Dylan Thomas, who was the poetry equivalent of a rock star in my youth. As Emily says, good poetry is a rush to read and— when things are clicking— to write, a way to see the world through new eyes. Like any rush it’s addictive.

AUTHOR BIO: Michael Waterson retired as a journalist after a varied career that included stints as a seasonal firefighter, San Francisco taxi driver and wine educator. He earned an MFA from Mills College. His work has appeared in numerous online and print journals, including California Quarterly, Cathexis Northwest and The Bookends Review. His information may be found at: michaelwatersonpoetry.com.