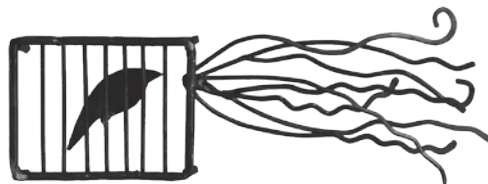


Yes I know, everything turns on Rome.
I lived penniless above a warehouse
an actual garret
and crossed the river on that unsteady bridge
to archive duties in the Forum



'as a girl takes a song-sparrow
and cages it for its voice'

My tavern buddies were abrupt and foul-mouthed
like my first poems. I tangled
with wanton Cinara and vain Lyce
the loves of my life

And one day you reached a hand, as a girl
takes a song-sparrow, and cages it for its voice

*I heard a fable recently, the tale of the starved fox
and the corn-bin's ill-fitting lid. Creeps in the fox,
gorges himself. Too large to leave, he howls for help.
Comes a weasel, who pauses to say, 'You fool,
after this indulgence you must starve to escape.'
Although I fear to become the unwise sybaritic
fox, I confess a greater secret fear: of standing
off to one side, a cool sententious weasel.*

Forgive me. I have grown too fond of histories,
those windows into vanished worlds. It is too
comfortable under the vine-trellis in spring sun,
talking. We fill every least fissure with words.



'we fill every least fissure with words'

*When Telemachus came to Sparta for news of his lost father,
it was all stories: myths freighted with promise, histories and
half-truths, evasions, theatre, the self-absorbed garrulous king,
a boy brought to tears by nostalgia and lost hopes, and ageless
Helen, wise with experience, dropping a narcotic in his wine.*

*The king's proffered gift
the boy's polite refusal*

The great editor Richard Bentley, Master of Trinity, suggested emending 'volpecula' (little fox) to 'nitedula' (little shrew), on the grounds that foxes are carnivorous. We can suppose Horace on his Sabine farm to have discovered that hungry foxes are omnivorous. Bentley would have encountered few foxes at Cambridge, but he certainly knew some weasels.