

A Brief History of Rome

Chad Davidson

October is crueler. This Acestes knew,
leaning from the height of his importance
to shake Aeneas's hand after the funeral
games. An egret alighted on a finger
of shoreline. A palm, inconsolable, rustled.

Aeneas swam a little in the king's eyes,
awkward and glossy. But for Acestes,
Rome was a word crosshatched and dyed
in a blue no Carthaginian could write in,
a hue of later scholars and inkhorns,

and the inevitable ivories of the classical age.
Already, Aeneas marshaled his gore torn
from its roots there across the Hellespont,
lodged in the guts of a fallen city, proffered
in his hand. *Look closely here*, he said, fondling

contours of what appeared to Acestes a glass ball,
only soft and fleshy like a tumor. It colored his hands
even as it made them larger. Acestes,
like the egret's fingerlike rise, stood erect
as he forced himself to say, *Love her*.

Palm Pilot

Chad Davidson

It is the horsehair and the chicken
headless and wormy, the bad cartographer
myopic, holding his stick in the once-mud
of an arid world. It is the thwarted
veery in the thicket, the wart, the air-raid
siren you writhe so from, exiled prince
of nostalgia. Far from the mission,
church bells fester in concentric pools,
cruel reminder of the pew-heavy days
when everyone clutched their mirrors,
walked too quickly for the clothes they wore
draped over themselves, disfiguring
especially young women, a pot of basil
above each open door. An open palm

consenting was the plague. Now it is
the good-hands people, an empty bowl
awaiting cargo. Who pilots the scored
landscape of the hand, bullet trains
those tiny Chinese-water-tortured furrows?
There in the finger's fuselage, your studied face
in the swirl womb-water makes, what Chicago
mobsters tried to remove surgically. Printless,
what are you but a fallow table stripped
of the news, the blank slate of mornings
without coffee or the necessity
of knowing someone else is doing worse?
You know this as your hell, as you know birds,
integral in the same way ignorance is.
Say it to yourself: *I am simple. My palm
has a pilot. There are many like it
but this one—swear it now—this one is mine.*