

We are currently presenting a series of poems by Xi Penn, from a manuscript called, *Poems of the Late Tang (a book of magazine verse)*. This is the fourth. You can view the first three here at the site.

--Dispatches

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Lost Amidst the Cliffs, I Finally Arrive, and Am Startled by Mei in an Ancient Room

--for *The Kenyon Review* and *LARB*

The path up the mountain keeps fizzling out, in the jumbled rocks and scree. When I see the monastery, huge bats are already feeding in frenzy. I go to the guest room and sit on its gilded veranda. The rain has stopped. The clouds are torn and red. The gardenias are aflame. Helen Adam comes up and says there are ancient paintings on the walls. She goes and gets a Coleman flashlight. I see they are incomparably beautiful, especially the ones of Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser, as painted by Jess. Then Mei, whom I'd lost in the mists, begins to speak, like a ghost, behind me. It used to be that heterodox poetry, at least in the U.S., had some serious interface with the quotidian, and was more all-embracing for it. Think of Whitman and Dickinson and Williams and the Objectivists, for instance. Or of the NAP era, not so long at all ago-- so informed, across its groups and strains, by everyday life, demotic language, and a decidedly non-professionalized sociality. But that down-to-earth ambience of the field more or less went poof with the ascent

of Language poetry and its obsessive conflation of poetic vocation with theory à la mode, much of the latter of pseudo sort, we now know. The figures glow from within. Helen Adam spreads our bed and sweeps the mat. She serves us kidney pie and 粥. It is simple Scottish fare but fair and fine. The night goes on as we lie with our hands clasped behind our heads, loafing at our ease, listening to the great peace. Crickets chirp and click in the night. The pure moon rises over the ridge and shines on the fresco of Kenneth Rexroth on the wall. He looks mad, now sad, depending on the fickle shadows of the trees, swaying in the wind. At daybreak I get up alone. I saddle my mule and go my way, down the face, letting Mei sleep and snore like a hibernating 熊. The trails are fucked, all washed out. I go up and down, the hail clanking on the mess kit at the saddle. I pass pines and oaks ten men could not reach around. Where have the anti-careerist poets gone? What has happened to their dreams? Will anything like the 50s and 60s come again? Golden snub-nosed monkeys snicker from the trees. If I only had a few friends who agreed with me, we'd retire to these mountains and vanish, like Lew Welch, for always, without reason or trace.

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