



Gregory Woods

Jean Genet in Norwich and Other Poems

↳ Jean Genet In Norwich ↵

Adrift, becalmed but—knowing life—expectant,
directed by the smell of disinfectant
alone, he finds his way to Bishopgate,
where the cathedral dwarfs a brick and slate

ciborium. In darkness devotees
of a consuming faith sink to their knees
to celebrate with seasoned gravity
the rites of their refined depravity.

Asperged by sperm and leaky cisterns,
confessional, they minimise their distance,
each *mea culpa* a bouquet of faults.

He'll find the space beneath these mossy vaults
more homely than the home he never had—
as good a place as any. Or as bad.

↪Wing Three-Quarter ↪

Transformed into a god whose body could redeem
the very sins it succoured, mortal and extreme,
he was enough to make a Carmelite blaspheme.

When he appeared, first drawing human shape from steam
among the lesser members of the rugby team,
we had to hide the evidence of our esteem.

Although of boys the manliest, and of the cream
the very cream, his modesty could make him seem
provisional, the barest notes towards a theme.

Determined not to leave the groves of academe
(as our headmaster called his punishing regime),
without a solid grasp of how he reigned supreme,

we each put into practice plots to mine his seam
and plumb his arse, a speleologist's wet dream.

↪ Last Resorts ↪

He spurns Apollos you'd have thought were certs:

this Jason to unworthy Argonauts

attracts a retinue of introverts

whose slightest willingness to please he thwarts

with condescension so severe it hurts—

as if a smirk could melt a lump of quartz—

and anything a nervous suitor blurts

he answers with uncompromising snorts.

The foolish supplicant forlornly flirts,

a speculator reconciled to noughts;

the wise (if such a man exists) averts

his eyes, preferring indirect reports.

Those sturdy nipples, like a pair of yurts

on barren steppes, or sullen bronze-age forts!

We seek a weakness—though the thought subverts

our sense of him—the merest spots or warts

to reassure us human life reverts

to the reality a dream distorts.

His mere existence, in the flesh, perverts

the most reserved, conventional of sorts:

to breathe the sweat his energy exerts

in strenuous routines of manly sports,

we rummage in the laundry for his shirts.

The despotism of his feet extorts

our kisses, less deserving than the dirt's.

The sheer abundance of his lycra shorts

exacts the tribute of our petty spurts,

and we are left with little but our thoughts,

those sorry spectres of our just deserts.

We make do with each other. Last resorts.

Author Bio

Gregory Woods is Professor of Gay and Lesbian Studies at Nottingham Trent University. His was the first such appointment in the UK. His poetry collections are *We Have the Melon* (1992), *May I Say Nothing* (1998), *The District Commissioner's Dreams* (2002) and *Quidnunc* (2007), all from Carcanet Press. His critical books include *Articulate Flesh: Male Homo-eroticism and Modern Poetry* (1987) and *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (1998), both from Yale University Press. His website is www.gregorywoods.co.uk

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