

and the sheer pleasure of hearing their own voices,  
"I like a woman wif a big ol' butt!" though it's not the same  
as wishing women to have penises so that one may look  
for it affords not the same opportunity to speculate  
on the psychosexuality of children actual and otherwise,  
that is, resident in our biologically mature selves,  
and therefore I find myself grateful for both status quos,  
the vanilla status quo of the present moment  
and the more venerable status quo ante,  
represented in this particular  
by the exquisitely-sculpted genitals of women,  
contemporary as well as historical,  
and also for the silliness of the four-year-old;  
by any account an oracle yet also a fool and unaware,  
though no one else is, of both his oracular and foolish  
natures  
and therefore doubtless the better for it.

#### THE POTATO MASH (MORE INDEFINITE AND MORE SOLUBLE)

If Debussy had written the score to the story of my  
adolescence,  
he would have called it, after the name of the poem  
by his good friend Mallarmé, L'Apres-Midi d'un Dope.  
So many adventures! All of them stupid.  
For a while I worked for a rock band:  
I handled the bookings, the equipment, and the snacks.  
The band leader played the French horn,  
which is all he knew how to play;  
it was the only rock and roll French horn in the business.

And the bassist, who had never played at all,  
just hit whatever notes he felt like hitting,  
saying it didn't make any difference  
because nobody ever paid any attention to the bass line  
anyway.

Then there were the two blind brothers,  
a drummer and a guitarist,  
good musicians who drank bourbon and ate doughnuts  
during the shows, always with disasterous results,  
though the band was horrible to begin with.

We never accomplished our goal of meeting pliant women,  
and everywhere we went,  
the drunken fishermen we played for were mad at us  
because our music had not brought out any women for them.  
Instead we played songs like "The Mashed Potatoes,"

each time to a smaller and surlier crowd.  
We "loosened classical tonality" the way Debussy did,  
and at times we destroyed it, like Schoenberg,  
when the blind boys were too far gone.

Our last night, I knew it was going to be bad;  
one of the customers had stopped me coming back  
from the men's room to ask why I didn't use hair tonic.  
Then a big guy in suspenders and a plaid shirt  
and a cap that said "Sex is like snow,  
you never know how many inches you're going to get"  
came up to the bandstand and asked,  
"Y'all can play dat Potato Mash?"

We knew our career was over anyway,  
so we began to laugh and make fun of him,  
and he and his friends jumped up on stage  
to throw beer at us and turn over the drum kit.  
The three of us who could see were frightened  
by these hairy bayou men with their great hard bellies  
and their forearms big as Popeye's,  
but the blind boys didn't give a shit  
and were ripped on bourbon and doughnuts anyway:  
howling, their fish-belly eyes red in the light

from the beer signs, the blind boys lashed out  
and began to hit the men and us and each other  
with the neck of the guitar and the drum sticks.  
It was a fight in hell: "The Musicians versus the  
Fishermen,"  
like a myth from some country that had never developed  
much of a culture. I got a cut lip and my first real  
hangover,  
and for days my parents heaped shame on my silent head.  
But it was worth it to have seen the blind boys  
whip the ass of those tough fishermen;

for sure, they did the Potato Mash. Later we got more  
bourbon  
and more doughnuts and had a real party. We sang and  
threw up,  
and one of the blind boys cried for his mother.  
That was our only good moment — our last. On the  
ride home,  
we were a lyrical and pantheistic group of fellows,  
and our music was plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,  
according to the formula of the poet Verlaine,  
son-in-law of Madame Mauté de Fleurville,  
Debussy's first teacher and herself a student of Chopin.

— David Kirby

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