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Robert Daseler

Three Poems

Barefoot Girl on Rocks

The beaches of the world, their prowling sands,
So recently debauched by running feet,
Conceal the clutch and grab of human hands,
But one day in the stillness and the heat,

A summer afternoon, gratuitous
And cruel, allowed a barefoot girl to mince
Along a rocky quay, insidious
As anything I'd seen before or since.
So far from kind, so random, and so glib,
Encounters of a summer afternoon
Recall me to myself and pink the nib
That touches not the page, therefore I turn
My eyes away from such inopportune
And baleful sights as still within me burn.

Germany, 1922

Behold the dawn that brought defeat and hope,
The streets of broken glass and freshened life.
Impeccably attired we stroll along
Imperial Charlottenburger Chausee,
Expression of Wilhelminian taste.
The death of Rosa Luxemburg disproves
Some theory or another, for she died
Perhaps before a full account of things
Could be disseminated far and wide.
The Rilke fever blossoms on the world
And Walther Rathenau's assassination
Unfurls like flags along the Siegesallee.
In flagrant cabarets, androgynous
Performers prance beneath the lights and smoke,
The dust and grime adhering to their clothes.
The socialists rely on history;
It lets them down, *Dolchstosslegende's* curse.
The rational republicans' retreat
Becomes a rout, our scholars gone to drink,
Unhappy children rolling on the grass.
Unwritten elegies, approaching fog,
The *Wandervogelmystik* of our youth,
And now behold the rising noxious dream.
The warm surroundings of our lives dissolve.
Kapellmeisters are all the rage this season
And override the harmony we held
Distantly in mind when lost in thought.
Some shapes arise, perhaps from sleep, to shift

The horde of memory from night to day,
And who neglects the ailing painted bird
Will rouse the youth who'll wring its feathered neck.

The Blind Belisarius

One of his soldiers recognized him there,
A blind man on the street led by a child,
Receiving alms from strangers with a hand
That once had silenced armies when held high.
Myself, I never knew his mighty stare
Or followed him onto a battlefield
Or trembled at the sound of his command,
For I was never warrior, not I!
I stayed at home, contending with the wind
And snow of winters in Connecticut,
Editing the weekly lively arts.
Rarely did the war enter my mind
Until it ended in desperate rout
And we received defeat into our hearts.

Robert Daseler's book of sonnets, *Levering Avenue*, won the Richard Wilbur Award and was published by the University of Evansville Press. Two of his plays have been produced by South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa, California.