

Eileen R. Tabios – Three Poems

From The Ashbery Riff-Offs

—where each poem begins with 1 or 1-2 lines from “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” by John Ashbery

Witnessed in the Convex Mirror: Running

But how far can it swim out through the eyes
and still return swiftly to its nest? Anyone
else still doing forays with the cigarette the advance
guard and excuse? We saw another couple, topless
behaving in an unlit corner the way we wanted
to behave, but not with each other. From that
shared though private acknowledgement, we
came to agree: to see each other is to see
compromise. Still, a typhoon warning has blared
swording through the heated air and at least we
know each other as not mere flotsam and jetsam
in the wake of another’s decision. We don’t
begrudge it when we warn each other: that wave
will top the tallest building on the island upon
which we find ourselves. We’ll even take each
other’s hand before, in unison and unanimity, we
run away, we run, together we run away

Witnessed in the Convex Mirror: The Return of Your Smile

I feel the carousel starting slowly
then going faster: desk, papers, books
until my gaze alit on your photograph
—wink, red lipstick, glimmer of teeth—
and the universe slows down, along
with my heartbeat, *thud-thud, thud, th...*
Our golden ring remains tattooed on
my wedding finger, our baby snores
gently in his crib at the corner of my
office, you will return (I know) even after
how the desk fell to its side and
the papers, books, cluttered the floor
A stillness—welcome but longing

to be interrupted by your return:
a wink, red lipstick, glimmer of teeth
presaging your broadening smile

Witnessed in the Convex Mirror: Queen Anne's Lace

The distance between us. Long ago
the strewn evidence meant something:
a charm bracelet with brass letters
from our names, the green bottle
emptied of Portuguese wine, a candle
stub with its perfume long evaporated
a high school prom photo with your
face a stranger's, as is mine
To be young is to be beautiful
and so we were. To be young is to
be fragile and so we were. Like *Queen
Anne's Lace*, so delicate in beauty
it's often found threaded through bridal
bouquets. Yet Hippocrates, Pliny
the Elder, Pedanius Dioscorides and
Scribonius Largus all warn of the white
flower's power—its seeds, when chewed
and ingested after sex, prevents birth

Dear,
Is it worse or better for us, as ancients
with hair of snow, still to be together?

Eileen R. Tabios loves books and has released about 50 collections of poetry, fiction, essays, and experimental biographies from publishers in eight countries and cyberspace. Her most recent include *THE OPPOSITE OF CLAUSTROPHOBIA* (Knives, Forks and Spoons Press, 2017) and *AMNESIA: SOMEBODY'S MEMOIR* (Black Radish Books, 2016). Forthcoming poetry collections include *MANHATTAN: An Archaeology* (2017) and *HIRAETH: Tercets From the Last Archipelago* (2018). More information is available at <http://eileenrtabios.com>