

DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN

Three Poems

1. Ronsard's Dream

O wouldn't I love to be the golden rain
Drenching the bare thighs of Madeleine
As she sleeps, or tries to, in the downpour;

Wouldn't I love to be the great white bull
Who takes her as she goes over the hill
In April, a flower amazing the other flowers;

Wouldn't I love to slake the thirst of lovers,
Play Narcissus, making the nymph my pool,
And plunge into her all night long;

Then, if only that night could be eternal,
And dawn kindly refuse to rekindle
A new day, and mine be the last song.

2. Alice

She had come to the place
Just shy of womanhood,
Seeing and being seen
Lovely of form and face,
That cannot come to good
Without some sheltering grace.

Men would stop and stare,
 Then turn away, ashamed
 Of what they dare not do
 And where they might not go,
 If madness could be blamed.
 Free of pride and vanity

As if she'd been born blind
 Or never held a mirror
 She passed in her summer dress,
 So oblivious of her beauty
 She might search for its likeness
 Behind the looking glass and not before.

3. Fleur-de-lys

When sepals and petals look the same,
 As in the tiger lily, we call them
 Tepals, these bright blades of perianth,
 Sheathing the tulip and hyacinth,
 The blossoms that do not bother to put on
 Green calyx beneath the corolla gown.

If all this is Greek to us, then
 So it is. Most of the savoury words
 That make a flower: anther, stamen,
 (Not pistil, which some Roman
 Named because its style reminded him
 Of his pestle, and his swords),

Were spoken by Aristotle and Phidias,
 Long ago, by hero, virgin, and wench.
 Much later came the tepal, coined in Paris.
 Once the ancient gardeners were done
 Spinning flowers from words, no one
 Dabbled in such magic but the French.

