

Sister Mary Appassionata Praises the Sense of Smell

"Houses and rooms are full of perfumes . . ."

—*Whitman*

Lion and lamb, lion's den
and sheep pen, ardor of Adam
and Eve's sweet cunning fruit—
only nothing smells the same.
To safely make it through
this blooming, awful world
we must sniff out the difference.

Teachers live longer, inhaling
all day youth's unfaded essence,
lessons licorice-sweet,
salt of dew on downy lip,
chalk dust erasing wrinkles,
chafe of damp corduroy,
ringing change of every hour.

Socrates knew a new bride
needs no perfume but innocence.
And not just beauty speaks.
Power too breathes out
its name: Alexander the Great
stank of blood and violets
while his armies blackened earth.

After noon, the left armpit
of a certain nobleman of Paris
exuded a priceless musk—
you can look it up. Sorrow
takes away all sense of smell,
anger offends like the flare
of sulfurous kitchen match.

History's a mildewed tome,
dog-eared. Scratch and sniff:
St. Therese showering roses
upon us from up above;
that stench which says
Sin Here; baby's milky kiss,
the insult of ammoniac age,

our bouquet of every day.

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