

*vi Signor Bellini's Madonna.*

(Giovanni Bellini, Madonna of the Meadow.)



Beneath a mountainous display  
of blue silk she sits in the passing day,  
her fingers scarcely touching  
almost holding back, as if perplexed  
by the careless lie  
of your head against her thigh -  
a tiny sleeping drunkard languishing  
between one indulgence and the next.

Your foot points up to hooded wings.  
A long-beaked bird with shrill squawk  
is dancing with a squirming snake  
and the raven, on the thin bare stalk  
of a tall tree, looks on with a cold eye.

Beyond these fearful posturings  
a lazy champion sits, grudgingly awake,  
legs casually apart  
in a crass reply  
to the mother in her simple chastity.

Signor Bellini's art  
now forms a sweet trajectory  
along her shoulder line, to tenderly caress  
your mother's wholesome cheek,  
toward the towers and roof tiles  
in the early afternoon.

Can you hear the aching tune  
of a lonely flute? Can you hear it speak  
with thin lipped smiles,  
while the white robed figure slows its walk –  
with the mournful curiosity  
of a cow turning to gawk.

Signor Bellini graciously  
requests a curved and genial seat,  
for mother and child. I pose with dignity,  
but our good-natured harmony  
is shattered by the figure's high pitched wail.

Curious heads from far and wide,  
gather for news of a frightful tale  
and, when they see me stretched along the ground  
with the virgin on my rugged hide,  
I hear the righteous piercing sound  
of human animals at bay.

To avoid undue embarrassment  
I bid the virgin rise  
and, bowing to the venomous intent  
of the mob, I apologise  
and bid them all 'good day.'