

Mark Halliday

Artabanus Riding

Artabanus am I, Artabanus of Parthia,
with matted hair and bloodshot eyes,
fleeing to the farthest wooded hills of Scythia.

Not long ago I ruled all of Parthia
and my son Arsaces sat on the throne of Armenia
and my son Orodes shouted our glory in battle.

But Pharasmanes and his greedy Sarmatians
hounded the cavalry of Orodes
and the capital Artaxata fell to the vicious Iberians

and now I, Artabanus of Parthia,
ride desperate far and far into Scythia
with bloodshot eyes and matted hair.

It is true I poisoned Abdus
who plotted to give my throne to baby-fleshed Prince Phraates
and many another I poisoned as well

or hacked to death in the pantry behind my banquet hall
and all this was done as it had to be done
so that I and no other would be Artabanus of Parthia

FOREVER—long days and long freezing nights
I studied and pondered, drinking dark medralla,
hunched under torches, pondered and studied without rest

yet here now in the stupid cruelty of this mud-plashed world
where nothing can be trusted, stupid and vicious world
where nothing stays solid, everything is clay

that turns to mud in the fetid rain, now here aching I ride
far and far through the vales of Scythia, even I,
Artabanus of Parthia!

Miasmo Strumazz

This is to be my latest shrempf about Miasmo Strumazz,
a hero of the fictive, lanky with longing, male and white
in a good way, not some old bad way. He has not suffered
much except a few heartbreaks but how subtle have been
his feelings! Now comes the part where the mind of Miasmo drifts,
fenestrated, athwart the clouds of time and loss,

a streetlight in Raleigh, the Chateau Frontenac in Quebec,
Annie and the Crocodile Rock, Cathy and Marcus Aurelius,
“J’ai jeté mon coeur,” “Oh, Ellie Lou,” a dark lavender kitchen,
unrequited desire on a roof in Brookline,
murk of confused priorities in South Philadelphia,
his father’s love of balsa-wood airplanes, [something something]
[something something something],
his mother striving to conceal her desperate pain—

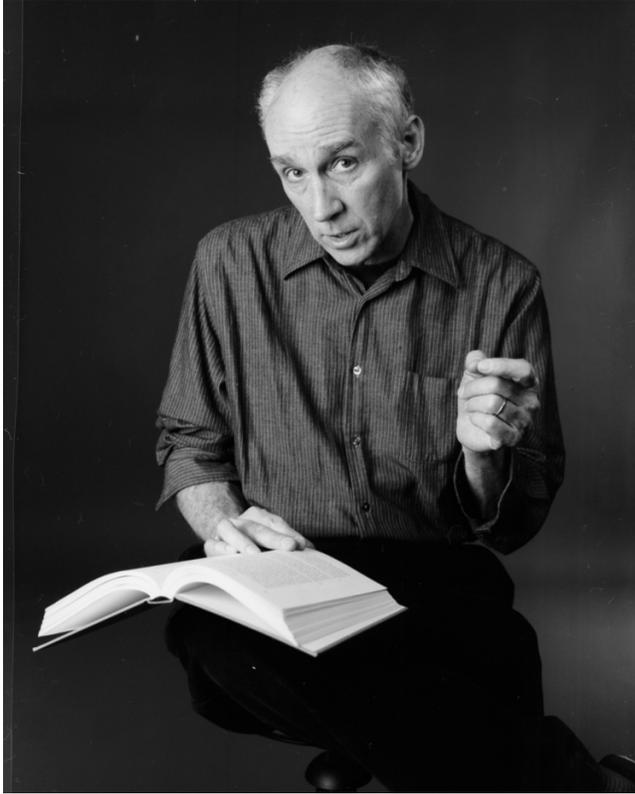
all this to be coordinated so subtly in my latest shrempf
about Miasmo Strumazz. You can’t love him
the way you could love someone real and yet
here in the fictive he is sweet-funny-sad like a fine version of you
so hearteningly unbourgeois
because bourgeois is over *there* where you glance briefly at books
and return to social media whereas Miasmo is over *here*
limned by the power of shrempfitude which you should calmly
acknowledge, that’s right, see here it is I hold it towards you,
my latest shrempf about Miasmo Strumazz.

Untexted

No one is texting me. The day is cold and blank.
Three women in particular are not texting me.
Hours go by. I am enduring. Why
do they not care enough? They are so
oblivious, or distracted—

I could text them
but then I might seem pathetic, abject.
When a guy is abject you definitely don't text him.
On the bank of the Hocking River
the matted weeds are icy and brown gray
and gray brown and icy and dead
OK I get it I get it

I must show how I am
not like that—pretty soon I will think up a witty text
all devil-may-care and you-should-be-so-lucky.



Mark Halliday teaches at Ohio University. His seventh collection *Losers Dream On* was published in 2018 by the University of Chicago Press.