

ONE SWELTERING DAY ON THE CARONTE

The short man's five rigid fingers shot energy rays

Then his hands went back into his curly hair for lubrication

Then his fingers became erect again and shot more frustration juice

He bit his marble hand, bent way over and yelled and cried

(not real tears though, don't confuse acting with acting)

In any case, I couldn't hear a sound locked in my glass observation booth

I did get to see the girls going at it, five or six of them

Heads down like rams, flailing

Pulling shocks of hair, slapping faces, breaking glasses

(Females know no rules)

One had a switch for herding goats,

And *everybody* crept up to see the show, gratis, and kibitz

Except the northern gentleman in the next car with the yellow shirt and red tie

He didn't get out either, clicking his tongue (the animals!)

Won't somebody exercise some authority here?

Where's the captain, in the wine cellar?

I realized as we pulled up to Messina and the lazy peace officers came aboard

That I was a northerner too and will never grow accustomed

To this welcome home.

Included in a family not my own
I'm held in fond regard or perhaps hostage
Bondage but not blood
Blood forgives
Blood washes they say here
You don't know what a blood is, I say
Unless you went to my high school
And stayed out of the bathrooms
I won't go into that because
I know you can't understand
Around a mourning table of Sicilian focaccia
Washed down with American Co'Cola
Cousins remember the rusty go-carts and funny mini-bikes of their speedy youth
The same stories told at each funeral
So that I almost feel like I was there then
But no, this isn't my family, I wasn't there,
I have been adopted as a houseplant
A philodendron, tall and common;
While I fancy throwing other rocks
into other rivers with other kids
Drinking and eating other stuff
[Beverly cream soda and Moon pies]
I don't belong here.
Any more than a eucalyptus tree outside Oz,

Or Adam outside the garden, that is

So why am I here?

We are all destined in eventual generations

To exile

The undecideds always leave sometime

For their 50 miles of elbow room

And that can't be taken back (no do-overs)

I left

My fault

I left,

as you will sooner or later

and lost I don't know what

and gained I don't know what

how could you?

how could I?

Only that the lust for peculiarity

means my grandchildren will call this weird place

home

when they leave it

on that same ferry.

– *E. MARTIN PEDERSEN*

ABOUT THE POET

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E. Martin Pedersen, originally from San Francisco, has lived in eastern Sicily for nearly 40 years. He is a dual resident and citizen, as is his Italian wife. In Messina, he teaches university English; in California, he enjoys summer hiking in the Sierras. His poetry has appeared in *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Former People* and others. He is a 2011 alum of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers.