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# Breathing Out Smoke

Angela Sorby

Marquette University, [angela.sorby@marquette.edu](mailto:angela.sorby@marquette.edu)

## Breathing Out Smoke

*C'est l'Ennui!—l'oeil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,  
 Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.  
 Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,  
 —Hypocrite lecteur, —mon semblable, —mon frère!*

—CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

On day 110 of W.'s second term  
 I join my neighbor Caddie

on her porch, where she folds  
 her leggy black-Irish go-to-hell

body into a wicker rocker and fires  
 up a Pall Mall. Long ago, in junior high,

football stars threw pennies in gym  
 yelling "Scrounge!" at special-ed kids.

This seemed natural—inevitable—  
 part of the fixed Linnaean order.

But now our rust belt city's so rusty  
 it's falling to pieces, like Caddie's car

that coughs when she turns the key.  
 Why quit smoking? Smoke's

our cityscape, our V of geese at dusk.  
 My mom says we've got no class

because our kids run on the lawn in socks.  
 Their uncut bangs half-block their view

of our other neighbor, Pearl, whose helmet  
shields her during seizures. She's fifty-one,

too young to wander like she wanders.  
But maybe to be seized is to flower,

like the *Linnaea borealis* that spreads  
from northern clime to clime,

blooming in sync with summer,  
blanketing boreal woods with its petals,

as if there were no hierarchical order,  
as if the rivulets were clear,

as if the Canada geese could bring us  
word from the birch and the silver fir:

*Mon semblable*, we wish  
they'd say, or squawk. *Ma soeur*.

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