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Ars Poetica

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Kann: Ars Poetica

ARS POETICA

David Kann

So I said to Rosenbergmy Jewish Transcendentalist friend-"Rosey!" I said, "I'm stuck in a hole. Suddenly writing poetry is like carving granite with a butter knife or trying to find beauty in literary criticism." "Bubby," he said, "Bubbeleh. It's like pastrami and corned beef. You can slice corned beef any time you feel like it. It's easy to find. It gives of itself easily, paper-thin and pale baby pink and shining with rainbow juice-drops, not too fatty. It should be nice and lean. You can slap it down on any old rye, gild it with yellow mustard, and it will make you a little happy any time. Cold. Hot. Who cares? You sit in front of the terse conversation of bread and meat, take a bite. It's pleasing. Okay. But pastrami—ah, pastrami! The rhythms of pastrami are the rhythms of the earth.

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Try to slice it and feel basalt crust, crackle, quartz-shiny with fat peeking through, opposing your knife. Pastrami is not easy, does not give of itself right away. Insist gently. Give it time and it submits, revealing the lovely soft crimson coarse-fibered meat. Pastrami sings in your mouth with many voices: the darkness of the earth and time. Brine-soaked it speaks the sea under hot pepper-black nights, autumn-loam-brown nose-pinching cloves bring hot tears of memory, sweet spring-scented marjoram bring slow tears of hope, piney bay in its wintery green brings remembered bright short days, long nights and sad endings. It serenades the winey rye, grainy with cornmeal at the crust and seeded at the pith. The enamoured rye croons back. Liebchen, this takes time to cure and become itself and not just corned beef."