

Not Guilty

By David Rivard

The days are dog-eared, the edges torn,
ragged—like those pages
I ripped once out of library books,

for their photos
of Vallejo and bootless Robert Johnson.
A fine needs paying now

it's true, but
not by me.
I am no more guilty

than that thrush is
who sits there stripping moss
off the wet bark of a tree.

A red fleck, like his, glows
at the back of my head—a beauty mark,
left by the brain's after-jets.

I would not wish for the three brains
Robert required
to double-clutch his guitar

and chase those sounds he had to know
led down
and into a troubled dusky river, always.

Three brains did Johnson no earthly good,
neither his nor Vallejo's 4 & 1/2
worked right exactly—O bunglers,

O banged-up pans of disaster!
Crying for days, said Cesar, & singing for months.
How can I be so strong some times,

at others weak? I wish to be free,
but free to do what? To leave myself behind?
To switch channels remotely?

Better to sing.
Not like the bird, but as they sang,
Cesar & Robert—

with the shocked & seeded
sweetness of an apple
split open by a meat cleaver.

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