

GARRETT CAPLES

**THE ANTIQUITIES
MY OLD CAR**

THE ANTIQUITIES

DEAR GEOFF

I'm not 100% sure I have an *interpretation* of the poem, but I can report what caused me to write it.

The poet André Breton was the leader of the Paris Surrealist Group from its inception in the early '20s until his death in 1966. He'd lived in the same apartment in Paris, 42 Rue Fontaine, since 1922. There are many photographs of this apartment over the years. It looks like a truly magical place, every inch of the walls covered in art by the likes of his friends Picabia, de Chirico, and Tanguy; ethnographic objects like African masks, Hopi Kachina dolls, and Oceanic sculptures; found objects that had a special significance for him; and glass cases filled with butterflies and other flora and fauna. The apartment had remained intact in the almost 40 years since his death, but in April 2003, the collection was split up and auctioned off, yielding some \$40 million. This is especially ironic in that Breton died relatively poor. He'd acquired his collection through shrewdness as a collector and advocacy as a critic. He'd made painters famous through his writings, and works that had little monetary value when he acquired them were in some cases worth hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars. In a very real sense, Breton himself made these objects valuable.

I was angry the apartment had managed to survive so long, only to be sold off piecemeal in the end. The French government should have purchased it and turned it into a museum. One wall has indeed survived and relocated to the Pompidou, but this is a poor substitute for the apartment itself. I couldn't see how France, indeed the world, could let this happen. It was an act of cultural destruction, equivalent to taking a hammer to Michelangelo's *David* or slicing up the *Mona Lisa* into little squares of canvas.

In terms of specifics, I have little insight, insofar as the words of my poems suggest themselves and I often don't know their significance. Some might have come from things I've since forgotten. The one line I have a suggestive memory of is "so long to the fingerbone that lingers on." I was in Beijing, China in 2001 and went to a temple said to house the fingerbone of the Buddha. Clearly it was nothing of the sort, but rather some animal bone. But the little pavilion these monks had built for this bone struck me as a genuinely holy place nonetheless. You could feel it in the air, even if the holiness derived from the devotion of the monks rather than the dubious bone. I remember a monk standing there holding a mallet next to a small gong. I remember thinking, "I'd like to hear that gong," but had no sense of when the monk was supposed to hit it. As I was about to leave, however, I slipped some coins into the offertory box by the fingerbone's casket, then, *splash*, the monk hit the gong. The gong was a reward for an offering and it felt like a real reward, for approaching things in their proper spirit. This experience of the sacred felt related to André Breton's apartment.

Much love,
g!

MY OLD CAR

approaching tollbooth ready to crack door when it dawns on me: i can lower the window automatically. change lanes on highway, head over shoulder, neglecting my ability to act confident in reflection. turn the engine on before turning it over, groping a kill switch that doesn't exist. my old car's infirmities imprinted on me. my bumper attached by string. my driver's side window leaked. i peed on the tires with laurie weeks after a party at dodie's. i remember i stuffed an upright bass in there, for steve neil of the pharaoh sanders quartet. my old car carried shock-g, lamantia, even barbara guest, and i once lent it to brian lucas to ferry ferlinghetti over the river styx. meltzer and mcclure were among its later victims. it's been towed and impounded at 500 a shot, but even when i got caught it would hold on one more day. i remember j.stalin telling me, *get in the 21st century, g*, because i didn't have gps. it was antique, and except for the radio, analog. my dad bought it for me for graduation, because it met california emissions. i drove it across country packed with my possessions. i was 22. it was 22 when it finally failed to smog. it makes me think of sun ra: *the tables are turning—saturn. saturn, the crazy taskmaster*. i was never a car guy but it became second skin. i knew what it could and couldn't. my whiskers told me what clearance i had, spidey sense a-tingling. i put it through the ringer. dui. lsd. rotfl. you name it. its official colors were *plum w/ grey interior*. it broke down maybe six times. i'm sure i broke down more.