

Winners & Losers: 5 Poems

The Music of the Spheres (23 lines)

Her disappointment makes them strangers.
In her voice he can sense the abyss
his lame attempt at humor cannot bridge.
Conciliating words spawn newer hardness in her jaw.
Her green eyes find another place to stare.
She knows him all too well,
as he knows her.
Galileo to her Bruno he recants
while she insists on burning at the stake.
She's all inscribed in stone to him, the tale
as clear today as when the chisel struck.
Elisions of eroding years are glossed.
Time-softened planes fail of detection.
Recalcitrant remembering recarves
each faded line, each miniscule imperfection.
Inside the stove, the fire rails
against the glass (it would be free).
Outside, frigid air beats on the walls
(it would come in).
None would touch the theme of freedom now.
The one locked in, the other out,
their wheeling flings new mud
from ancient ruts.

High Tide (9 lines)

I found her at the water's edge
kneeling in a patch of gravel.
Her hair had taken on the shape of sleep
and would not let it go.
The Tigris and Euphrates of her arms
joined at her hands,
which held a pile of smooth, clean stones.
Tears streamed down her cheeks.
“They’re *so* beautiful,” she said.

How To Know The Grasses (25 lines)

Mother knew the grasses.
As I crawled about she'd say to me,
"Don't put that in your mouth,
Sweet thing."
Saving me from certain death.

I knew the grass
against my butt
beneath a spruce
in darkness with
a girl named Fern
whose husky breath
smelled sweetly
of cheap whiskey.

Now grass seeds shed their chaff
and fill the cheeks
of tiny mice
who know the grass
that fills their nest
will be their sweet salvation
or,
them swept up by hawk or owl,
the seed in spring
will sprout a riotous clump
of sweet lush blades,
a monument to missing mice.

Practice (15 lines)

I'm practicing to be
a sentimental old man.
Already there is practically nothing
that will not bring me to the verge of tears.

I'm practicing with too
much drink,
not to steam with anger,
but to simmer in a maudlin stew
of foggy reminiscence.

I'm practicing to love
my old, drunk, maudlin self,
and not, hating myself,
to be a hater of everything else,
jealous of all that will still be
when I am gone.

Anna's Plague (32 lines)

Tiny bugs come to drink at his eyes while he sleeps.
 One or two stop to graze on the salt paths that lead
 From his eye, down his cheek, to the cleft of his ear
 Before making their way to the well of his tears.
 His deep, blinding sorrow, to them, is a fountain,
 A treasure of rich, subtle flavors and scents.
 They drink after crossing broad wastelands of linen
 Unmindful of anguish and tormented dreams.

Sorrow-filled dreams evanesce with the dawn
 Though he still feels her hands on his chest when he wakes,
 His breathing made hard by that fading dream-touch
 And a vaguely sensed movement around his closed eyes.

In the dim light of day's edge he flees to the wood
 Where crepuscular songs weave a dirge-like lament.
 Such a threnody strung on the darkness within
 Is, without, reinforced by the dank, clinging cold.
 Spider webs wave like flags in the mouldering straws,
 Festooned with the moisture of night's fading damp.
 Tattered leaves, like rags, limply flap in the breeze.
 One, releasing its grip, sinks to ground.
 In the bark of gray trees tiny lenticels wink,
 Each a vessica pisces which hints at once-sacred
 Geometries prized by the ancients, now lost,
 Or the bright eyes of elves in a happier tale.

In his mind swarm ineffable thoughts of the past,
 Crowding the images caught by his eye.
 Elves become monsters, leaves become blades
 Whirling sharp on brown branches like gilt-handled swords.
 His legs fold beneath him. He sinks with the leaves.
 At the edge of a whispering stream he succumbs
 To despair-laden dreams in a sleep of despair,
 While bugs vainly search for the eyes that they love.