

More Light!

Five Poems For SixFold

“More light!” Goethe called out,
settling into his chair, moments before dying.
No way to know his intention, his finger writing
on the air. Was he beseeching the morning sun,
the shutters thrown open by a servant,
or pleading for one more day of poetry?
Perhaps Heaven’s radiance was his desire?
Or was he recounting Faust’s final redemption:
to know all human joy and sorrow, though blind
he moved unceasingly toward the light?

And was that Monet’s obsession?
Losing his eyesight to cataracts the last 26 years
of his life, he painted nothing but the light
reflecting from the surfaces of his water garden.
There was a stream at the boundary of his property
he’d diverted into a pond and he loved the flowers
chosen randomly from a catalogue. The effect,
he said, varied unceasingly with the seasons,
weather and time of day. But the water lilies were
merely an accompaniment to the mirror of the pond.

While Faust, in old age, sought redemption,
Monet longed for perfection: to know and apprehend
light’s fleeting moments of revelation.
As he moved irreversibly toward blindness,
he worked in all light until last light,
painting its mutable colors, transforming
the tactile details of the flower garden and footbridge
into moments so pure they can live forever,
as will the metaphor Goethe’s finger traced
in the air that morning.

*Suddenly Monet grabbed up his palette and brushes.
“The sun is out again.” he said. But we could see nothing.*

Note: This poem relies on the plot of *Faust* by Johann von Goethe, and Gary Baldrige’s (todayinliterature.com) recounting of the author’s death. I’ve used Monet’s own words to describe his water gardens. The last two lines are from a quote by Monet’s friend, Gustave Geffroy.

Reflection

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What were we thinking, to build them so high
that clouds reflected off the windows,

not like the altering light in Monet's
water garden, but ethereal doorways.

So many birds flew into them
confused by that inexplicable theory of heaven.

We watched them fall from the sky,
disbelieving,

their tremulous flight
as appalling as nursery rhymes.

Though it was not fear we saw in their eyes,
rather that scrap of hope

one holds on to
until there is no hope remaining.

Our children picked up the feathers,
arranged them in shoe boxes.

They asked us why they fell.
And though we explained how false light

reflected from the glass,
they refused to believe

such beautiful winged creatures
could be fooled by that deception.

How Many Fingers Do I Really Need?

The man who cut his fingers
off
used 28 strokes.
One for each knuckle.
Had to plan ahead
for when he couldn't grasp the cleaver.
Said: Now I can't be held responsible
for what slips through my fingers.

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Hot And Sour Soup

taste he perceives as molecules
of desire a ghost of herself
she leaves boiling on his tongue

a scalded pleasure he devours
though the flavor his papillae
lament is what came after

the argument
they had for breakfast still lingering
sour in his mouth

the soup is seasoned for artless surrender
hot oil for passion
vinegar for suffering

he orders it at the Chinese restaurant
is inflamed
by the chef's ardent improvisation

the chili pepper infusion
she stirs into
it repentant and fluent

as any spoken seduction
the capsaicin a ghost of herself
lingering after fiery in his mouth

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Color Blind

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When he can't trust what he sees, the color blind
optometrist thinks of infidelity. Still, he believes
there must be one guileless person in the world.
Though, even his girlfriend smirks as she tells him

that his purple shirt is blue, because she knows
how he feels about purple. And the saleswoman
at JC Penny, he's sure, only said the gray sweater
was green, that it matched his hazel eyes,

just to make the sale. He didn't think the lady
cop was lying, but why had she insisted the yellow
light he'd driven through was red? He learned early
the mutability of truth, how everyone was capable
of deception. But no matter their clever devices

he perceived them differently. And though
it was unsettling to live with the uncertainty
he needed to be free of everyone else's ideology.
He even imagined his own names for colors.
whirligness, inciderous, romanticite.

A physicist he dated in college thought she
could invent glasses to fix his disability.
But his eyes lacked the rod and cone cells
needed to see colors. He even used a spectro-
photometer to measure pure wave-lengths.

Though precise, the instrument couldn't
reveal what he wanted to see. Rouge, cerise,
vermillion: even with good eyes he'd never
be certain what these names meant to others.

There are so many ways to say red—strawberry,
cherry, laceration, scarlet, artery, broken-hearted,
betrayal—even though the color remains the same.