

FIVE POEMS

The poem of you dissolves in my insomnia

(upon reading John Donne's "A Valediction of Weeping")

you who preferred the British spelling of *grey* to gray
so I remember your *grey* eyes that I barely could gaze into
and the elegance of Wanda Landowska playing Scarlatti
as you played upon my awkward affection,
a John Donne sun falling across the unmade bed
and I caught up in the rush of Scarlatti, then Bach

and you (who loved your Wanda more)
became for me my own Glenn Gould
hunched over the piano, riffing God through Bach,
taking me with you through all the Variations
down through that spring, those spheres

so dazzled I was

and years later you, high on the roses of Sharon,
(as you wrote *agitato* in your cramped hand across torn notebook pages),
blinded like some raptured dancing monk,
God-besotted, in the middle of the Negev, ten time zones away, the earth
turning, turning away,
the sphere, the clouded orb tumbling down the years like Hikmet's walnut
(do you know his poems?)

leaving me

to my ordinary life, to children, silly woman-friend conversations,
notebooks unwritten in, the variations of you forgotten,
(my best friend can't remember you)
I too, can't remember, tongue-tied, can't say the poems we
read once to each other and my compass did spin in your words and
north was south; east was west.

how Milton's lost angel whom you loved best as it turns out
plummeted from Paradise stealing my soul's heart,

so I myself turn again and again
to Donne
as night descends to its own pale morning light
and my valediction of tears mourns the elegant complexity of separate universes,
still dazzled I am by the different poets, by how spheres spin

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away from each other, the complex fingerings of music,

lives played apart,

the counterpoint of what God takes away.

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An Apprehension of Love

They held hands perhaps like Hansel and Gretel
while clutching their coats against the cold March showers
watching for where the sidewalk rose unexpected
making their way down the block to the Starbucks
where the young man, his red beard trimmed so nice,
knew she liked her latté "with skim milk please"
and her husband needed his coffee fresh with "room for cream."

They favored the green chairs off in the corner
where the hummingbird photos hung next to the mugs for sale.
Occasionally they spoke and they knew when each other was done.

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The Poem I would Write for You

I am an impatient writer of poems,
wanting the stanzas to slip
on to the plate like
perfect poached eggs, the yolks
filmed over, but only a
little and only until the tines
of my fork puncture the poem
and the words run out egg yolk
yellow, sliding onto my plate
to be salted a bit and then
sopped up with toast to get
bread crumb crunch mixed
with the taste of yolk,
washed down with coffee,
black and hot and smoky.

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No Exit

Hey, if you're reading this
could be you know
my dad used to be this hotshot
baseball phenom
only he didn't make it which
of course is an existential dilemma: who
gets to the Show and who does
not, who has the pinpoint throw or the curve
that fools, the fastest legs, the velcro
glove. Sartre wouldn't get that.

But Camus, who knew how the sun
blinds and desert dirt tastes, might have had it
in him to ponder the absurdity of
sweltering somewhere in southern
Indiana, lurching from town to
town in a rust bucket bus,
washed up but still clutching
your lucky bat wearing
your easy lopsided smile

'though your legs are giving out
not unlike Sisyphus.

Me, I never learned to
keep a score card - it is how
you capture the half-life
of innings and the best
innings are not too short, or too long - like
when the flag out in center field flags
in the bottom of the ninth with no men out - the
peanuts start to taste stale
and your pencil point breaks.

You always wonder
if this inning is really the Last Exit or if there
is No Exit from the game as you
remind Sartre that if you pass the
salt shaker without putting
it on the table first, you will
never get a hit again.
Camus would get that,

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how life drowns in the
white-hot day game shimmerings,
the sweated out flannels,
the scuffed chalk lines

of what's not to be.

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Christmas Bicycle

knife-sharp blue sky and bare limbs
ice air full in my face scuffed
brown oxfords double knotted and
Dad yelling Pedal! Pedal! Pedal! his
gloved hand at my back then

suddenly, finally

I wheel free tearing down
 Ross Avenue
 away

from the clacking of false
teeth, wadded up grandmother
tissues, my grandfather's bitter spittle,
the clenched jaws of my parents staring
each other down across the
prattle of Christmas dinner white
asparagus turkey liver gravy tiresome
jokes about catholics commies mexicans,
them, always them

nobody noticed the manger with the baby Jesus I bought
at the Woolworths
all by myself

panting, I pedal as fast as I can
the sun sinking behind the squat brick houses
tears icy pricks even as I squint them away
my fingers clutched tight on the handle bars

dashing away
from all of
them