

Silence Is Quiet

When I attended
the poetry reading
at William Blake's
coffee house, no one
showed up; drinking
my café latte',
I rehearsed, under my breath,
reading magnificently
to a wilted white daisy
in a dirty green glass vase.

However lonely,
there were certain benefits:
no one to critique
or blow raspberries,
no anxieties, no stuttering,
no misreadings and
starting all over again;
imagining twenty appreciative
listeners, applauding loudly,
(no, make that fifty),
the music of one hundred
hands clapping, one hundred
trees falling in the desert
with no one to hear.

Uncentered

I've always felt a bit off-kilter;
not in the same world as others.
A child trying to seesaw with himself
while the others played on swings.
Afraid to go to church because
the congregation prayed for
the final Rapture of death.
I believed that prayers came true.

I always felt my nose was larger, that
I had on different colors of socks,
the right one brown and the left one blue;
as if the rear of my pants was torn,
as if my DNA came from alien worlds.
Perhaps I was a foundling
brought in from the forest,
having been raised by animals.

My thoughts stroll on different paths
than ones where others are jogging.
My hot air balloon is blown out to sea;
the rescue ship has sprung a leak.
I am locked in a space capsule when
it explodes, seeing only
blue sky, flames, and angels.

I should sneak off and hide somewhere,
before they realize there is a wolf
loose in their holy places.

Remembrances

They only exist in the
corners of the room now,
like repossessed spider webs,
the tenants gone,
unable to make rent;
dusty strands of silk,
fading threads of memory,
offering only glimpses here
and there, sneak reviews
of life already past, or recollections
of that bare sight of thigh
above a woman's stocking,
before she lowers her dress.

All things you do
become memories and
attach like mistletoe,
needing a host,
slowly draining you,
sprouting white berries;
lovely to kiss underneath,
but dangerous to eat.

Or, perhaps they are like
the wispy ends of dreams
as you awaken,
not telling the whole story,
but letting you remember
just enough to keep you
from going back to sleep.

Naked in Dreams

Poetry is just too damned embarrassingly personal;
airing your own dirty laundry in public,
or writing unpleasant truths about your friends,
praying they won't see themselves in the poem,
hoping they will see themselves in the poem,
trusting they won't kill the messenger.

Reading a poem aloud is like
coming out of the closet to your parents,
like standing red-faced in the bathroom
with your pants around your ankles,
like loudly breaking wind in the middle
of your onstage plie'.
Poetry doesn't always smell like roses.

The audience stares with blank gazes,
yelling, "Take it off. Take it all off."
looking for their money's worth,
wanting to see the poet's naked soul,
even when they know that souls are invisible,
even when the poet thought
he had it lit in flashing neon.

Poets will continue to be caught and embarrassed
putting their hands down unbuttoned blouses,
sneaking back in their windows late at night,
slipping the magazines under the mattresses,
trading quick kisses with other men's wives,
walking naked in dreams while others are dressed.

But, poets go on with their singing—
eccentrics in their own home towns—
with stains on their shirtfronts
and their flies unzipped,
wishing their voices carried better,
wishing for the silver tongues of gods,
reading poems with pebbles still in their mouths.

How to Start a Fire

Looking at you ignites
lust; you are dry kindling,
during a drought,
stacked underneath the wood
pile, carelessly left unguarded,
your incendiary qualities
quite forgotten by your
husband, a negligence
that allows homes
to burn to the ground,
destroying families inside,
batteries dead in their alarms
with no advance warnings
of the coming conflagration.
Fire burns in your hair
and flames play between
your slender fingers.

If we take the next step,
and lie in the next bed we find,
the mattress will alight
without a dropped cigarette.
Neighbors will flee the condos
in pajamas and bare feet,
as a blaze of red trucks,
bringing water and hoses,
siren their banshee wails
through the dark wet streets.

They will be too late.
There will be nothing left
but glowing red ashes,
the woody smell of smoke,
and exposed, scorched plumbing.

The inspectors will suspect arson;
they will pinpoint the flash point
of ignition, will discover the
images of two smiles melted
into the blackened sheets.