

## FOUR POEMS

### A TRACTOR TALE

Rust is gratifyingly visual,  
the patinated stamp of value  
for this tractor's final place  
as sculpture on the lawn,  
a function's carapace,  
the function gone.

A favorite from my past,  
it sits now on worn grass,  
not on the wobbly table  
where I happily glued  
piece to piece, a decal label  
on its modest side.

Who could have seen the new  
reduced to so humble a view,  
this place for such a future,  
engine, wheels and gears  
put out to pasture  
to spend their rusting years?

Wanting a second look,  
I turn around and park  
along the street. A man  
as old as I, meekly  
ambles out, feebly and  
with a limp, unshaved.

What to ask, knowing  
naught of farm and furrow?  
His eyes, tired of the ground,  
find mine. I turn away  
in awkward silence to say  
against the traffic sound,

*I was just driving past...*  
but nothing follows, so at last  
he puts a hand where once  
he must have sat, and says,  
“People stop, always,  
when it’s parked out front.”

So it *is* for sale. I want  
to ask without sounding blunt  
if he’s the single owner  
of the thing we stand beside,  
as if it’s a horse and buggy  
I could test drive. No sooner

have I thought this, the man  
more agile even than  
someone half my age  
mounts it and with a flourish  
turns the key with a sudden rush  
of sound like primal rage.

He dismounts, invites me  
to take her for a spin, hardly  
what I’m angling for. I smile.  
“I wouldn’t know how,” I say,  
as white collared as the day  
I was born. His turn to smile.

“I never get riders,”  
he tells me, now an insider  
in a fraternity of elders.  
The real-life version, burning oil,  
rattles on, as if to spoil  
what in the living smokes and smolders.

I could not begin to say  
what state mine’s in today,  
what Star-Wars infatuated boy

would violate such trends  
among conformist friends  
for such a toy.

Beyond the making of the thing  
I remember almost nothing  
of its place on this, my earth.  
Perhaps, from pride, I kept  
it long enough to be parentally swept  
away, deemed of negligible worth.

Here stands what mine  
was meant to be, a machine  
enabling industry, or  
for those who stand and watch,  
a chance on the sidelines to catch  
a good deal more.

I nod. I shake his hand.  
He smiles, a man  
withholding a wanted yarn.  
I give the tractor one last look,  
and one more driving off,  
but the man's now gone behind the barn.

EPIPHANY FOR  
A SOLIPSIST

Such honor in the dark,  
to be singled out this way:  
this star, its light, its rays,  
for me alone, a spark

sent millions of years before,  
this chosen dart of light  
aimed at the very night  
I venture out the door.

And so with me in mind  
searching near and far,  
this infinitesimal star,  
had only here to find

a moment's admiration  
before a thoughtless mist  
so carelessly erased  
a moment's adoration.

The mist now passed away,  
my star is not to find,  
engulfed by its own kind  
among the Milky Way.

To seize the day I write  
to save what to one man  
before the earth began  
was sent him of the night.

## SUMMER RENTAL

Stately on its promontory,  
it sits in distant memory  
as indelible as the myths  
endemic to romantic youth.  
Make of it what you will:  
the pictures on the walls  
tell of what might have been,  
had you been more securely born  
and lived reliant on the sea  
for needed Down East scenery,  
therefore (also on the wall)  
the sleek Concordia yawl  
moored in the obliging cove  
among the cabin's treasure trove  
of envy everywhere around—  
in upstairs rooms, or bound  
in albums carelessly stored  
as intended found rewards  
among the many tattered books  
on shelves, among the nooks  
and crannies of a week away.  
And charts, the charts! Of bay  
and inlet, isle and reach,  
displayed in tandem, each  
to each, our spot, like wrecks,  
marked with a scarlet X.  
Our spot, indeed. We rent  
a touch of what's meant  
for us only in dreams.  
Place is merely what it means  
to be alive, being here  
among the atmosphere  
of fragrance, feel and tone,  
enough for now, if not our own.

## WAR POEM

I would have liked to ask  
my mother about the war,  
coinciding as it did  
with the worthwhile task—  
the burden that she bore—  
of bringing me, her first kid,  
into the world.

The glint in my father's eye,  
some quick research unveils,  
might have coincided,  
give or take a day,  
and ignoring previous trials,  
with the day it was decided  
France and Britain both

should enter into war.  
How did Hitler play  
into parental plans?  
A propos of blood and gore,  
did you foresee a day  
Hitler's German planes  
would find our shore?

Two months before I found  
the light, when Hitler pummeled  
France, did newborn fears  
before the days of ultrasound  
reduce you to a humbled  
dread of what war years  
might soak with tears?

What were your unvoiced thoughts,  
birthing another son,  
after negotiations failed?

At the merciless onslaught  
of Japanese bombs and guns?  
Or when two bombs prevailed  
in August, '45? (I, too, was five.)

You hated Roosevelt,  
and worse, his active wife.  
Your reasons, unclear, yet  
intense, incensed, heartfelt,  
came from an inner life  
that seemed to me beset  
with family regret.

By the time I might have risked  
to ask who in that war  
you were, or thought you were,  
I'd appointed myself the task  
of damning what I abhorred,  
incessantly, cocksure:  
"my" unjust war.

Did family (or its lack)  
eliminate how one  
young mind should care to know  
how elders, thinking back,  
might care to tell a son  
how other lives had gone?  
A lesser woe

than that of war or loss,  
or death by any means,  
takes hold of me, to mourn  
the wisdom lost across  
those years I could have gleaned  
how from mothers' minds—war formed—  
sons' are too soon weaned.