

Sixfold Poems

July 2019

I Found a Poem

This morning, sifting through
my cluttered archives—one step
ahead of my wife who'd like
to throw out the whole mess—I found
a poem I wrote when I was
nineteen. With the detachment
that comes with age, I read
and re-read, trying to remember
that poet, that voice shouting over
the gaping chasm of fifty years,
a cool half-century.

But a poem, like a memory, is only
a photograph, a grainy image frozen
in time. And so out of context are those
words, laden with honest lies,
misplaced rhymes, metaphors
infused with the hope of
living in that moment of lost time—
before love, before loss, before
the acceptance of mediocrity,
the acceptance of life as it is
and not how it should be.
As though the pure white canvas
that was the future held no promise
for the young abstract artist.

I read the poem one last time
then burned it, adding the
ashes to all the others
I have saved over the
ever-widening span
of years.

I Wanted to Write

It was time—or so I thought.
I was ready and
I was poised to write that
happy poem—you know,
the one full of
roses and sunlight,
blessings and youth
and love is in the air.

But then I saw this low
April sky hovering overhead,
gray as a gravestone; I saw
the lonely green leaves in
the garden bravely emerging,
waiting for the warmth that
is more like a fading dream
than forthcoming. I
felt the cold winter kiss
still fresh on my cheek.

And sensed the illusion
of it all and breathed the
faint transcendent hope
that tomorrow the sun
will shine and my pen
will work a different magic.

Night Shift

You lie down alone after dawn
and let rain drenched dreams
drain through your sleep like
melting ice. Dreams of blood,
of methodical chaos, dreams of
plastic, high grade medical plastic
washing up on primordial shores
like dead fish; dreams in which this
murky, shadow-filled world is wrapped in
plastic like fresh red beef in a butcher's
window.

Bone weary and soaked with cortisol,
you strain to sleep while the sun
erupts and seers your eyes, and
the frenetic, light loving world
buzzes all around you like a
hungry mosquito at twilight.

And then at dusk you emerge,
like Dracula from the crypt,
and watch the sun sink into the earth
the way the vampire might sink his
fangs into a soft young neck, hear the
lonely call of the night, ready once
more to stalk the unwary, to seek
fresh blood from the powerless.

Blood: the red soul of life
coursing through the world. And
you are compelled by its power,
driven by its elan vital. And
you must either rise up to direct
the flow, step aside and let it pass,
or jump in and be swept away.

Words

(for Wallace Stevens)

If we were to study
the intricate pattern
of particular words

on the partially printed
page,
we would see the

simple

truth of the

nothing

that is there,
dribbling down upon

a field of winter white
as cold as the

last November

frost sparkling in the

dampness of dawn.

The Squirrel
(April 8, 2017)

“Cruise missiles fired
at Syrian air base”. “Four
killed in Swedish
truck attack.” These and similar
morning headlines bellow
out like an angry mob shaking
its collective fist
at a world cowering and
terrified and transfixed.
A world dancing in a
fire of its own creation.

But I don't see that world;
I refuse to see that world.
Not today anyway. I turn
my head and gaze into my suburban
backyard, searching, scanning, and
I marvel at the splendor of this
early spring day. I see the grass
beginning to green, the new
white blooms on the apple tree.
I watch a single
squirrel scamper across the yard,
leap, and make a vertical
and seemingly effortless
run up the oak tree, defying the
laws of gravity and common sense.
She skillfully navigates the tangled
web of leafless oak and
maple limbs in order to
find that final perch at least
thirty feet above the earth.
And there she remains, silent
and oblivious, living in the
moment, while I smile
and stare and think:
Oh, to be a squirrel