

You Can Climb Down Now

Forgive me that I
 ask too much of your
 body,
 boosting sweet day-to-day flesh into
 Endless Redemption By Passion.
 Must be a
 drag up there, and you can
climb down now.

If only something could
 centre us, in a century of dearth.
 One
 whiff of carnal joy and a man will come unhinged,
 or try to cram the body of his longing
 thru somebody's flesh into
heaven,
 to never be lonesome again.

Aw, you must get
 tired up there, those crummy wings & you
 don't look good in marble.
You can climb
 down now, girl I
 like you more in person. I
 willed you there. I
 nailed you there:
forgive me.

Dennis Lee

Ramble, On Intimacy

Propinquity is the explanation why
 We need God: straw in the crib
 And cows chawing cud and the spider
 Spinning intricacies on the corner beam,
 Mazda's burnishing growth, sesame
 Sprouting, Dionysus' moist
 Warmth groped — nearness, palpable
 To fingers, herehold. Speculate
 Concerning the Holy Ghost: who
 Can engulf, sit upstairs and think
 Into control zipping suns, lightyear
 Quasars? He'd neet a seat nowhere
 To get a perspective or else He is
 It. How then create it if
 He is it? And physics won't do,
 Electro, astral or dish-antennae
 Listening with their ears until
 They're blue in the rims, we won't accept it.
 Who got there first, who was is what
 We want who set the blaze, lit
 The fuse and blew the equation, jounced
 The primordial hot potato thirty
 Times the sun and tossed the thing,
 The purlieus of heaven singed silly,
 Mind-boggling light from the Big Bang,
 Stars all over creation. But intimate.
 Distance is for the birds. What
 We want's someone close to nail
 To a cross, Orpheus out of Hell

No looking back, or Moses soaking
 His feet following a hard pull
 Up and down Sinai, not pulsars
 Pulsing in space. Ghost and substance
 Both, of course, is the answer—but stars
 Out first, at least they are, look
 In your telescope and photograph
 The stuff, celestial but real as marbles.
 God is intimate doings, jackpots
 Of bells, tadpoles into frogs—
 Part of the same dumbshow process
 But certainly nothing's as good as Jesus
 Come down from His fish-fry to take
 A breather with Martha, smelling of must
 After a hot day on the Mount.

Ralph Gustafson

Cathedral Window

Sun shines on glazed glass
 Translucent with fire, crimson lashes
 Strike the stone paving,

Light which was before the perception of it
 Who built this cathedral, the stained window
 Needing suffering,

Noah hammering a plank and Jesse
 With a tree in him, naked Christ
 Handsome walking water.

Ralph Gustafson

Black Holes and Beethoven — for Harold Schonberg

Black holes in heaven and Beethoven
In his room, the broken strings of the piano
Shouting deafness, the meadow somewhere
Out the window, beyond the stair,
Notebook, theme and error on
Its own, eardrum, hammer done with
Which is no news and he almost,
Tapped, punctured, drained, half
A step from heaven. Meanwhile, Karl,
Juniper tea and the Tenth in his head—
In heaven, black holes outside
In, back to eternity again!
God is His own question. A canon
Only against mortality:
Das Thor dem Todt. Note hilft.
Note hilft auch aus der Not.

Ralph Gustafson

Moving its Train

Moving its train past every dozing spectre
 the spiral, an undertow oscillating
 — tedious loop of piqued libido — a tether
 returning to an undisclosed centre.

A dangling convolvulus of silver
 the land eel in sartorial moon glow
 snares the mind's bruised apple,
 towed back to Eden, & green hygiene.

Joe Rosenblatt

The Spasmodic Eel Sloughs Off Pure Skin

The spasmodic eel sloughs off pure skin
 —amorous sheath with legs trimmed off—
 frost settles on limbs, pain, & kin.
 He hears a lower voice in the water trough:
 'Who lopped my branches on His Behalf?
 May fiery opals ripen, prosper, & oppress—
 Let venomous spittle corrupt sweet flesh,
 O split tongue, darken my last seraph!

Joe Rosenblatt

The Shadow of the Heart

is perhaps black.
There's a fault, a crack;
nothing is appeasable

our eternal shortness of existence
ensures it.

The heart is functional,
a performer. Its shadow
eschews respectability
sings blues, sings blues

The Black Saint and The Sinner Lady
a split audience of two

heart, a tired waltz
shadow, a jazz funeral.

I Got Rhythm
I Got Rhythm

That's my nigger!
That's my nigger!

Susan Musgrave

One More Lyric, One More

For Patrick Lane

I fail, we all fail —
 that's the morality of it.
 We don't know how to love,
 we make a career of it.

Richard says I write in symbols.
 Patrick smashes another glass.
 Poetry has never been anything
 but trouble; we hurt because of it.

The glass cuts; Richard says
 blood is symbolic.
 I say it's real.
 Wounds don't heal; scars are evidence.

We don't know how to die,
 we make an art of it.
 Patrick says we're in trouble anyway.
 It's Winnipeg, it's winter.

We don't have much to say,
 words betray pain.
 It's late. There's snow.
 In bars up the Coast we cursed the rain.

Susan Musgrave

A White Book Lies Open

A white book lies open
on the Pope's coffin.

Oh, my God! Look
a page rises
like a ghost in a shroud.

It stands upright,
sways,
 falls
forward
 and is still.

As if the dead had risen
to draw one last
terrible breath.

We call this
the wind's doing.

You would have run,
run and knelt to read,
my ancestors.

Alden Nowlan

I'm Simply Walking

I'm simply walking,
I think. Or standing there.
I'm not afraid, which means
the homicidal maniac must be dead.

I can't tell where I am
but that is only because
there's been no reason
for me to ask myself
what place is this?
As yet, nothing
horrible has happened.

I'm simply walking, except
I'm not a man,
I'm a woman.

The extraordinary thing
about this is
it's of no importance.

Perhaps that's because
there's nobody else here.

I put one foot in front
of the other
and think no more
about being a woman
than a woman would.

If I'm wearing a dress,
well, what of it, I must be
accustomed to dresses.
It's nothing at all like
putting on your sister's
panties and her frock
when you were twelve
if you ever did
and wanting to be seen
but, please God,
never recognized.

Watch me, Sir
Looking Glass!
See me twirl
like a daisy!

Thinking, then, how
awful it must be
to bleed like that.

Alden Nowlan

Fisherman in Snow

blurred figure
who in the blank eye
of the lake

knows nothing
of the latest news

his line
runs elsewhere, probes
the underside

invisible
of the noisy world

there, proleptic
he picks up
the tremor of scales, rainbows

moving, or
removed

hears without hearing return
the omnivorous
static of the snow

D. G. Jones

It Is No Explosion on Krypton

sends snow now avalanching
from roofs, and slabs
of crystal like industrial waste

tumbling from eaves, merely
the mild weather. Thus
shall the meek inherit the earth

quietly, some almost colourless
woman amid the ruin of diamonds
bring us to our senses, lake

fields, sky, though seemingly bloodless, be one
placenta for a roof and trees.
Superman we do not need.

D. G. Jones

A Game of Blocks

Sir, it's no bloody wonder
you stop and stare at this man sitting
before you on the sidewalk,
moving four plastic containers
milk bottle are packed in
back and forth in front of him,
as if they were somehow
the wooden toy blocks of his childhood,
this one an "O", this one a "F",
the third one an "L",
the last one another "O".

And sooner or later
by the grave of averages,
he'll have them in the right order
and they'll spell out
once and forever his past, present, future:

"FOOL"

Raymond Souster

Saturday A.M. Blues

That pair of half-drunk
 or half-drugged kids in their over-charged sports-car,
 make their last wheel-squealing turn, last drag-strip roar
 from the Crescent to the Avenue
 more than five minutes ago, so I take it
 they've either crashed somewhere or else gone to bed
 in one of the Baby Point Mansions.
 (Thank goodness this part of the street's
 closed for repairs, but I don't suppose
 that would have really stopped them
 if they'd set their minds on racing it!)

Now if I can get my tag-tinkling cat
 now pussy-footing through the house to curl up
 beside her mistress again, dream her life-long dream
 of catching a back-garden squirrel . . .
 and if
 my headache pills work this time, and the pain in my left
 eye
 fades away so I drift back into sleep, Saturday may still seem
 a good day in a few more hours.

Until then it's only a toss-up,
 and I've been calling heads
 and watching it come down tails
 too many times in the past month, with of course the slightest
 hint
 of a raspberry blown somewhere on the most discreet
 of fate trumpets . . .

Raymond Souster