

Fruit Fly

As fountains drained beneath
ancient basilica spectacles,
I inhaled the chaos of frescos

with a bronze *belle donne* on my arm,
the fruit flies were having their way
with the trash I forgot to empty

before I left. They bred in the soft
apples and black bananas of the bin,
formed a halo above the trash,

at the mouth of the sink, the head
of the shower, the calcified pit of the drain.
I used the hem of a blue *Italia* t-shirt

to cover my face as I sprayed
the final inch of Raid from its tall poison can.
Some fell / some linger

as rhythms of work reassemble
and suck me dutifully in. While showering
dust from the Monday softball double header,

enwreathed in orange blossom / ginger
shampoo, one curious fruit fly tapping dumbly
in the corner of the stall. I dry and hang

my damp blue towel from the curtain rod
and see him again, tapping at the mirror.
Slow and deliberate, I point to the final fruit fly

and wonder if he was the last egg hatched
or the steadfast of the bunch, toughest,
unwilling to abandon what times might be had

in the universe of a garden apartment.
Brushing my teeth, bending to spit
in the newly clean space of the drain, I am

struck with the small pangs of guilt: the mark
he leaves upon the world: paltry, underwhelmed,
as I press him casually into the glass.

Salt Peanuts

for Dizzy Gillespie

I tried to make you more man than you were
primitive suggestion. Peanuts, irregular

in the jukebox, in red plastic bowls atop
the bar beside the showering train. Pointillism

is the closest we've come to truth: pin pricks of vibration
in the waving banks of La Grande Jatte.

Even so, it's the space between points that fills
with flecks of marble Michelangelo shaved

for a mother's great encumbrance. Young men beg
to see Heaven & Rome before they're gone. Go on,

I forgive you. Man or ghost / primitive or else.
Great chasms open in the limestone of blinding

abstraction. The space between walls is hard
as Dizzy's palm against the rock, cheeks full of pigment –

big like he's blowing a horn – spit against the back
of his hand: spray of toxic manganese, crimson black,

contrasting sparks, making marks along the cavern face
between the cavern's ravenous teeth: wild human rhythm.

▣ Shepherd's Purse

Fill me with stones, she said, ring my green bell-
bonnet, fluff my prick-leaves. Touch yourself, *capsella*

bursa-pastoris, then recoil. Pull back the cream
venetian blinds, set free the window of what comes

next, you garden hoe, edging the garden, intuiting
spades, root-face, take your place at the blackberry hilt,

fill me with your mother's heart. It's very common.
There are dead things here you see and some dead only

not yet. Tease the soil, quarry one small gold bit
from the footprint of a stone cherub. Stir this, honeybee

with a thistle then sting. Split things whistle as wind
impairs, fills my eyes with cat-tongue kisses. You,

roaming shepherd, fill your purse with anything hard –
sing me a fortune, she said, you're heavier set with devotion.

▣ Pigeon in the Elm Tree at Buckingham Fountain

Curdled bobbing, in a way, or so it seems
as the pigeon's startled manner parts the branches.

Come with me

the wind says careening on Lake Michigan's briny tongue

but it's better to sit with your bare feet

on the ledge, I decide, and think once again of my father
coming home with whatever's left

of a bloody prime rib

safe in a cardboard box, disheartened at the lack
of dog reacting spastically on the patterned entry rug

as he shuffles in, sets his keys

on the table near the door.

Small wind rippling the reflection of the fountain –
a camera aimed at the monitor where its own reception

is projected: mirror of a mirror in a hallway

where the doors sway like cattails edging a marshland

where the greatest concern is bugs

and the bugs' greatest concern is the song of other bugs.

The pigeon braves winter in the elm tree, dreaming of concrete

since it's impossible to mark an immaterial world

with what's gone through you. Buckingham expectorant, come
down now, you're apparent, you're April's summoned rain.

There is a man who works for the city, whose job it is to collect
pennies from the fountain, another shovels birds from the street,

(those birds who've collided with buildings)

and one who wanders waist deep in the lake to find the spring.

In Deference

At birth they had to cut him free
from a hip cavern, his mother's agony
heavily sedated as blue light flooded the room.

In the room beyond the room of blue light,
rose walls, gilded mirrors, a framed Lautrec
lithograph, he listens for the churning wash –

same light, different room, different time, same boy
waits to switch the laundry before heading off
to work. His father on his knees, patching scars

the dog has left in the door. A new plan sketched
in his notebook, books of poetry and incomplete
graduate applications. There has to be something more

to the story of the Ingenious Gentleman, Don Quixote,
fat on the shelf among other disappointments. To his mother
he's the best that's ever been: green-eyed, brilliant.

Then came the hottest July since 1895, when the corn quit
growing, bubbled up in lopsided rows like the dotted
smile of the man who showed the boy how to field dress

a doe. When he slides the knife through her abdomen
he choked at the sight of a greased fawn hoof, twitching
as he retched in the leaves. The old man leered and bared

yellow teeth and leaned against the mangled knot
of a bending birch and gripped his gut as if it were
the funniest damn thing he'd seen. The boy fainted

and woke in obsidian. The tree-line shook with stars.
He began to understand lessons reserved for those
who had not spent the day napping in the shade.

When the churning stopped the coffee he was drinking
went cold, then the dog died and it snowed. It's all passed
and cast in that blue light touching everything the same.

▣ The Stranger

after Rilke

Earthly plans made luminous by oil
lamps in rosy corners of an afternoon
alone with tea & lemon. The stranger appears

before prints pattern the snow. Cluster of tear
drop berries, red & rime coated, define poisons
in the making. An old man uses a wire brush

to scrape the grill, breath spiriting away
to join spirits leaving smoke stacks, open cups
& the wall beside the Laundromat, Blackhawk & Ash-

land. Spirit of the bus, spirit of the soup, spirit on the brink
of a lake smashing into mountains, making mountains.
The stranger & I pay close attention – he believes

he's losing me. There should be a flash of light
soon, southwest, yes, 4:18. *Patience seems to be
great as His strength.* Yes, you will have to wait,

though *the whole thing will only last a moment*
& there will come a time when you forget
what you heard. *Go to a young woman & tell her*

but very softly, "I want to live." Before your spirit
escapes, say to the stranger "I'm a buried rake
in a pile of my own leaves."

▣ What I Imagine was Something of Considerable Significance

*but what of the world is seen in looking at the earth
any more than the world's measure of minute to a rock*

–Ed Roberson

Purple t-shirts hung beside the Wildcat fleece,
quarter zip. Chocolate candies at the counter
coated in school colors: purple, white. Black
Tom, the Caucasian cashier, began to tell
the story of the night his girlfriend stole something
from his sock drawer. *Whap!* was the sound
he said her face made when he slapped it.

Ed said nothing as we sat together on the bench
by the plate in the rock in the garden to honor
the visit of H.R.H. Princess Diana, of Wales. Her
tour began here, near the paintable rock, which
was recruiting new Greeks in subtle shades of pink
and blue. Another plate in a rock nearby reads
On this Spot, in 1892, nothing happened.

Stock boy Brad said to Tom the teller, do you realize
what you're saying? *Whap!* he said again.
Brad set *A Conversation on Tolerance* in its place
beside *An Essay on Human Understanding* and tried to
align their spines in what seemed like order with
Some Thoughts Concerning Education. In another
section, *To See the Earth Before the End of the World*.

Ed said they were soldering desks in the basement
of University Hall, so it was nice to be outside.

The diner near campus played Mashed Potato Time
by Dee Dee Sharp,
which doesn't say much about anything
other than itself.

Ed and I began to tap our toes
as though music was a secret.

We shared a pack of peanut M&M's.

Passing Stones

Strained efforts of an old man cast above the window.
Chimney smoke, fragrant wood enwreathing a green lake
of bullfrog chirps and cricket whispers. Something like the sound
of healing. Long days stacking parts at the motorcycle plant
on the outskirts of Milwaukee. Fred Greiner on bass, slow jazzing
out of Montreal on free radio. The old man straining at the window,
unsure of what he heard and smelled and even felt, aware somehow
of the shrouded snow owl, questioning the night. Pale yellow spider,
moon spider, crawls along the exterior sill. The river running behind
his house won't shut its mouth, babbling over small fish and basalt
river rocks. And drowned things passed. He shuts his eyes. In certain
shadowy circles it's difficult to expect even the expected. Smell of
autumn rain and the whipping of rivets against the flagpole.
He cracks the window and listens to the bells across the river.