

Gillian Harding-Russell / FIVE POEMS AMNESIA: FOR CLAUDE JUTRA

Having written his way through worlds,
the old man wandered St. Catherine's Street
looking for what he'd missed along the way.

'I cannot enter the word
to its substance, so it is
little good to me now.
The substance, I want
now it is going
so fast,' he once
told a very close friend.

'I see the abstract street—
lines diagonal and perpendicular
moving; so terrifying before
by grainy sight

and

I am lost. It is too exciting
you know. To know
the substance without
the words.'

CLAUDE JUTRA'S NOTE

Claude Jutra gave up the dregs of his mind
for his soul, his soul
protesting, 'this is my body—incredible
but true': "I am Claude Jutra,"

let the world know.

Thoughts disoriented
out of sync, disposed
of, conveniently—*where there's a will, there's a way*
the self
rising out of a carcass of brain.

A friend now speculates, he didn't have it at all—the dreaded Alzheimer's;
when he stopped making films, he fed the squirrels more

(red paisley squiggles on grass)

Increasingly depressed, wanting
a change, the silence
between frames.

The St. Lawrence, mottled in grey ripples brown sparkles
like TV static, the perfect place
to drop everything

amorphous
looking for a new shape.

But
his films were the preview: Mon Oncle Antoine (himself)
dragging himself (the corpse)
across snow (tracks
obliterating tracks); the double signature
'me but not me.' Himself giving himself
a chance to explore crystal flakes
sharp-angled stars interstices
of the universe in galactic formation
at zero time.

YOU HAVE A WART

You have a wart, I notice.
Your grandmother says: Wrap the wart
in a strip of bacon fat overnight
(others say potato peel) bury it
in the ground afterwards. (I remind
you of this, your living grandmother's
wisdom told me before; but you
pretend to ignore me.)

Warts are a virus,
you tell me. Very scientific,
I say. My mother's mother
used to tell my mother in fun
sickness is the evil, coming out
of us. I like that better.
A skeletal horse in Childe Rolande
stands in a landscape of gnarled trees;
he must have been wicked to suffer so.

I have never met my grandmother
but remember an old brown photograph
worn at the edges, unstuck from the album.
She feeds small birds, perhaps sparrows
amongst flowers—foxgloves, sweet williams
and roses behind stiff raspberry canes
in an English country garden.
She died of tuberculosis.

As a child, I wept over the dead birds
lost in the glass—the glare
of window panes struck by sunlight.

In the springtime, we would pick their shattered
bodies off the ground, among bomb-shaped crocuses,
their little necks like corkscrews
bent sadly sideways
rigid leather only
left.

Nowadays

my heart is too cluttered
for small kindnesses.
I watch you thread your wart
through and through with a needle
(you remember doing this to an interesting
wart as a child) absentmindedly
to the fleshy, feelingless heart.

THE JOGGER

Along the gravel road pointed cedars
dark in the early dawn, the girl
forces herself to jog
from habit. We make
our own prisons, she jokes
with herself.

Jagged stones catch her feet
occasionally. I am out of shape
she thinks. I shouldn't
have had that last drink—the one
after the one thrown in my lap.

Birds begin to sing in the grey
before dawn. A crow's wings fingering
shadows of clouds behind the solid
black hands of branches

Approaching from the side
a mere boy, he looks
at first, so slight
in stature, crinkled
face, many lines
eddy around eyes opaque
as broken glass you can't
see through. He asks her the way
to Grouse street. Her jogging rhythm
broken, trying not to be
too irritable, she points over
her right shoulder towards
low mountain foothills when
he pulls a knife

just a shadow of pine or spruce
in her peripheral vision until it catches
a flash in the fading street light,
and she turns sharply.

Why am I so drawn
to see reconstruct
this scene traced around a thin
newsreel? Dream finds the scene
locked in a honeycomb cell
of the brain, shafted
by bitter bees.

How many other
brains do these same bees
inhabit—or do they
hibernate?

THE LIVING HOUSE

Last night we heard a small mouse
grow jaws in the dark,
sharpen his teeth on a steel pipe,
gnaw a hole in the rotting wood,
rock our little house
of bending planks and
collapsible walls.

When we moved in
the house was uninhabited, we thought.
Now we are aware of the night life.
The frog clicks his throat
outside the window playing
the ventriloquist's trick.
Was that your stomach
or my intestine?
We lie on the crooked floor
hearing the cock crow, drunkenly
false dawn, inspired
by a passing car.

In the grey morning light
flies crawl out of cracks in the plaster
and corners in the newly heated rooms,
take over our seeing windows
on the raging panes
rolling drops, a fleet
of sea-going planes
battling against us.

You play the hunter
batting them with a fly-swatter
while I am more thorough,
squeezing them against the dustpan,
a thin tissue of kleenex between me
and my fear. I tell you
I have seen these flies
that seem so unimportant to you
rise on rumpled wings, one-legged
monsters nourished on rain and mildew.
I have seen battalions growing
into bulldozers, taking over
our little house.

A fly on the window, again.
I have a sty
in my eye.