

David McFadden/EIGHT POEMS

A DATE WITH bpNICHOL

We had a date once.
He called at my place with his van.
We went to the movies.
We were early so we went into the bar next door.
We got everybody in the bar talking about the latest styles in digital watches.
Then we went to the movie.
It was Beverly Hills Cop.
We laughed so hard we hugged one another.
Then we went to Just Desserts for a well-deserved snack.
Then he drove me home.

He wasn't one of those vindictive poets you always hear about.
"He left me out of his anthology, I'm gonna get him for that if it's the last thing I do."
But he understood that kind of pettiness in others and tolerated it beautifully.

Now I find myself saying:
"What would Beep do in a situation like this?"
The answer is always the same:
"It's up to you, man."

EARTHQUAKE AND DROUGHT

Saturday night when we were driving home through southern Ontario another earthquake hit southern California, it was centred under the empty Rose Bowl. No one was injured but one fellow in the area shot himself in the foot. He thought his house was being burglarised.

In the Australian desert a kind of frog buries himself in the sand and secretes a second skin, a kind of bag for himself and he stays sealed up in the watertight bag for decades until the rains come again and then he punches his way out of the bag and climbs back up to the surface of the earth and starts hopping around, looking for mates.

Nothing exciting ever happens around here.

SHIVERING ON THE DOORSTEP

Now that I know my poems
will never be taken seriously
I can write anything I want,
even that in the spring or the fall
or whenever I sense there is a full
moon spilling liquid gold over the
New Denver glacier I become
nostalgic for the interior of B.C.
and is your little white cat still
shivering on the doorstep?

For D.H.

FOR MY BROTHER IRVING

I saw you having an argument
with a tall blonde woman
in front of the Native Peoples'
Centre on Spadina Road
and you looked so old. If you're
old can we be far behind?

You never published a book
in a year ending with a zero
until 1980 when you published
three. When we read your poetry
it seems that you have never had a
sensitive relationship with anyone,
poor man. But you're a true romantic
who does it first and writes about it later.
And maybe you deserve less attention
and more respect. You've given your life,
maybe you were right all along.
There's nothing ambiguous about you
except for your subtle ability
to hate and love the same person
at the same time, as we
love and hate you, as we
do not want to see you suffer,
do not want to think of you dying.

PORTRAIT OF YOU AS A LITTLE GIRL

Always I see you, when I think of it, standing,
alone, eyes dull and dry, finger in nose, thumb
in mouth, legs twisted awkwardly but consciously.
Little girls are terrible. Mary, who is a poet,
has a daughter, who is six, and who used to be
passably nice but has recently started to write
poetry and has become disgustingly self-cute.
So now Mary is going off to a poetry reading and asks
Emily if she wants to come along and Emily says
oh maybe I will, I might pick up some tips. Laughter.

Oh, I hate little girls. They stink, they're awful,
they're so conceited. But you, I always see you
as a blonde, pink child in a stained dress with your
nose running and your drawers thick and heavy
beneath the hem of your skirt, strange sadness,
long stick legs and arms and a strange perfection
surrounding you as a town surrounds a cathedral.
Your mother has died, you are standing there
conscious as you will ever be but mind dimly
virginal, unrippled, holy, still, snotty, stinky,
and this deep image of you is always with me,
in a way I think I'll never come to understand.

FEATHERSTONE POINT

If they ever make a movie of this book
I'd love to see the cook with the two empty pails
go gliding nonchalantly down the river on the log
flowing under the low bridge without even ducking
and unsmilingly nodding sometimes to people ashore.

Nicholas Temecoff and the nun are perfect, but I'd
have to close my eyes during the rescue scene,
it's not scary at all in the book but it would be on the
screen, like Keri Hulme not allowing a movie to be
made from her Bone People because of the child abuse.

It's okay in books but not in the movies. In the movie
there would be high irony in his not seeming to notice
that he has never heard her voice. And what's all this
about Featherstone Point (which is on Lake Erie, not
Lake Ontario)? Only I am allowed to talk about it.

For M.O.

TEN YEARS AGO

Bonnie says the number
nine is magic but can't
explain why. The New
Zealand kiwi's nostrils
are on the underside of
its beak. Easily
frightened people
seldom have nightmares.
Marilyn was a great singer.

If I were a painter I
would paint something
like Greg Curnoe.
Curnoe is the old word
for Cornwall. The old
Chinese man was
talking to two very tall
black men in a language
I didn't at first recognize.

The old Chinese man
took me aside and said:
"These guys are from
Panama. We're
speaking Spanish." I
was amazed. How did he
know I was wondering
what language they
were speaking?

He said he was born in
the Philippines. He said
he could speak
Cantonese, Mandarin,
Filipino, Spanish and
English. He said he
started learning
Japanese as a young
man but gave it up.

“Spanish verbs are very
hard,” he said. I phoned
my old friend Terry
whom I hadn’t seen in
ten years because
he moved to Powell
River. He was very
surprised to hear from
me. Wouldn’t you be?

He had a new wife and a
new truck for hauling
woodchips from the
saw mill to the pulp
mill. The ambiguity is
not intentional. He said
he had developed a
personal relationship
with Jesus Christ.

I told Terry his voice
had deepened and
reminded me a lot of
his father's. He was
surprised that I could
remember his father's
voice after all these
years. His father,
Nelson, died in 1959.

On February 23, 1979,
Geraldine Sinclair
introduced me to
Audrey Thomas. Robin
Blaser jumped to the
stage and called the
people who had been
heckling Victor
Coleman "limp dicks."

Terry said his sister,
Little Lavarre, had
three children and lived
in Calgary. And his
mother, Hilda,
remarried a nice man
and lived in Rosetown,
Saskatchewan. Rosetowns
are a girl's best friend.

For Bonnie Ericson

PERFECT AND SAD

Toronto today looks perfect and sad
as I walk through the Annex on the way to meet
Jennifer Oille at the Madison Avenue pub
and I know that if I just keep on walking
anywhere in the world I went today would look
perfect and sad.

Do not under any circumstances
put your hand in your pocket abruptly
when strangers are around,
it makes them nervous. I only learned this today
and I pass it on for what it's worth.

Also, with modern science and new-age nutrition
the average age of poets is continually increasing.
You might have noticed that before 1900 wars
were fought by men and after 1900 by boys.