

George Bowering / MUSING ON SOME POETS

Those poets, heads coming out of collars,
advised us, showed us how to hold paper and look good,
did we sometime grow tired of them, those
who lived for us,
died for us,
rotted under ground for us,
are still
so we may move.

Not friends, really, not teachers,
poets, whose names glittered when we were alone,
whose books dropped like gleaming newborn calves into our unsteady
hands,
did we read them as if pulling shavings off our souls,
never stepped out of the Pacific combers with shine on morning face,
never twisted body out of grip of coal giant ogre
save with inspiration of our poets,
and who knows what our
means?

What are we now besides older;
a young man newly graduated from university,
black gown still on him said I envy you and your friends,
you got to make the last ones,
there isnt anything to make now, or no one knows what there is.
I said it seems that way but there is always something,
and I showed him my teeth through yellow beer.

Do we old farts say thank you every genuflecting morning
to those poets with agate names who showed us their synapses?
Nowadays the young want us to love the earth,
And I never say out loud to them that my dear old people
Are columns of earth, walk around, sit in chairs,
discard cigarettes and write what's left of poems.
They were low lights between mountains visible
To the evening gaze, they were evaporate mornings,
They are not mulch but stones in the earth, they are not
specimens but the authors of words should be whispered inside a dark
bowl
from Siena.

I have no remaining skill for form,
just feel words jostle each other in doorways on the way out, sit here this
evening remembering a former life, I'm with friends
all lovely all restrained by hope, all agreed without saying so
—those poets gave us a way to waste our lives
saying useless things, smiling indulgently at each other's personal
diaspora,
carrying mismatched goodies on the way to the grave,
trip, fall into hole, write on dirt walls
a first and last sonnet,
solving all, coming to rest, combing hair, adjusting socks,
kissing no one but the image of Jesus, disbursing mind as if it were mer-
cury,
listening for the voices to arrive with the worms.

WOLF BETWEEN THE TREES

His wife, his wife,
his daughter, his daughter,
his granddaughter, her brother,
knelt in a circle
in huckleberry woods,
digging with fingers, under pine needles,
a small hole in which to place
smoking sweetgrass, optic moisture,
& by the grandson, his grandfather's ashes,
gray Douglas Woolf, fine at last,
poured from expensive plastic bag
removed from official metal box,
taken from out a brown grocery bag,
his usual appurtenance.

Fifty steps from here
he wrote accurate prose
in his favourite ramshackle cabin,

juncos rescued from the cat & buried
under bushes, small daughters
didn't know what they were
rehearsing, now

his favourite knitted cap
has a rock in it, thrown
far as can be into the woods

as they call them back in New England
where few people came
to know he was from, gone
back there as well as here, wouldnt
you say?

Now the women have a picnic,
sitting close as they can to the wolf in the woods,
huckleberry cider, jack cheese, bean & chile spread,
nothing from Europe, songs from mountain folk,
holed up in dark city, sitting firm
on clear prose, tears in all their eyes,
smiles on their faces, smoke from the sweetgrass,
no airliners in the sky, no
mote in that eye.

Below Nine Mile Creek, in Wallace,
Idaho it is 99 degrees. An old man in a see-through hat
leaned on the wall outside a bar.

I said when does it warm up? He replied
moving nothing but his toothpick,
wait till next winter.

Doug will be up there next winter,
no romance, no spooks, meaning
no, he will not be writing a story, that is
over. If you want to visit, use your fingers,
open a book,
dig.

NORWEGIAN LINES

Lars showed me
the grand boulevard
downtown Oslo.

They were making
artificial ice
for skating on.

How wonderful
imagination
upside down.

Lars told me
turn Norway over
it reaches Rome.

Norse get lost
finding hotels
or far continents.

These lucky leaves
home in Oslo
crunch underfoot.

Lars found me
a downstairs bar
with dark brown beer.

Eating peanuts
dark November
how delightful.

It's a saga
told in minutes
Sonja Henie.

WINTER 1975. Vancouver

All these visits when the earth seems
to tilt away,

 now, for instance in Cuba,
we are all in green or brown fatigues
and the sun is down, we
simply lie on the ground, young
men and women, to sleep.

Strength.
To endure.

But in the small university classroom
a middle-aged female professor
and a middle-aged male professor
urge their sociology on us,
standing up clean, big clean eyeglasses.
Explaining the young revolutionaries.

Buy.
That makes me mad.

I'd rather lose something
and slowly come to realize
it's gone.