

Poems

Tim Terhaar

Ode to Autumn

Autumn is the season I like best.

I am truly capable of flourishing in autumn.

Future lovers come to me then.

They approach me on the train and at the park and they reply to me online.

No day is as good for walking as an autumn day.

The sun clings low to the sky, and the wind occasionally tests the leaves still on the trees while rearranging those that have fallen.

Whatever is not gentle is not autumn, is either summer's protest or winter's petition.

The seeds of maples spin on the wind, and there is nothing as soft and golden as this afternoon.

It is hardly possible, on such an afternoon, to wonder what unseen desecration, what concealed annihilation, is being wrought upon the spirits that make a season what it is.

It is almost inconceivable, in light of autumn's reverie, that men are at this moment engaged in felling whole forests, dredging up the creatures of the sea, and releasing great plumes of poison into the ether.

The Enlightened

On one wall of the room, a sheet of paper bearing the following inscription has been tacked up: "David Lynch's Vedic definition of the Enlightened: / Softer than the flower where kindness is concerned, / Stronger than the thunder where principles are at stake."

Below it hangs a sheet that reads: "When are principles not at stake? When is kindness not concerned? / These two demands sometimes conflict."

A third sheet, taped to the side of the second, continues: "Or is the point that the enlightened are capable of simultaneous kindness and strength? / To be always a thunderous flower! A floral thunder!"

All I Have to Do Is Dream

i.

I feed a koala some strawberries and oats from a Ziploc bag.

After a while, she loses her appetite for berries and oats and looks up at me, imploring.

She clings to my leg and I drag her across the room, wishing I were rid of her insatiable desire.

I make one last attempt to assuage her before lying down on the floor and covering my face with my hands.

When I finally look around, she's gone to search for what will nourish her.

I take a book from the shelf and read a line: my sky is black with small birds bearing south.

A crow alights on my head and pours quicksilver into my eyes.

A transgender woman is beaten to death in Harlem.

A 10,000-year-old tree is identified in Sweden.

A drought hits Australia.

Koalas beg for water in the streets, drink from swimming pools, and enter homes, where humans give them what they need.

ii.

“Are you aware—”

He pulls the trigger.

“—that your gun’s not loaded?”

He curses.

I hand him a bullet.

He loads it into the chamber, pulls the hammer back with his thumb, and points the gun at his temple where it pointed before.

“Are you aware—”

He pulls the trigger.

For a few moments, I stand transfixed.

Finally, the dead man’s guardian angel appears.

“Itching to make yourself useful, were you?” she says.

“I’m willing to try anything to save a doomed world.”

The angel snorts.

“You know yourself, right?” she says.

“I’ve been staring at screens so long I no longer recognize the emotions on my own face when I look in the mirror.”

Knowing that angels are big enough for exactly one feeling, I can see that she’s all wariness.

“Did you know that all-white juries are 16% more likely to convict a black defendant than a white defendant, but that the presence of a single black person in the jury pool equalizes conviction by race?” she says.

“I know that if I don’t see a miracle, I should believe it.”

“Who are your people?” she says.

iii.

I'm stupefying myself with drink one night when a dove of searing white light enters my room through the open window.

"You knocked over my succulents!" I say.

The dove is altogether too bright for comfort and I begin to worry I might throw up.

An intonation: "Be still!"

So I am.

When I look again, I see that the dove has become an ordinary pixie.

"What's your problem?" he says.

"I don't know. I've tortured some folks."

"Nothing unusual there. I see I've caught you with stolen meat in your pants—a talisman, I'm sure."

I wait for him to continue.

"Are you trying to attract the last man on earth or something? Do you want to lure him into your mouth?"

To my surprise, I proceed to wet myself.

The pixie squirms so that I know he wants to touch me with his lips.

"That's all right," he says. "Go ahead and set the couch on fire."

"What, you mean start a fire in my room?"

"Better to set a fire in your gut."

The pixie forms an inscrutable expression as I take a steady draft of poison.

I gasp more than 600 times before he saves my life.

FIRST VARIATION ON ROUD #19798

The rose is blue.
The violet's red.
Sugar is white,
And so is dread.

SECOND VARIATION ON ROUD #19798

The tuna's blue.
The lobster's red.
It's dinnertime;
They must be dead.