

Beauty, Humor, and Hope: an On-Line Poetry Workshop
Sunday, November 4th, 2-4 pm
sponsored by the Orange County Public Library
in Hillsborough, NC

Dear Writers,

I'm thrilled to be hosting you this Sunday, November 13th, from 2-4 pm for a craft workshop on writing poems of beauty, humor, and hope. This packet contains the poems we'll be studying on Sunday. You're welcome to read them in advance, or you may choose to wait and see them for the first time during the workshop, whichever you think will better serve you. During our time together, I'll discuss the techniques the poets used in crafting their work and offer ways to use the poems as jumping-off points for our own writing. As always, any prompts I offer when we begin writing will be optional.

Please note that a second session using different poems will be offered on Sunday, December 4th from 2-4 pm. *You must sign up separately for the second workshop*, so if you haven't done that and would like to, please go to the library's Events Calendar to do so. It's not necessary to be present at the first workshop in order to participate in the second, so if you know someone who missed this one but would like to attend in December, please share the registration information with them.

Many thanks to library staff members Jody Smith, Adult and Teen Services Supervisor, and Kafi Allah, Adult and Teen Services Coordinator, for their work in making this class available. We're very lucky to have them at the library.

See you all on Sunday!
Pam Baggett

Patience

Call it sloth; call it sleaze;
call it bummery if you please;
I'll call it patience;
I'll call it joy, this,
my supine congress
with the newly yawning grass
and beetles chittering
in their offices
beneath me, as I
nearly drifting to dream
admire this so-called weed which,
if I guarded with teeth bared
my garden of all alien breeds,
if I was all knife and axe
and made a life of hacking
would not have burst gorgeous forth and beckoning
these sort of phallic spires
ringleted by these sort of vaginal blooms
which the new bees, being bees, heed;
and yes, it is spring, if you can't tell
from the words my mind makes
of the world, and everything
makes me mildly or more
hungry—the worm turning
in the leaf mold; the pear blooms
howling forth their pungence
like a choir of wet-dreamed boys
hiking up their skirts; even
the neighbor cat's shimmy
through the grin in the fence,
and the way this bee
before me after whispering
in my ear dips her head
into those dainty lips
not exactly like one entering a chapel
and friends
as if that wasn't enough
blooms forth with her forehead dusted gold
like she has been licked
and so blessed
by the kind of God
to whom this poem is prayer.

The Same City

For James L. Hayes

The rain falling on a night
in mid-December,
I pull to my father's engine
wondering how long I'll remember
this. His car is dead. He connects
jumper cables to his battery,
then to mine without looking in
at me and the child. Water beads
on the windshields, the road sign,
his thin blue coat. I'd get out now,
prove I can stand with him
in the cold, but he told me to stay
with the infant. I wrap her
in the blanket, staring
for what seems like a long time
into her open, toothless mouth,
and wish she was mine. I feed her
an orange softened first in my mouth,
chewed gently until the juice runs
down my fingers as I squeeze it
into hers. What could any of this matter
to another man passing on his way
to his family, his radio deafening
the sound of water and breathing
along all the roads bound to his?
But to rescue a soul is as close
as anyone comes to God.
Think of Noah lifting a small black bird
from its nest. Think of Joseph,
raising a son that wasn't his.

Let me begin again.
I want to be holy. In rain
I pull to my father's car
with my girlfriend's infant.
She was eight weeks pregnant when we met.
But we'd make love. We'd make
love below stars and shingles

(no stanza break)

while her baby kicked between us.
Perhaps a man whose young child
bears his face, whose wife waits
as he drives home through rain
& darkness, perhaps that man
would call me a fool. So what.

There is one thing I will remember
all my life. It is as small
& holy as the mouth
of an infant. It is speechless.

When his car would not stir,
my father climbed in beside us,
took the orange from my hand,
took the baby in his arms.

In 1974, this man met my mother
for the first time as I cried or slept
in the same city that holds us
tonight. If you ever tell my story,
say that's the year I was born.

why i feed the birds

once

i saw my grandmother hold out
her hand cupping a small offering
of seed to one of the wild sparrows
that frequented the bird bath she
filled with fresh water every day

she stood still
maybe stopped breathing
while the sparrow looked
at her, then the seed
then back as if he was
judging her character

he jumped into her hand
began to eat
she smiled

a woman holding
a small god

Trophic Cascade

After the reintroduction of gray wolves to Yellowstone and, as anticipated, their culling of deer, trees grew beyond the deer stunt of the mid century. In their up reach songbirds nested, who scattered seed for underbrush, and in that cover warrened snowshoe hare. Weasel and water shrew returned, also vole, and came soon hawk and falcon, bald eagle, kestrel, and with them hawk shadow, falcon shadow. Eagle shade and kestrel shade haunted newly-berried runnels where mule deer no longer rummaged, cautious as they were, now, of being surprised by wolves. Berries brought bear, while undergrowth and willows, growing now right down to the river, brought beavers, who dam. Muskrats came to the dams, and tadpoles. Came, too, the night song of the fathers of tadpoles. With water striders, the dark gray American dipper bobbed in fresh pools of the river, and fish stayed, and the bear, who fished, also culled deer fawns and to their kill scraps came vulture and coyote, long gone in the region until now, and their scat scattered seed, and more trees, brush, and berries grew up along the river that had run straight and so flooded but thus dammed, compelled to meander, is less prone to overrun. Don't you tell me this is not the same as my story. All this life born from one hungry animal, this whole, new landscape, the course of the river changed, I know this. I reintroduced myself to myself, this time a mother. After which, nothing was ever the same.

Mountain Dew Commercial Disguised as a Love Poem

So here's what I've got, the reasons why our marriage might work: Because you wear pink but write poems about bullets and gravestones. Because you yell at your keys when you lose them, and laugh, loudly, at your own jokes. Because you can hold a pistol, gut a pig. Because you memorize songs, even commercials from thirty years back and sing them when vacuuming. You have soft hands. Because when we moved, the contents of what you packed were written inside the boxes. Because you think swans are overrated and kind of stupid. Because you drove me to the train station. You drove me to Minneapolis. You drove me to Providence. Because you underline everything you read, and circle the things you think are important, and put stars next to the things you think I should think are important, and write notes in the margins about all the people you're mad at and my name almost never appears there. Because you made that pork recipe you found in the Frida Kahlo Cookbook. Because when you read that essay about Rilke, you underlined the whole thing except the part where Rilke says love means to deny the self and to be consumed in flames. Because when the lights are off, the curtains drawn, and an additional sheet is nailed over the windows, you still believe someone outside can see you. And one day five summers ago, when you couldn't put gas in your car, when your fridge was so empty—not even leftovers or condiments—there was a single twenty-ounce bottle of Mountain Dew, which you paid for with your last damn dime because you once overheard me say that I liked it.

Love Song of the Bat with Vertigo

Oh your hair! How I long to stroke your hair with the tip of my wing like the giant in that book about mice and men, so I escape your attic, a mouse with wings, soaring above the mousetraps smeared with peanut butter in your kitchen. You shriek at me and hand the giant standing next to you a bat, not a bat like me, but a bat for hitting baseballs, now a bat to hit bats, so I sail high and away, four times around the room, a fastball slipping from the hand of the sweaty pitcher who puts the tying run on first in the ninth inning. You toss the giant a bucket to catch me, and suddenly I am incarcerated up against the wall, so I beat my wings inside the bucket the way a drummer improvises a solo, a song for you that silences the chatter in the nightclub. The bucket dumps me into the night air, a bat with vertigo, and I flap away upside down, searching the darkness for the light glimmering from your hair, like the waterfall in that cave where all good bats go to die.

Romantic Moment

After seeing the nature documentary we walk down Canyon Road,
onto the plaza of art galleries and high end clothing stores

where the orange trees are fragrant in the summer night
and the smooth adobe walls glow fleshlike in the dark.

It is just our second date, and we sit down on a bench,
holding hands, not looking at each other,

and if I were a bull penguin right now I would lean over
and vomit softly into the mouth of my beloved

and if I were a peacock I'd flex my gluteal muscles to
erect and spread the quills of my Cinemax tail.

If she were a female walkingstick bug she might
insert her hypodermic probiscus directly into my neck

and inject me with a rich hormonal sedative
before attaching her egg sac to my thoracic undercarriage,

and if I were a young chimpanzee I would break off a nearby tree limb
and smash all the windows in the plaza jewelry stores.

And if she was a Brazilian leopard frog she would wrap her impressive
tongue three times around my right thigh and

pummel me softly against the surface of our pond
and I would know her feelings were sincere.

Instead we sit awhile in silence, until
she remarks that in the relative context of tortoises and iguanas,

human males seem to be actually rather expressive.
And I say that female crocodiles really don't receive

enough credit for their gentleness,
Then she suggests that it is time for us to go

do something personal, hidden, and human.

Man Listening To Disc

This is not bad --
ambling along 44th Street
with Sonny Rollins for company,
his music flowing through the soft calipers
of these earphones,
as if he were right beside me
on this clear day in March,
the pavement sparkling with sunlight,
pigeons fluttering off the curb,
nodding over a profusion of bread crumbs.
In fact, I would say
my delight at being suffused
with phrases from his saxophone --
some like honey, some like vinegar --
is surpassed only by my gratitude
to Tommy Potter for taking the time
to join us on this breezy afternoon
with his most unwieldy bass
and to the esteemed Arthur Taylor
who is somehow managing to navigate
this crowd with his cumbersome drums.
And I bow deeply to Thelonious Monk
for figuring out a way
to motorize -- or whatever -- his huge piano
so he could be with us today.
This music is loud yet so confidential.
I cannot help feeling even more
like the center of the universe
than usual as I walk along to a rapid
little version of "The Way You Look Tonight,"
and all I can say to my fellow pedestrians,
to the woman in the white sweater,
the man in the tan raincoat and the heavy glasses,
who mistake themselves for the center of the universe --
all I can say is watch your step,
because the five of us, instruments and all,
are about to angle over
to the south side of the street
and then, in our own tightly knit way,

(no stanza break)

turn the corner at Sixth Avenue.
And if any of you are curious
about where this aggregation,
this whole battery-powered crew,
is headed, let us just say
that the real center of the universe,
the only true point of view,
is full of hope that he,
the hub of the cosmos
with his hair blown sideways,
will eventually make it all the way downtown.