

Why I Am a Poet

By Donald Caswell

I am a poet. I am not a carpenter. Sometimes I think I would rather be a carpenter, but I am not. For instance, Gene, my carpenter friend, is building a house. I drop in. He gives me a hammer and says, "Start pounding." I pound; we pound. I look up. "Where's the roof?" "I'm not that far, yet," he says. I go and the days go by and I drop in again. The roof is up and I go and the days go by and I start a poem. I am thinking of stars and I write a poem about stars. I grab a typewriter and start pounding. Soon there are pages, acres of words about stars and the coffee is gone, so I go to a restaurant. And I buy a beer and the woman next to me tells me how she was raped by her stepfather when she was twelve, so she ran away with an ex-con who got popped again for cocaine and left her pregnant, so she married a GI and moved to Germany, where the baby died of kidney failure, so she came home to live with her mother. And I drink a lot of beers. Then I go outside and lie in a vacant lot looking up at the stars, thinking how many they are and what a wonderful poem they would make. And I fall asleep with a beer in my hand. In the morning, the beer, the stars, and my wallet are gone, so I go to see Gene, and the house is finished. A family is living there, and they show me their dog. There are flowers blooming; cabbage is cooking in the kitchen. So I go home and write another poem. And one day Gene drops in. He looks at the poem and now it is twelve poems, all neatly stacked and ready to be read and he asks, "Where are the stars?" And I say, "I'm not that far yet."

Poetry is a Destructive Force by Wallace Stevens

That's what misery is,
Nothing to have at heart.
It is to have or nothing.
It is a thing to have,
A lion, an ox in his breast,
To feel it breathing there.

Corazon, stout dog,
Young ox, bow-legged bear,
He tastes its blood, not spit.

He is like a man
In the body of a violent beast.
Its muscles are his own.. .

The lion sleeps in the sun.
Its nose is on its paws.
It can kill a man.

I Leave Bits of Me Everywhere
by Karen Swank-Fitch

poem-words are my clothing, stripped late at night
a trail from the threshold to the foot of bed
along the stairs lay verbs
the actions i need to climb twelve steps at 2 am
a vowel left adjacent to toothbrush
i get sloppy with tartar and allusions
over the cornice of mirror, hangs a strand of pearly metaphors
a simile in my sink
a limerick needing to be laundered
the clothes hamper is full of rimes & meters in want of mending
kick off the shoes,
make a pile of cacophony
wrap myself in the plum flannel of sonnet
hair up-tied with haiku
find the resting place for naked poet...
in ambiance i light a candle
a sestina goes up in flames.

The Poet, Trying to Surprise God
by Peter Meinke

The poet, trying to surprise his God
composed new forms from secret harmonies,
tore from his fiery vision galaxies
of unrelated shapes, both even & odd.
But God just smiled, and gave His know-all nod
saying, "There's no surprising One who sees
the acorn, root, and branch of centuries;
I swallow all things up, like Aaron's rod.
So hold this thought beneath your poet-bonnet:
no matter how free-seeming flows your sample
God is by definition the unsurprised."
"Then I'll return," the poet sighed, "to sonnets
of which this is a rather pale example."

"Is that right?" said God. "I hadn't realized...."

The Thought Fox
by Ted Hughes

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
Something else is alive
Besides the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.
Through the window I see no star:
Something more near
Though deeper within darkness
Is entering the loneliness:

Cold, delicately as the dark snow,
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow
Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come

Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business

Till, with sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
The page is printed.

The Questions Poems Ask
by Lawrence Raab
from *The Probable World*

Watching a couple of crows
playing around in the woods, swooping
in low after each other, I wonder
if they ever slam into the trees.
There's an answer here, unlike
most questions in poems,
which are left up in the air.
Was it a vision or a waking dream?

You decide, says the poet.
You do some of this work,
but think carefully.
Some people want to believe

poetry is anything
they happen to feel. That way
they're never wrong. Others yearn
for the difficult:

insoluble problems, secret codes
not meant to be broken.
Nobody, they've discovered,
ever means what he says.

But rarely does a crow
hit a tree, though other, clumsier birds
bang into them all the time, and we say
these birds have not adapted well

to the forest environment.
Frequently stunned, they become
easy prey for the wily fox,
who's learned how to listen

for that snapping of branches
and collapsing of wings,
who knows where to go
and what to do when he gets there.

The Writer
by Richard Wilbur

In her room at the prow of the house
Where light breaks, and the windows are tossed with linden,
My daughter is writing a story.
I pause in the stairwell, hearing
From her shut door a commotion of typewriter-keys
Like a chain hauled over a gunwale.

Young as she is, the stuff
Of her life is a great cargo, and some of it heavy..
I wish her a lucky passage.

But now it is she who pauses,
As if to reject my thought and its easy figure.
A stillness greatens, in which

The whole house seems to be thinking,
And then she is at it again with a bunched clamor
Of strokes, and again is silent.

I remember the dazed starling
Which was trapped in that very room, two years ago;
How we stole in, lifted a sash

And retreated, not to affright it;
And how for a helpless hour, through the crack of the door,
We watched the sleek, wild, dark

And iridescent creature
Batter against the brilliance, drop like a glove
To the hard floor, or the desk-top,

And wait then, humped and bloody,
For the wits to try it again; and how our spirits
Rose when, suddenly sure,

It lifted off from a chair-back,
Beating a smooth course for the right window
And clearing the sill of the world.

It is always a matter, my darling,
Of life or death, as I had forgotten. I wish
What I wished you before, but harder.

The Secret of Poetry
By Jon Anderson

When I was lonely, I thought of death.
When I thought of death I was lonely.

I suppose this error will continue.
I shall enter each grey morning

Delighted by frost, which is death,
& the trees that stand alone in mist.

When I met my wife I was lonely.
Our child in her body is lonely.

I suppose this error will go on and on.
Mornings I kiss my wife's cold lips,

Nights her body, dripping with mist.
This is the error that fascinates.

I suppose you are secretly lonely,
Thinking of death, thinking of love.

I'd like, please, to leave on your sill
Just one cold flower, whose beauty

Would leave you inconsolable all day
The secret of poetry is cruelty.