

The Physical World: A Selection of Seven Poems

by Mary Clark

Parking

from *Ploughshares*

I got to know what was soft
and where the hard parts were

in that upholstered bedroom.
Every headlight was a worry.

I kept my clothes as much
as I could. It didn't bother you.

Even that time getting caught didn't.
You like it. You said you loved me

but it was what I was doing
that you loved. You grabbed

at my hair when you said it.
I couldn't believe how fast

I didn't see you anymore.
Breath on the window blurs

the evergreens by the reservoir.
The fabric imprints my skin.

The engine gasping, almost
stalling sometimes, rocks, still.

She No Longer Looks at Herself

from *New England Review*

In the new
and happy life
she is not looking
at herself crouched
in the easement
channeling her pee
downhill between
her feet, moving around
the gravel run off.
She is looking at
her love, who rocks
in the car of loud
soothing music.
She is looking
at the browning
wild flowers
beside her, stiff
in their seeding.
And her mind
sweet problem,
has stopped yapping,
“blah, blah”.
The weather's cool
atmosphere is all over her
saying, “You are here
by the freeway. It is
the mist in the air at dusk
making the sun
look unusually
large, that's all.”

Your Place

from *New England Review*

After, as you say,
doing it,
our first time,
two passengers
in one seat
of your Honda,
you reclaim
the driver's side
and crank the window
down and wipe
the windshield
down with your shirt.
I blot my hands
about the car mat,
finding my bracelets,
and shove each stocking
into my purse.
When I look over
you're a long place
away from when
you first went
for my hair
like you do.
Looking straight
down to the end
of this sleeping
residential street,
your head up,
your jaw tight,
your eyes take on
everything
with the same
consideration
of the old Romans
who asked questions
regarding the State
and the hereafter.

One Way Love

from *New England Review*

I came out of the place
alone, after eating alone,
just because I wanted to.
I wasn't lonely. I was
anything but lonely.
And I hit that street happy.
Happy in that slightly
sad way I'm happy
when I'm alone
missing the people
I love. I'm thinking
about them tonight.
And tonight I'll go home
and I won't let myself
call any of them up.
I'll sit in my room
alone, no TV,
no poems, nothing.
And when I'm good
and sad in that
happy kind of way
I'll go out driving
past all their
apartments. I'll look up
at the windows of the rooms
where each of them
will be sleeping - not
thinking of me - but I'll
be thinking of them and
I won't let myself
wake them. I won't.

Breasts

from *The Iowa Review*

Eggplants is what
I would say
if I had to
say what
mine are most like.
Eggplants
on a bough
and hassle-free
for the most part
by now.

Problem is
they grew
too fast, grew
too early.
Such a young girl
I was, always
bending backwards
sticking out
my stomach
to exceed them.

They had, as you
know, advantages.
Sure they got me
Picked
for couple-skate.
Guided by them
and a boy
I glided
around the rink
holding hands.

And always I was
the first
girl to go
when the best
boys, the captains
they were called,
chose-up sides
and we went
to stand
behind them.

It went on
for years,
my hatred
of them. And people
were better off
not to tell me
they were lovely.
Every blouse, every
garment I owned, chosen
to lessen them.

They were a part
of me, yet not
a part of me.
Not like the arms,
not other,
but simply more
body. A fatness
in the chest.
A curvature
up high.

They were something
of my own.
They needed
my blessing.
My constant desire
to eliminate them-
I hope that caused
no damage.

Pantyhose

from *Ploughshares*

When you wash them
do it gently
with a mild soap
and lightly
swish.
Silken, seamed,
off-black, mist, dotted,
patterned in some way,
support,
light support,
sheer, nude, coal,
reinforced toe,
taupe,
suntan, ivory, smoke,
they're in there now
all crossed
over
the
accumulation
of bubbles
which gather
at the edges
of your porcelain
sink transformed
into something
womanly.
Rinse them fast
and hang
preferably
on an outdoor
clothesline
so that
if you stood
watching with a
imagination
and a generous
suspension
of disbelief,
you would see
something like
The Rockettes,
though certainly not
as shapely

and much more
out of unison.
When they dry
put them on
with well-filed
fingernails
in that way
women have
of rolling so quickly
a leg of nylon
into the ready position,
a rose into which
the foot steps
and all petals
unravel
evenly up the leg.

Our Philosophy Professor Used The Table
As An Example Of The Physical World

from *Passages North*

We sat around the example
that Hume would rest his life on
and Berkley wouldn't trust.
An emblem of the world

according to the senses,
an actual empirical model,
we didn't doubt our textbooks
would stay on top, or worry
our bodies would fall through
when we leaned into our notepads
with our pencils and suffered
our first bout of thinking.

The table was a reference
when making the distinction
between the world of the table
and the world outside the table:
the world, that is, of the window,
the room's single metaphysical

symbol, through which, for us
he held the logically intangible.
The blackboard, erased, was *tabula rasa*.
It's eraser was a thought
he dropped and dropped and dropped
and never could we say for sure--

there being no causal relation--
that it would drop again
the next time he let loose his grip
and the powder in the felt,
which happened to fall,
hit the floor and scattered.

I never did believe the horrifying
notion that I held the table there
just by my perceiving it.
Not could I ever really feel,
when I asked of God's existence,
the Ontological made it so.

But inside the philosophy room
where logic was the measurement,
a ruler held up to a theory
to count out plausibility
and check for moral integrity,
I learned to believe everything once.

In a room where the softer things
had far less value. In a room
where truth represented something hard,
he pulled us away from what we had known
and set us down lightly
at something solid and old and angular.