

Selected Poems

Tim Neil

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Definition #2 (Young Gardeners)

Originally published by Poet Lore

Now, I'll admit you knew
me first, a kind of freak
different from your clan of twos.

The men, the pretty,
the straight, the strayed,
the Samsons, the manes.

In certain moments, when your words lashed like a bullwhip,
I pictured you dead.

Could you not have said,
"You are the autumn day in June,
a new mother's morning quiet,
the ladybug forcing aged daughters to smile."

In my dystopia, children wouldn't speak until they learned
about tenderness, tolerance.
Back then, you spoke as you had been taught to do
about differentness.

faggot (n.): a garden tool for pruning blooms.

Example: Ever since the caretaker used the faggot on the butterfly bush, the fairies were wary to live aboveground.

To Winona

Originally published by Washington Square Review

Once, I dreamt I saw you in your disco wasteland, at the end of a porcelain aisle. Beautiful men in sequined lingerie danced on one side, to the rhythm snapped out by long-fingered women in alien gowns. You sat on a throne of glittered bones; isn't that what you called hummingbirds? I wore a citrus tree and felt like Monica Vitti in that one scene. How she looks at the distance. Tonight in my brain, we drive through a city built from pink sugar. When I remember we are made of rain, I wake. I say your name. It tastes empty on my tongue, like the air around a pigeon's descending feather. Just once, I dreamt I saw you in your disco queendom, at the end of a back-alley aisle. Beautiful men in sequined tatters danced on one side, to the rhythm snapped out by sharp-nailed women in alien gowns. You sat on a throne of glittered bones; isn't that what you called good intentions? I wore a citrus tree and felt like Monica Vitti in that one scene. How she looks at a distance. You rose and walked towards me with thudding indifference, a bird on the subway tracks. I knelt before you and begged. Looking up at your glimmering height, I almost learned something about pain and mercy. A tree stump accepts the hatchet. An orange breathes, free of the peel.

Mother, Unlit

Originally published by Pittsburgh Poetry Journal

When you left me that morning,
in the smother of July, I had just seen
you cry the empty, tapped-out cry
of a parent, tired and whittled
down to a wick
by the way things broke.
Bruce Springsteen was playing,
“Walk Like a Man,” I think.
The bit about wedding bells,
and their peak of happiness.
Your hands were clasped
around the steering wheel,
as you seemed to ask,
*How far a distance
have I travelled from my happiest?*

I learned that day
steps are physical attempts
to escape our losses,
and sometimes, we fail.
Steps betray
the cynic we grow
in self-defense.
They prove
we live in hope
of moments worth
lingering in.
Almost two years ago,
I watched you dance
with your other son at his wedding.
You moved like liquid wax unmelting,
returning to an untouched candle,
its promise of light.

Myth of Life, All Around This Place

Originally published by The Fiddlehead

After Ada Limón's "In the Country of Resurrection"

At a gas station on a beautiful day,
I think of how we are the last generation.

Who will have these days
after us, to take them without notice,

as if they are the loose change
handed back with the cheap coffee I will half-drink?

We don't die old in the world we grew up in,
and our memories are mortal fossils:

the weight of auburn light on nude oaks,
the soft strangle of Sunday nights.

The world will not die, only people.
As I pump gas, I gaze at the dogwood

across the way. I let it peer into me,
to see the rings grown around my bones,

as if it will remember and one day tell
the left-behind bluebells about you

and me, how we saw a dying bear
and drove past it in fragile awe.

We did not stop to dole out comfort,
just turned the music up and let it die

slowly, a fellow casualty of standing still.

Myth of My Manhood

Originally published by The Fiddlehead

I would have named myself Cassandra,
had I crossed the sea from self to self.
I picked it from a movie I loved in those days,
the name of a faceless lady loved by a man,
whittled into a splinter by loss.
I remember her ache to own her body.

I remember I related. Awake those spring nights,
I looked at distant Arlington, and mourned a loss
of comfort. My reflection was foreign. My body
seemed a half-stuffed scarecrow of myself.
Take that picture, frame it, label it “Cassandra
as the Minotaur,” and laugh at the woman

for enduring a labyrinth. To wear her body
the way months wear seasons—skintight at night,
a detail in the day. What a joy to be that person
who knows their name; what a grief it is to be lost
in layers of my skin. Constant laundry of the self.
That winter, I was a reluctant lover. A dumb Cassandra,

tottering after the sun. Two babies bonded by loss.
We wanted to pawn our time for warm bodies.
As if part of a shipwrecked crew, we offered up ourselves.
She was the first person to call me “Cassandra,”
gaudy with tangerine lips, as if they made me a woman.
What was I? A skin-squatter, a sprinter at night,

fleeing to a cave in Greece, where all the selves
dwell as patient ghosts. If I’m not a man,
what am I, what can I be? Cassandra,
tell me, lady, what’s the secret to a happy body?
I have not been happy in mine since the days
before bodies mattered. So many lifetimes lost

under the weight of words like “woman” and “man.”
Shackles to rocks. The middle reality, Cassandra
sees. There are no clothes to dress this loss,
my mournful human form, separate from the night.
I am setting out to build a body
of every silky thing in which I see myself.

A cracked cloud of perfume on lost days.
A breeze, a body, a woman, a man, an Aphrodite unsexed.
Cassandra's joy, had she snuffed the sun herself.

Self-Titled*after Molly Brodak*

I live a beautiful life
that isn't quite mine.

When Daniela came to visit,
I was concussed and my ass was hanging out
the hospital gown. She cried.
I don't know what I did to deserve
that empathy.

In the spinel light, looks of love
have been sent my way that I felt were meant
for whoever I took this body from.

When I was a child, I fantasized
about a machine that switched me from boy
to girl, and back again, like I knew
how to glitch the system.

Truth is impermanent, and I can prove it.

I try so hard to let people know when I'm happy,
to place an affirmation in their pocket that yes,
we had some joy together, because I don't know,
they might need to find it one day.

It feels inevitable, I want to tell my friends and family.

A girlfriend's drunk yahoo father
handed me an AK on Easter Sunday, and told me
he'd give me one shot. I aimed it at the empties
lined up in the mowed grass.
The trigger asked me if I really wanted it to do its job.

burial no. 1

brother, this land is fine

dust the Creators brushed off
their tables and saws.

my shovel resents this burial.
it tells me this dirt tastes green,
sickly, unnatural.

you are no longer here.
i am glad,
but i need to grieve.

your right arm carried your dances;
it mocked the Space meant to contain
the giving god.

your two eyes, now judgment-blank,
would be easy to eat. i would wash them
down the gullet, wine-slick.

your handsome face, with the forehead
i kissed when we were young
and you adored me: i love you,
but one of us had to die.

i grab the spent shovel,
the bag with the rest of you.

red doves fly full-speed
into your grave to join you.
their necks break in time with my every step.

I went to the woman with sheep for eyes

as she whipped the coast and fog
 into a French meringue for her divination.

Traffic lights stipple the horizon like pinpricks,
 blooded vials for testing.

She teaches me the secret word Chemistry and Curses conceived.

I pick up one of the minuscule figs we walk on.

She gnashes her woolen teeth
 to suggest my consumption of this shriveled fruit
 we kill with decisions.

Her fingers plunge into the spongy meringue,
 and begin to knead what prophecy she has summoned
 with egg whites and sugar.

She retrieves from its core:
 hair from a baby's doll;
 a glass flute with honey keys;
 a sack of five pearl bullets.

Fog slithers from her fingers, and forms
 a skull over the hairs;
 a jester's hat hung on the flute;
 conjoined snakes to purse the bullets.

She asks if the trees are still alive;
 I hesitate, then say yes. The sheep
 smile, she smiles, and thanks me
 for the lie.

Cathedral in Horizon

The air turns, tight swirls
around your steep spires.
I, the pagan, sing adorations.

Cathedral, you're closer to god
than I give you credit for. The thieves
who shelter in your belly,

they've done us the same harm.
When I was twelve, they dissected me
alive on a schoolhouse desk.

They pulled my appendix, then strands
of ink, then a meaty, green, fist-sized thing.
Miniature Jesus hopped off the cross

by the clock. He swallowed the Green
whole like a starved boa. One thief
stitched me up (the appendix was returned)

while the others ate ground beef raw,
and spilled their beer. Cathedral,
I have thought of climbing you

to catch a view. Has the Green grown
like me these fourteen years?
Did it kill cheap Jesus? If it's dead,

I would be too. Cathedie, do you think
about death the way I do? How would we
decide who would jump from whom?

