

Classic Poetry Series

Bob Hicok

- poems -

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Another Awkward Stage Of Convalescence

Drunk, I kissed the moon
where it stretched on the floor.
I'd removed happiness from a green bottle,
both sipped and gulped
just as a river changes its mind,
mostly there was a flood in my mouth

because I wanted to love the toaster
as soon as possible, and the toothbrush
with multi-level bristles
created by dental science, and the walls
holding pictures in front of their faces
to veil the boredom of living

fifty years without once
turning the other way. I wanted
the halo a cheap beaujolais paints
over everything like artists gave the holy
before perspective was invented,
and for a moment thought in the glow

of fermented bliss that the bending
of spoons by the will was inevitable,
just as the dark-skinned would kiss
the light-skinned and those with money
and lakefront homes would open
their verandas and offer trays

of cucumber sandwiches to the poor
scuttling along the fringes of their lawns
looking for holes in the concertina wire.
Of course I had to share this ocean
of acceptance and was soon on the phone
with a woman from Nogales whose hips

had gone steady with mine. I told her
I was over her by pretending I was just
a friend calling to say the Snow Drops
had nuzzled through dirt to shake
their bells in April wind. This
threw her off the scent of my anguish

as did the cement mixer of my voice, as did
the long pause during which I memorized
her breathing and stared at my toes
like we were still together, reading
until our eyes slid from the page
and books fell off the bed to pound

their applause as our tongues searched
each others' body. When she said
she had to go like a cop telling a bum

to move on, I began drinking downhill,
with speed that grew its own speed,
and fixed on this image with a flagellant's

zeal, how she, returning to bed, cupped
her lover's crotch and whispered not
to worry, it was no one on the phone,
and proved again how forgotten I'd become
while I, bent over the cold confessional,
listened to the night's sole point of honesty.

Anonymous Submission

Bob Hicok

By Their Works

Who cleaned up the Last Supper?
These would be my people.
Maybe hung over, wanting
desperately a better job,
standing with rags
in hand as the window
beckons with hills
of yellow grass. In Da Vinci,
the blue robed apostle
gesturing at Christ
is saying, give Him the check.
What a mess they've made
of their faith. My God
would put a busboy
on earth to roam
among the waiters
and remind them to share
their tips. The woman
who finished one
half eaten olive
and scooped the rest
into her pockets,
walked her tiny pride home
to children who looked
at her smile and saw
the salvation of a meal.
All that week
at work she ignored
customers who talked
of Rome and silk
and crucifixions,
though she couldn't stop
thinking of this man
who said thank you
each time she filled
His glass.

Anonymous submission.

Bob Hicok

Other Lives And Dimensions And Finally A Love Poem

My left hand will live longer than my right. The rivers
of my palms tell me so.
Never argue with rivers. Never expect your lives to finish
at the same time. I think

praying, I think clapping is how hands mourn. I think
staying up and waiting
for paintings to sigh is science. In another dimension this
is exactly what's happening,

it's what they write grants about: the chromodynamics
of mournful Whistlers,
the audible sorrow and beta decay of Old Battersea Bridge.
I like the idea of different

theres and elsewheres, an Idaho known for bluegrass,
a Bronx where people talk
like violets smell. Perhaps I am somewhere patient, somehow
kind, perhaps in the nook

of a cousin universe I've never defiled or betrayed
anyone. Here I have
two hands and they are vanishing, the hollow of your back
to rest my cheek against,

your voice and little else but my assiduous fear to cherish.
My habbed
like the wind-torn work of a spider, like they squeezed
something in the womb

but couldn't hang on. One of those other worlds
or a life I felt
passing through mine, or the ocean inside my mother's belly
she had to scream out.

Here, when I say I never want to be without you,
somewhere else I am saying
I never want to be without you again. And when I touch you
in each of the places we meet,

in all of the lives we are, it's with hands that are dying
and resurrected.
When I don't touch you it's a mistake in any life,
in each place and forever.

Anonymous submission.

Bob Hicok

Spirit Dity Of No Fax Line Dial Tone

The telephone company calls and asks what the fuss is.
Betty from the telephone company, who's not concerned
with the particulars of my life. For instance
if I believe in the transubstantiation of Christ
or am gladdened at 7:02 in the morning to repeat
an eighth time why a man wearing a hula skirt of tools
slung low on his hips must a fifth time track mud
across my white kitchen tile to look down at a phone jack.
Up to a work order. Down at a phone jack. Up to a work order.
Over at me. Down at a phone jack. Up to a work order
before announcing the problem I have is not the problem
I have because the problem I have cannot occur
in this universe though possibly in an alternate
universe which is not the responsibility or in any way
the product, child or subsidiary of AT&T. With practice
I've come to respect this moment. One man in jeans,
t-shirt and socks looking across space at a man
with probes and pliers of various inclinations, nothing
being said for five or ten seconds, perhaps I'm still
in pajamas and he has a cleft pallet or is so tall
that gigantism comes to mind but I can't remember
what causes flesh to pile that high, five or ten seconds
of taking in and being taken in by eyes and a brain,
during which I don't build a shotgun from what's at hand,
oatmeal and National Geographics or a taser from hair
caught in the drain and the million volts of frustration
popping through my body. Even though. Even though his face
is an abstract painting called Void. Even though
I'm wondering if my pajama flap is open, placing me
at a postural disadvantage. Breathe I say inside my head,
which is where I store thoughts for the winter. All
is an illusion I say by disassembling my fists, letting each
finger loose to graze. Thank you I say to kill the silence
with my mouth, meaning fuck you, meaning die
you shoulder-shrugging fusion of chipped chromosomes
and puss, meaning enough. That a portal exists in my wall
that even its makers can't govern seems an accurate mirror
of life. Here's the truce I offer: I'll pay whatever's asked
to be left alone. To receive a fax from me stand beside
your mailbox for a week. It will come in what appears
to be an envelope. While waiting for the fax reintroduce
yourself to the sky. It's often blue and will transmit
without fail everything clouds have been trying to say to you.

Anonymous submission.

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Sudden Movements

My father's head has become a mystery to him.
We finally have something in common.
When he moves his head his eyes
get big as roses filled
with the commotion of spring.
Not long ago he was a man
who had tomato soup for lunch
and dusted with the earnestness
of a gun fight. Now he's a man
who sits at the table trying to breathe
in tiny bites. When they told him
his spinal column is closing, I thought
of all the branches he's cut
with loppers and piled and burned
in the fall, the pinch of the blades
on the green and vital pulp. Surgeons
can fuse vertebrae, a welders art,
and scrape the ring through which
the soul-wires flow as a dentist
would clean your teeth.
And still it could happen, one turn
of his head toward a hummingbird,
wings keeping that brittle life
afloat, working hard against the fall,
and he might freeze in that pose
of astonishment, a man estranged
from the neck down, who can only share
with his body the silence
he's pawned on his children as love.

Anonymous submission.

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The Maple

The Maple

is a system of posture for wood.
A way of not falling down
for twigs that happens
to benefit birds. I don't know.
I'm staring at a tree,
at yellow leaves
threshed by wind and want you
reading this to be staring
at the same tree. I could
cut it down and laminate it
or ask you to live with me
on the stairs with the window
keeping an eye on the maple
but I think your real life
would miss you. The story
here is that all morning
I've thought of the statement
that art is about loneliness
while watching golden leaves
become unhinged.
By ones or in bunches
they tumble and hang
for a moment like a dress
in the dryer.
At the laundromat
you've seen the arms
thrown out to catch the shirt
flying the other way.
Just as you've stood
at the bottom of a gray sky
in a pile of leaves
trying to lick them
back into place.

Anonymous submission.

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What Would Freud Say?

Wasn't on purpose that I drilled
through my finger or the nurse
laughed. She apologized
three times and gave me a shot
of something that was a lush
apology. The person
who drove me home
said my smile was a smeared
totem that followed
his body that night as it arced
over a cliff in a dream.
He's always flying
in his dreams and lands
on cruise ships or hovers
over Atlanta with an erection.
He put me to bed and the drugs
wore off and I woke
to cannibals at my extremities.
I woke with a sense
of what nails in the palms
might do to a spirit
temporarily confined to flesh.
That too was an accident
if you believe Judas
merely wanted to be loved.
To be loved by God,
Urban the 8th
had heads cut off
that were inadequately
bowed by dogma. To be loved
by Blondie, Dagwood
gets nothing right
except the hallucinogenic
architecture of sandwiches.
He would have drilled
through a finger too
while making a case for books
on home repair and health.
Drilling through my finger's
not the dumbest thing
I've done. Second place
was approaching
a frozen gas-cap with lighter
in hand while thinking
heat melts ice and not
explosion kills asshole. First
place was passing
through a bedroom door
and removing silk that did not
belong to my wife.
Making a bookcase is not
the extent of my apology.

I've also been beaten up
in a bar for saying huevos
rancheros in a way
insulting to the patrons'
ethnicity. I've also lost
my job because lying
face down on the couch
didn't jibe with my employer's
definition of home
office. I wanted her to come
through the door on Sunday
and see the bookcase
she'd asked me to build
for a year and be impressed
that it didn't lean
or wobble even though
I've only leaned and often
wobbled. Now it's half
done but certainly
a better gift with its map
of my unfaithful blood.

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