Classic Poetry Series

Christina Pugh

- poems -

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Christina Pugh

Christina Pugh is the author of two books of poems: Restoration (Northwestern University Press / TriQuarterly Books, 2008) and Rotary (Word Press, 2004), which received the Word Press First Book Prize. She has also published a chapbook, Gardening at Dusk (Wells College Press, 2002). Her poems have appeared in The Atlantic Monthly, Poetry, TriQuarterly, Ploughshares, and other periodicals, as well as in anthologies. Her honors have included the Lucille Medwick Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Grolier Poetry Prize, an individual artist fellowship in poetry from the Illinois Arts Council, the Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship from Poetry magazine, and residencies at the Ragdale and Ucross colonies.

In addition to her own poetry, she publishes criticism; her recent articles have discussed Emily Dickinson's metrical "ghosts" and the role of imitation in creative writing pedagogy. Pugh has also reviewed the work of many contemporary poets and poet-critics in publications such as Poetry, Verse, Ploughshares, and Harvard Review. At present, she is completing another collection of poems that takes the sonnet's volta, or turn, as a formal principle guiding the construction of contemplative free verse. She has also recently completed a critical book manuscript about ekphrasis (poetry that treats visual art) in twentieth-century American poetry.

Eserleri:

Restoration (Northwestern University Press / TriQuarterly Books, 2008)
Rotary (Word Press, 2004)

I and Thou

Must we cultivate our kindness? Can we
book a fellow-feeling for the sake of the fellow,
not the Ghost? Last night, for example, the whitehaired
girl told us singing was like praying; and that
iron of naturalized note in the bluegrass made me
want to say sublime, sublime to myself, in the Sapphic
sense that knows sublimity as love (O wash me
green as yonder field); and the girl's reed song did
light from the stage, articulating phrases like Heavens
divided in a quaver between forte and whisper, acute
supple wavers among syllables and slants: and now
may you keep me close within your ear; I can hear
the voice I loved when I wondered at its dialect—
you know, if I'm ever able to speak, I'll want
someone human to answer me.

Christina Pugh

Inflection

They are white planets in a galaxy, these wheels
of cheese—before the fungi knobble the skin, cobble
some resistance in the rind. Deep in the cool
caves of Auvergne, a nun sets the circles on shelves
so their surfaces will stain, sheen, stipple,
shade … while above her, a Latin chant
folds many women in one voice. If glass
were music, could it sound like this?
How can we call those words
human, when they've flown so far
from our commerce, our marketplace?
Every mold that steeps the skin is local: grafted
and endangered as the dead letters become notes
floating still in vowels from the nuns' grille

Christina Pugh

Rotary

Closer to a bell than a bird,
that clapper ringing
the clear name
of its inventor:

by turns louder
and quieter than a clock,
its numbered face
was more literate,

triplets of alphabet
like grace notes
above each digit.

And when you dialed,
each number was a shallow hole
your finger dragged
to the silver
comma-boundary,

then the sound of the hole
traveling back
to its proper place
on the circle.

You had to wait for its return.
You had to wait.
Even if you were angry
and your finger flew,

you had to await
the round trip
of seven holes
before you could speak.

The rotary was weird for lag,
for the afterthought.

Before the touch-tone,
before the speed-dial,
before the primal grip
of the cellular,

they built glass houses
around telephones:
glass houses in parking lots,
by the roadside,
on sidewalks.

When you stepped in
and closed the door,
transparency hugged you,

and you could almost see

your own lips move,
the dumb-show
of your new secrecy.

Why did no one think
to conserve the peal?

Just try once
to sing it to yourself:
it's gone,

like the sound of breath
if your body left.

Christina Pugh

Rue Family

April makes no difference
to the Lavalle cork tree
imported from central Japan;

to the Sakhalin cork,
its diamond bark
rising into branches

from a trunk of plated sand.
In the city park, this family of trees
wears its rue as buds

traveled into leaf each year—
predictably, invisibly,
as your sister wears hers

on a South Dakota highway:
there behind her knee, tempering
the air above her hand.

Christina Pugh

Twenty-Third

And at the picnic table under the ancient elms,
one of my parents turned to me and said:
“We hope you end up here,”
where the shade relieves the light, where we sit
in some beneficence—and I felt the shape of the finite
after my ether life: the ratio, in all dappling,
of dark to bright; and yet how brief my stay would be
under the trees, because the voice I’d heard
could not cradle me, could no longer keep me
in greenery; and I would have to say good-bye
again, make my way across the white
California sand and back: or am I now creating
the helplessness I heard those words express,
the psalm torn like a map in my hands?

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