

Poetry Series

# Glenn Latal

## - poems -

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Glenn Latal()

# A Glorious Blaze Of Dusk

I have long wished to be Brahms  
With girth and beard and an air of conviction,  
Belonging right here, on this street, in this skin.  
Old bull elephant, worn tusks, swaying trunk,  
Stomping down the cobbled street  
To his midday hops and hoof, pilsner and pork.  
Alt Wien smells to him of coffee, tobacco, and spun sugar.  
The clop of horseshoes and click of canes echo.

He seems content to have aged precociously,  
In this ancient city cozily cocooned in the golden decadence  
Of nostalgia for a past that had never been.  
Tomorrow suspiciously similar to yesterday  
Radiates from masonry walls  
Like heat stored from a timeless lazy afternoon  
Insinuating itself into the close of day.

He walks in a nimbus, equal parts cigar smoke,  
The jealous pride of a city for its most revered genius  
And the melancholy residue of a lifetime of doling out love  
In reluctantly accepted portions, separately and cumulatively  
Never reaching the minimal effective dosage.

I don't yearn for the acclaim or even respect,  
But the acceptance, not of, but by him.  
A lift of his hat, a kind word and a stoop,  
That painfully stiff facsimile of a bow of the elderly.  
It may be that the only common denominator  
Of all gentlemen is patience,  
Especially for those least deserving  
In the eyes of others.

Glenn Latal

# A Pilgrimage To Saint Sickle's Leg

Did they slash within the torrent, feuding still  
and Noah already fathoms above them?  
Was even the deluge not enough?  
When the waters rise over our heads  
and there is nothing left to dispute, will we yet?  
From habit perhaps, or...just maybe,  
we as humans must contest whatever there is.

Old Tom looked over the panorama of his morning's work  
that September in Maryland.  
Before him lay the detritus of the first half  
of the bloodiest day in American history.  
Between bites of his peach, he pronounced,  
'God has been kind to us this day.'

Short staple and that accused gin cut a swath  
four years wide and six hundred thousand deep,  
blue, gray and abysmally red.  
You can reach out and dip your fingers in it,  
still wet and sticky, you can never wash it off.  
This was not our doing, but it is our patrimony.

A field of fresh staccato rows,  
provisioned with the best we have.  
Plant one healthy young of the species.  
Surround with decaying organic material and plenty of moisture.  
One hillock per fleeting universe of hope and promise.  
Its neither first nor last crop from this field.  
An egalitarian cornucopia, it was prepared to overflow its bounty  
in other locales and guises, bottomland, ridgeline,  
round the calendar, we reaped.

And here we are met on another great battlefield of that war.  
Another campaign into the past,  
Another attempt to push the future back into the north.  
Old Tom has followed his arm into the soil.  
But once again, God his been kind  
To the Army of Northern Virginia.  
Its strategy has ensured it will lose this war...but not yet.

The vials of wrath must cascade onto the heads of just  
And unjust alike, as though they were mercy.  
So, we hold back the punch and look up into the fluid heavens.  
There's good ole Noah out for a sail.  
He's missing a hell of a fight.  
He can catch the next one, there will always be another.

So, AP old friend, don't we know better yet?  
Strike the tent and come,  
Let us cross back over these roiling waters  
And rest together in the ground  
Neath the shade of that first tree,  
Before we learned to sin.

Glenn Latal

# Could I Have That To Go?

Her steam starched, water whitened, raw reddened hands  
smelled of bluefish and clean pots hot and drying.  
One hip cocked, unwantonly saucy,  
her pen approaches pad as though taper to votive candle.  
With pensive regard, this Madonna awaits  
my confession of what private appetite tortures me.  
This dance of dropped wing, shaken head,  
elevated eyebrow, glance over shoulder retort  
has been shared every day by countless cowardly unsinners  
for as long as there have been diners.

Wishing we could rise and reach and pull against.  
A tango erupts from the miraculously full throated juke.  
We've all seen the others fade  
as the light falls toward the center  
till there is nothing but each other's eyes.  
Breath yanked and shoved, her hand so smooth and warm,  
the layered cloth sliding across the small of her back.

She turns, tears off the sheet  
and skewers my hunger with all the others.  
My gaze drops from her shoulder along her spine  
and is flung off her hip.  
House lights up, show's over.  
I stir my coffee.

Glenn Latal

# Foreblind

I watch the afternoon brush a coat of fresh shadow  
Onto the building across the street.  
It fills the view through the window of this quiet café.  
The day cools and darkens around me.  
Reflected light in elongated mimicry  
Of the shape of the window slides across the table,  
In and out of my outstretched hand.

Its cool and warm here in the well lit darkness.  
I have a peripheral sense of a burden of rain,  
The soft ostinato of a woman's breath  
And the fleeting gather of her well mannered smile  
Acknowledging proximity and nothing more.  
This voluntary obligation being the petty coinage of civilization,  
The tossing to the peasants has been millennia in the perfecting.

My hand smooths the linen  
As Corelli's bipolar lilt pours down upon us  
From the softly undulating diaphragms  
Of sleek visaged gargoyles crouching atop the walls,  
Continuo to the confident timbre of our well modulated murmurings.  
Gently stirring the fronds of the foliage strategically scattered  
To comfort our need for well regulated doses of serendipity,  
The sound weaves among the tables and solicitously reassures us  
That we are indeed poised and fulfilled,  
Being the ultimate in connoisseurs.  
Leather and cologne discretely bespeak security and surety,  
While that wayward relation, qualm, so as not to embarrass,  
Is given a small annuity to reside abroad,  
But not by me.

We are not rich, pampered, safe and slumming,  
Merely swaddling our post-(inset cliché) transcendence in nostalgia.  
Masonry walls stand disrobed and unintended,  
Shorn of lime and pigment to salve the sophisticated eye.  
Each brick of this family of individuals determinedly connected to its intimates,  
Sustaining and supporting all through their personal bonds.  
This is the community we've praised whenever encountered,  
But rarely considered laboring to build.

Dry stonewalls can always be re-laid after rupture.  
Failure entails no loss, it is considered a normal course of events, all change partners.

In my reverie, we could clear a space, dragging the tables and chairs  
Along the floor with the innately suitable resonance of wood on wood,  
Stand and appreciate the craft of properly laying a brick,  
Discuss the dignity of labor and our grandfather's calluses  
And what we used to wish to be when we were grown.

Instead, I blink and look about me.  
We sit and read and stare through the plate glass  
At the slender, lone Aspen, modestly disregarding us,  
Tidily suspended between consumption and armored flight,  
In it's hand-wrought-iron cage of protective custody,  
So submissively, unassumingly stoic.

As a pencil negligently dropped, rolls off a table,  
Often my thoughts seem to come to rest  
Just beyond my ability to grasp.  
We assume there must be value to this life.  
After all, there is meaning,  
For, there is coherence, isn't there?

Across the croissants crumbs  
And demitasse of cappuccino sits qualm,  
Sipping and smiling wanly over the rim,  
Keeping me company on my vigil.  
And I have nothing to say.  
Not even this.

Glenn Latal



# Gilled Was I

There comes a moment when the membrane is pierced.  
When our invulnerability leaks from us,  
Silently, invisibly, from one second to the next.  
Our cocoon of faith has sprung a doubt.  
We've passed into a new world.  
It's as though the air used to be liquid,  
But a new dimension has been added.  
How do we now breathe a gas?

Then we remember:  
The cold morning wind, that awakening, scours the soul.  
One dawn, leaving the other's apartment,  
You realize you are capable of not returning.  
But love is the conviction that we wouldn't ever have to face this again.

If I try just once more, this time, it will.

I am alone on the Larchmont platform.  
There are people, but they are they,  
Not remotely comparable to you or me.  
Yet I've become one, looking anywhere other than at them.  
Each of us is uniquely superior.  
I will refrain from implying equivalence beyond  
An embarrassed tight-lipped half smile of recognition,  
As long as they reciprocate.  
I too, am too busy being alone.

The light bleaches the day, draining it of life and color.  
The train glides me from here to there.  
Through and over the world,  
Encased from buffeting breeze and chilling cold.  
The wind rages within, I am no longer warm blooded.  
I do not lose heat to the air, but the reverse.  
The only thing that ever warms is each other.

Sometimes when it fails, neither is at fault.  
Without the solace of anger, we are left with only grief.  
The poise that pulled us striding into the future is gone,  
Stranding me between the garden and whatever purgatory is left to me.

I look out the window at this jostling entrepôt.  
It is always presumptuously prepared to enfold  
The prodigal back into its embrace of comfort, if not, joy.  
For late spring, it's unseasonably raw with bluster and bereavement.

This train takes me where?  
Places other people are.  
Things other people do.  
People other people know.  
I am unique, as are we all,  
In the superiority of our faceless solitude.  
How could we show feeling all those things  
we hadn't know were still there  
and that we would have to face again?

If I try just once more, this time...

Glenn Latal

# Icarus In The Rain

I

Trickling smudges against the sky,  
The city is heating water to stimulate its spirit and rinse its soul.  
This day has arrived wearing a dirty white overcoat  
Smeared with greasy streaks of gray,  
Ever the guarantor of a raw and chilling spatter.  
This is the bluff that hides me.  
After four years of that rat scuttle through the bowels of purgatory,  
I thought I'd try raptor's wings.  
But now as the storm approaches, there is no longer a burrow to shelter me.  
I shift my weight and brace in anticipation of a pelting.

My hand rests lightly on the casement latch.  
The walls are peeling and moist up here  
In the penthouse of this crummy hotel atop this ridge.  
From my vantage, I look out over half the world.  
Life swarms through the streets and buildings below.  
A murmur, the merest of rumors wafts up to me,  
No distinguishable words, no distinct individuals.  
I assume they and I are of the same species, or were once.  
But those whom the gods would destroy, they first make gods.

We were given such a magnificent opportunity,  
A work of great righteousness and therefore worthy of us.  
The sacred adventure vouchsafed to only those lucky few,  
Certainly no more than once a generation.  
None could take a second.  
So, novices, we spun salving scenarios of bravado  
To hide the telltale shiver from the tickle of the white feather.  
Just as had all our proud predecessors.  
Leaving us with: a long drag and a bloodstained bandage round the shoulder,  
Humble and stoic. 'No, really, it's nothing.'  
It's always to be you heroically carrying your wounded comrade on your back,  
Never you rotting on the wire.

II

The sergeant touches my arm.  
I squint just to the side of where he points.  
We lie there and swallow opened-mouthed,

Unplugging our ears, cupping our hands to them.  
Faintly deeper black and soft rustle,  
Intuition rather than sight or sound.  
The air is chafed and the void is inhabited.  
Lie, wait, let them pass.

You are under no obligation to participate.  
Let it flow into its own path.  
This insensible emptiness we haunt  
Admits of no encumbering specificities,  
Absolving you of responsibility for the scene,  
Draining away that scream in your head.  
It is all infinitely, eternally potential,  
Perpetually becoming and never quite being,  
As thin as wind and ephemeral as hope.  
As solid as mud and constant as fear.

The they over there on the other side, are they a they or an it?  
If we could reach out to this other,  
Could we touch it?  
Is anything there for us to touch or any we here to do it?  
That presence we sense,  
Is there really corporeality here?  
Or is it the nothingness  
Rubbing and curling onto itself?  
Souls making a last inspection before they head to...somewhere.  
Or maybe, still trying to reach that objective  
On the way to which they were lost.  
We could always hail them and ask.

### III

My anticipation is no longer tinged with glory.  
I will stand and smoke and watch the shower come in sheets, glossing my city.  
The ragged volley against the window is actually rather soothing,  
Like the familiar wave of an often passed and no longer spoken to ex-lover.  
What is that arrhythmic hiss that tightens my throat?  
Swallow, breathe: drizzle on the metal roof.  
The clouds are mustard in color only.  
Now that I think of it, yes, the shoulder is a little stiff.  
Bit of an ache now and then, especially when the weather turns.

Ah, luck.

Have you one hand or two? A face? A mind?  
I can light a cigarette.  
Walk down a street. During the day.  
There may be the odd stare or it could be in my head.  
Either way, I prefer my sordid fastness,  
To see beyond, to gaze down upon,  
To have nothing that can descend onto me.  
I could open the window to the rain and walk into the air,  
To be the inescapable uninvited guest, accelerating toward you.  
I have played the involuntary host,  
When the world suddenly goes red, then black and heavy and quiet,  
Reduce all of God's creation to your own body and then crush it.  
A shriek of defiance seeping away to a nearly silent "No."

Another drag and the faintest of tremors.  
Do I see the horizon clearing?  
It's rather late.  
The nothingness will soon be rubbing and curling onto itself.  
In the remains of my day, I make a last inspection before I head to...somewhere.  
Maybe I'm still trying to reach that objective  
On the way to which I was lost.  
You could always hail me and ask  
As I open the window to the rain.

Glenn Latal

# If My Machine Answers, You're The Plumber

I'm not here right now.  
If you wish to leave a message,  
I'll see that I get it when I return.  
It seems I'm doing something somewhere else.  
Though there's always the possibility  
that I'm actually here and I just didn't notice.  
If you want, I can look.  
However, I have to admit  
I'm not sure I want to be disturbed right now.  
I might be doing something important.  
Until I tell me that you're on the line  
there's no way to know if I want to speak with you.  
Are you beginning to see my dilemma?  
You know, it might be better if you tried some other time.  
Such as some time after five.  
I'll be gone then  
and there'll be a better chance I'll pick up.  
How's that sound?  
Oh, excellent.  
Thanks for calling and have a nice day.  
Ta, ta.

Glenn Latal

# It Fills And Hovers

Flakes flutter and glide mutely,  
sopping up the overflow of sound,  
coating the frictions of living in these depths.

Of what use is snow in a city?

To hasten spring by sheltering the fecund earth from the thieving cold  
or husbanding a first drink to break its long thirsty slumber?

To remind us of the nothing hence we came and will return?

Swaddling us in mortality.

□

We scurry into and out of the cliffs  
through the steam heat honeycomb nests we have burrowed into them.

The insignificant Colorado lost in the immense Grand.

Did we raise artifice to these heights?

Or were they carved by episodic floods of commuters  
surging through the tessellated wadii of Manhattan?

There is a jangle and skirl of solidbody blues anchoring the morning,  
chugging cattycorner through the sidewalk jostle.

Anticipation launches our famished sight careening  
around the next corner, eagerly ambushing whatever comes.

This moment and place are overwhelmingly tactile with merged musicians  
bumping shoulders and living above the corner deli.

Christmas, the first Neon and arms full of givable.

Our passionate giddiness in the wet wool foyer,  
laughing at the snug cold of mid-week flurries.

Snowball scarred, glove-soaked,  
our rushed voices half an octave higher.

Butter and rum and books browsed and bought  
to be read and aloud, covering the covers.

We may never quite dry, but, we are warm.

You read my verse as I stoically panic at the foot of the bed.

On the stereo, the piano's right hand is accented with empty glasses.

Just as at that club where we were to have met friends tonight.

But, then, we would have to disturb the books, and they look so peaceful.

Maybe the use of snow is to make dressing too much bother.





# Plotting The Drift

Throw back your head and laugh a heaven into the sky.  
An aerie for the mirthful gods.  
Pipe me a joyful tune and I'll sing of hope and trust and effort rewarded.  
Restock the myths, the truisms by which we live.  
Twirl before me a dervish spin with all the joyful madness within you.  
Throw back your head and summon forth the atavistic howl in us all,  
Amidst the soft glow of us burning through the gossamer bonds  
Of the cosseted maze of our mannered days.

Come onto my tent.  
Step and toe, fingers entwined behind. Sway and nod.  
A very small dance to the rhythm of a 'Hup, hup.'  
And dip, and turn, and back.  
Not quite a strut, more a deliberate canter.  
I shall await laden with spice and drink and delicacy beyond any,  
Unburden and splay my arms to the gift of yourself.  
And you will throw back your head and corroborate my suspicion  
That no matter how bedecked or bounteous, I am still just me.

Recumbent upon cushions strewn,  
We admire and mock the thronging panoply.  
Shall we honor with our colors  
An indiscriminately fortunate entry to the lists,  
Poised to do or die for our diversion.  
All this is ours, to appreciate each,  
According to any criteria we wish,  
And fondle that grape with the full span  
Of insouciant decadence your tongue possesses.

When twilight ebbs and the sky is swirling with black,  
A breeze flickers the lamps.  
We have sat and eaten and talked and danced and sung.  
Now to our feet, the chill of night will clear the head.  
Once more the elusive scuffs of light splotch the darkness.  
Can I care tomorrow as I do tonight?  
Can I remain impelled,  
And still dance the hornpipe on the swaying deck of day,  
While the gulls sing harmony with the wind in the shrouds?



# The Falling Glass

It does not come.

Perhaps it will bring release,  
the unbridled exuberance of casting free  
and shedding the need to lie;  
to die alone in a foreign land,  
where even the language doesn't recognize you;  
no longer any obligation to soothe, encourage, forgive;  
at last, our grip loosing from the bough of grace.

Still, it does not come.

We have the first cursings of the wayward stare,  
The driftless wanting eye.  
Not callers of spirits from the vasty deep,  
we remain merely welcomers of any that well of their own accord.  
Nothing sought, revealed and inevitably denied,  
banishing all the world.  
Rather, an immaculate grail, faithfully formed,  
earnestly cast, a brow's Athena triumphantly self-willed.

And still, it does not come.

The light that I shun,  
to which I can never quite unsquint,  
it wakes and walks and when done, will sleep again.  
Come dusk, we stand on a siding in the rain,  
cloaked in conjecture, awaiting confirmation,  
blighted by the awareness  
of the limits of our glimpse of infinity.  
Our gaze is calmly returned  
by the dissolving horizon from the dark  
at either end of the arrow shot vacant miles.  
If there were a bend, it would lie just beyond,  
any minute now, almost here.

Still, it does not come.



# When You Pull The Bow And Lift The Lid

I am wandering the swarmed aisles, perusing the tempting stacks.  
Idly seeking, I come upon a volume of poetry.  
Nothing leaps under my gaze, bolts into the unknown,  
a white dazzle smear of tail luring pursuit.  
No daunting, dramatic, recurring temptation  
so wondrous and unforeseeable.  
No stranger, noticing puzzlement, lifts inky hand, reaches between the lines,  
tugs my sleeve, points across the page and says, 'It went that way.'

Shaking my head, I slide it back onto the shelf.  
I now know less than I did.  
Proportionally the world is pulling away.  
With every second's addition to my experience,  
my susceptibility to the con of certainty lessens.  
This not being the place, I sidle to the door, wind round my scarf  
and take my chase onto the rapidly fading street.  
As I thread the winter evening's gaggle  
I know this world to be overpopulated with game  
I may well lack the forensics to detect.

Have some of these passersby had these qualities thrust  
upon them free of charge, like handbills?  
Could the gift be some magic formula hidden  
in the generous offer to exchange new lamps for old?  
Or is the accompanying nod of encouragement all we need?  
There may be truth to those esteem puffs, and either hawker  
or mark could be any of us, all having unique mysteries to share.  
Or are some of these bestowed talismans merely shiny pebbles  
that happen to speak French and were Voltaire's best friend?

I examine the faces I pass.  
Is there a secret code written on these features?  
Each could be a benefactor, a recipient.  
Do any of us really know what trade we seek in the market?  
Search your pockets, turn them out.  
Do you have what you need for what comes next?  
And that is?

This time of year, the sun quickly gives up the effort

to hoist itself over the buildings and falls backward toward the horizon.  
My fellow strangers clutch their collars tighter to their throats and hurry past.  
The wind churns the snowdrifts and tosses rivulets of flecks  
into the gelded light like tiny scraps of paper,  
sodden and dissolving under foot.

With the dimming, will there be a cupped ember  
and due clarifying dawn, truth again revealed with the rising?  
Or will darkness overwhelm into the last long goodnight?  
The storefront windows and streetlamps  
throw a half hearted glow in my direction,  
merely accentuating the depth and breadth  
of the shadow within which I am silhouetted.

There is a hole in my confidence,  
and all the momentum has leaked away  
as season and day bleed out their mortality.  
Which of you will pity the clown stranded motionless  
amid the discarded handbills littering the frozen sidewalk,  
and tug my sleeve, without need to notice anew  
that doubt is on that to-do list we all carry in our pocket?

Glenn Latal