

Jeffrey Shors

Poem

Responding to something seen or remembered, a cornice
Of blue light, a draught of molten snow, something
Unsummoned approaching with its own large darkness
And a call to order not resembling any previous alignment.
In the windward doors, the mysterious van
Unloads again, on a pallet of ice, its inscrutable wares;
And the laughing foreman stops in his tracks.
It might be the first horse in North America, spirits
Introduced among a sober people, or a new and unaccustomed
Flush or drain. Is it not terrible to be alone
Again, for the first or millionth time, with the sun,
A wave of darkness in the night,
With the evenhanded daylight that still plays tricks?

Even the agile spinners couldn't weave it all in;
Nor could the bellhops turn the sundry traffic
Into a ready quip. Nonsense narratives rise and
Falter in the dust. Light inscribes on tine and tea tray
A fragile, color-coded message as trees
Lose their leaves in phantasmagoric sadness. The angle
Was always there for us to see,
But never to hold, and we were mistaken to think so,
To believe that, with a caress, a motion
Of the mind, we could arrest, for one unbelievable moment,
The frantic pace of the light opera in which
We find ourselves ensnared, the dull bourgeois melodrama
That ends with a bang. It has come so far
To be nothing at all, cry the mice in the walls,
Moans the backyard ghost who flutters languidly
The laundry on the line. We will not be able to tell,
Now or next year, what impressed us so deeply,
What caused us to reset the clocks and unhock the silver,
On this lightest and greyest of afternoons.

The Sun

The small woven branches sheltered it, the century's
Last hope. Meanwhile it climbed trees, reckless
Of its future survival. Nothing got done
At the office that day. Permanently
Out to lunch, the radioactive jobbers
Drift through the endlessly reworded afternoons,
And nobody is surprised or ashamed when
It falls, like a bomb. Reports
Issue regularly from sewer and grate,
Not recorded in the official organs.

It's not merely a question of life and death
Anymore, or its nearest simulacrum.
It is about the apotheosis of the rubber
Stripping that circumscribes our lives,
The smile of the cat, our inaptitude
For the expanse of the sky, tragicomic ineptitude
In the face of all we have disowned.
And it could have been the rug of travels,
A necessary tale, poultice applied to the
Tender yet receptive area. The faces
We love in the distant daguerreotype. The
Sun.

Arthur Dove

He used, for his excuse, the elemental colors
Of dawn, the primal midnight of despair. So
When botany failed him, the organic world
Encroached—dark tendrils through a darker window.
But sometimes the bent leaves and buckled pastures
Resembled nothing so much as erratic lightning bolts.
The viewer is unable to reconcile the calm amorphous surface
With the fretted inquiry scratched upon it.

Finally, however, the staid environment comes
To mimic its devotees, arranging its colors
In a special performance. For him, that night,
The leaves were as luminous as islands,
Dramatic bays of blue and beige.
All the incidental details of a coming down
Or going up in the world—the sidewalk,
The emphatic turf—were as many eyes,
Starred like prisms, indecent like bars.
The hulking gasworks evaporated in a mist,
And there you were, privileged spectator
Of the formation of the first crystal, the last light.

Truce

Is it true about the bland figurines and the
Ducks, the gyroscope's blood, as it is true
Of the atomizer lost in the farmhouse
From the turn of the century, the oxeye daisies
Collected for you, a truce? Up against
The pellucid screen, nothing much matters,
Not the prismatic shimmer of a crushed insect,
Its own universe gone to waste. Not
The wind coming again out of last Christmas
Full of glee and muted feelings, alive
With the voices of those who have sailed
Past us. This house is empty, quiet,
With the exception of the demonic southing
Inside the pipes, and tomorrow
The household spirits won't tell us
Much more than they did today, rehearsing
The old story of the impermanence of the weather,
And how it can never alter the drab everydayness
Of the myth they and we have together been
Subsumed into.

Rest on the Flight from Nowhere

It was in the springtime of necessity
That the happy tagalongs first caught a glimpse,
Swallowed the necessary knowledge,
And the pilgrimage came to a halt, wondering.
These forensic forays have themselves
To be examined, held up to a light not filtered
Through the paper lanterns of yesteryear.
One shaver begged exultantly, but it was no use,
No good succumbing to the easy victory,
Every night's dream equation in straw.
And she recognized where she was, in the horse
Thieves' pond. Smiled tentatively into the
Remaindered day whose mobile cloud shadows dodged
And veered among the puzzled mendicants.

We are all falling, she said, into a well
To seek the shiny penny at the bottom
Until we wake up underwater. It's time
For a change, new wardrobe, eyes,
Hand-me-downs be damned. The naked offering
Basks in the fields, like you,
Like myself when I resemble myself
More accurately than I do today,
The slicing wing or disc we do not approach
To make it happen; it is its own.
Yet we are getting closer to it,
Rather than the other way around.

Jeffrey Shors is a writer living in St. Louis, MO. He is at work on a memoir and a new volume of poetry.