

Timothy Murphy

Trimeters

I. *Confessio Amantis*

I was immersed in sins
and not the venial sort,
Christ's blood up to my shins,
guilt of grave import,

heresiarch for years
(decades if truth be told),
but God allayed my fears
of hardened heart grown cold,

made Himself manifest
with all His Spirit's heft
and lent me strength to test
what goodness I had left.

II. Charismatic

To a spirit fallen low,
wallowing in despair
while ripping out his hair,
shoveling his snow

or falling down a stair
to bruise a drunken face,
or kneeling down in prayer
to beg our Savior's grace,

no Greek word can embrace
or give so great a lift:
Charis we translate *grace*,
but *Charis* means a *gift*.

III. Widower

for R.P.W.

Nine years after she died
he's very much alive,
a minor point of pride
as he nears ninety-five.
Lonely, his wilderness
watered with words, not tears:
nightly he kneels to bless
their sixty-seven years.

IV. Feast

Next Sunday Pentecost,
then Ordinary Time,
but first the Holy Ghost
brings me the gift of rhyme
as once the gift of tongues
descending from above
filled the Apostles' lungs.
They prayed, prayed to a dove.

V. *Bardo Thodol*

Suffering in his bed,
propped in his easy chair,
he read *The Book of the Dead*
to mitigate despair.
Padmasambhava's text
dear to my Savior's spouse
readied him for his next
life in our Father's house.

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Division of Labor, an Elegy

Forever Tenderfoot

Alan could never master the square knot,
 bowline or taut line hitch
while puzzling in the cockpit of a yacht,
muttering softly “You son of a bitch.”

His square knot came up granny every time.
 I always kept a hank
astern, a line white with its spindrift rime.
His knots fell apart at the slightest yank,
but he could kedge me off a sandy bank
before the ship’s clock struck its high tide chime.

Thousands of scouts had learned their ropes from me.
 Alan, unteachable,
would try again, present his work with glee,
but my first mate is now unreachable.

Division of Labor

Labor was settled after our third week.
 Alan would keep our house
while our small fortune was all mine to seek,
he the domestic, I the hunting mouse.

The house became hundreds of apple trees,
 our fortune never made,
the crushing debts my private miseries.
The orchard was a glass of lemonade
where we would share a breather in the shade
as apple blossoms drifted past our knees.

At sea our labors were divided too,
 the weather Alan worked,
my flemished falls, commandments to the crew,
our tasks divided, never to be shirked.

Apple Keepers

He never touched a chainsaw. That was mine,
 shaving down to the grass
the fallen tree trunks wreathed in orchard vine
so our front-mounted Deere 910s could pass.

I never touched his loppers. They were his,
 grafting my other task
to help him carry through his *orchard biz*.
And though each player sometimes wore a mask,
my grafting vest hiding a whiskey flask,
our focus wasn't on what *was* but *is*.

Another task of his was clearing snow.
 Watching the pressure dive
he loved to see a drifting blizzard blow,
squaring his shoulders, manfully alive.

Sneaky Alan

Alan contrived to sneak the weighty stuff
 into his larger pack,
knowing that altitude for me was rough,
a mercy for my chronically bad back.

Near the Divide Alan would choose the site
 where I would pitch our tent,
a clearing in the pines, and at first light
the summer sun would shine without relent

full on our stream bank or a granite seam
where I shoulder my labors now in dream.

Ever Upward

No giardia, our campsites were too high,
the mountain sheep carried none in their droppings.
After our camp was pitched I'd pitch my fly,
almonds, pepper and lemon juice our toppings.

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A weighted line wound round a lower limb
could snag dead pine, broken beside the fire
where we reclined until the coals grew dim,
then slept as must the just after they tire.

The Milky Way a thick blanket of white
from east to west, heart of our galaxy
wheeling above us on a moonless night,
two tokes of weed would stoke our reverie.

We climbed for sheer love of the mountain sky,
shed of the prairie, my young man and I.

Always West

The Wind Rivers and Beartooth, they were ours,
one a day's drive, other more than a day.
See through my windshield how a roll cloud glowers,
ready to toss the carefully swathed hay.

Bound for Bismarck I always make my crossing,
one more Missouri for my lifetime list.
In dream I often see a raven tossing,
blown all to hell before a crag of schist.

Burrowing owlets dig out of their nest,
and we believed Heaven lay always west.