

Jim Thompson's Spiritual Poetry Class #74

Wednesday, November 3, 2021

6 pm PT

One can't feel the totality of a poem without feeling it resonate in the body, without feeling the direct and subtle kinds of repetition, **without hearing it**...Because we study literature in the classroom, it's easy to think that poetry is about interpretation, about using the brain. But **poetry is for the whole body**. We need to bring the whole body back into the experience of art. When we use the word "voice," we mean poetic voice, one's own style and sensibility. But after all, **voice is vocal**.

—Kimiko Hahn

Dear Friends:

This week is different. I have asked Don and Joe to each share a poem that they love and lead the discussion of it. Don selected "Complementary Colors." Joe chose "Quarantine." If there is time, we'll look at a reckless poem from Kimiko Hahn, who is quoted above.

This week's poems:

- **Quarantine** by Eavan Boland curated by Joe Scally. "...his last gift to her..."
- **Complementary Colors** by Susan Robinson, a poet who "travels her life in the arms of wonder, mentally modeling beauty, form and relation into her poetic vision." Curated by Don Maruska.
- **Reckless Sonnet No. 8** by Kimiko Hahn. After multiple readings, I think I finally get why the earless cicada cries.

Here's the link for this week:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88014439518?pwd=bXQ3WjlWaN1US3ZUcnU0Qzc1VGdDQT09>

Passcode **959919**

Note: This link and passcode is good for classes through March 2, 2022

+ + Jim

Quarantine

—Eavan Boland

In the worst hour of the worst season
of the worst year of a whole people
a man set out from the workhouse with his wife.
He was walking—they were both walking—north.

She was sick with famine fever and could not keep up.
He lifted her and put her on his back.
He walked like that west and west and north.
Until at nightfall under freezing stars they arrived.

In the morning they were both found dead.
Of cold. Of hunger. Of the toxins of a whole history.
But her feet were held against his breastbone.
The last heat of his flesh was his last gift to her.

Let no love poem ever come to this threshold.
There is no place here for the inexact
praise of the easy graces and sensuality of the body.
There is only time for this merciless inventory:

Their death together in the winter of 1847.
Also what they suffered. How they lived.
And what there is between a man and woman.
And in which darkness it can best be proved.

Complementary Colors

by Susan Robinson
from "Complementary Colors, Selected Poems"
used by permission of author

Each color astounds its opposite.
A painter butts them up
for resonance, because no one thing
resounds.
One thing alone
ferrets around
for grits and ham,
for some kind of angle
to bank shots from.

Eager colors hang together
when they get along. Otherwise,
they grow grouchy; they squirm to jerk
away, as lurid aqua trim will,
tacked to gray New England siding.

But make an alehouse-yellow wall.
It will stare out, mute, until
violet pulls up, then grin
and wink, "Inside's the bar."

Let's say we strive for passion.
We haven't said that, just suggesting.
Smear turquoise next to peach,
not in a come-by way, sideways and modest,
but leaning hard with feeling,
the flagrant ache of a kissing bruise.

Now plop orange on the plummy edge.
You may blush to watch the colors
stir, duck, buckle and merge.

Encircle the muddle with a single stroke.
Crimson. It will be risky.
The line might break or smudge.
How wide should the brush be?
Should you limber your wrist or brace it?

Those are a thinker's questions.
No one will guess it wasn't hard
to chance that much,
even all you had,
for a bull's-eye that can glow forever.

Reckless Sonnet No. 8

—Kimiko Hahn

My father, as a boy in Milwaukee, thought
the cicada's cry was the whir from a live wire--
not from muscles on the sides of an insect
vibrating against an outer membrane. Strange though
that, because they have no ears, no one knows why
the males cry so doggedly into the gray air.
Not strange that the young live underground sucking sap from tree roots
for seventeen years. A long, charmed childhood
not unlike one in a Great Lake town where at dusk
you'd pack up swimsuit, shake sand off your towel
and head back to the lights in the two-family houses
lining the streets. Where the family sat around the radio.
And the parents argued over their son and daughter
until each left for good. To cry in the air