July 2014

Pace, Stones and Soil, Walking to an Eight O’Clock Class

Gray Jacobik

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.usfca.edu/ontarioreview

Part of the Poetry Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://repository.usfca.edu/ontarioreview/vol39/iss1/9

For more information, please contact southerr@usfca.edu.
Three Poems
GRAY JACOBIK

Pace

When I worked for Sani-Kan, selling
portable chemical toilets
for the comfort and convenience
of carpenters and drywall installer,
I gave the bright mold of my unborn self
to one of the company’s drivers.
Pace would back up his truck
to a Sani-Kan
and through a fifty-foot hose
suck up sewage to the galvanized tank
that later sloshed its way
to the pumping station.
I’d wait in the shop while he washed up,
comparing my shape to the finger-smudged shapes
rolling and pitching on the satin seas
of girlie calendars.
Pace would whip up the Lava at the greasy
sink, turn and grin, tease me
like he’d invented the technique.
Backseat of his Pontiac, his rough hands
warming themselves above my knees,
down I’d go into the belly of the whale
where it was dark and hot and nauseating,
praying some divine burp
would spit me up
at least to where I could swim.
I was leagues from self-respect.
Shit-eater the boss called Pace,
pointing him out to me—
All my men eat shit.
Stones and Soil

When I garden back in Massachusetts,
I think of Pilgrims, of Congregationalists,
then Unitarians, clearing that land.
Back-breaking labor for generations. Two horses,
iron bars, a stoneboat and months, years
of hauling; still stones everywhere,
even after the fields were crosshatched
with walls. I plant between stones,
over stones, after I've removed stones,
and wonder why the Pilgrims never called
that land Golgotha. But here, in Central Illinois,
dark soil curls off the cultivator
like pudding or chocolate; Fertility itself,
an enormous black goddess, lay down
one morning and gave her body to us
so we might feast forever. Last Christmas,
I scooped some up to show folks back in Mass
what real soil was. Family, friends, at the table,
and I'd pass the shoebox around. Touch it,
I'd say, and smell it. Can you believe how friable
it is, how rich, and look—no stone, nowhere, ever!
I've heard it said, lowering my voice,
farmers in Kansas and the Dakotas would kill
for Illinois soil. The richest soil on Earth.
go down twelve feet in some places.
They indulged me. Smiled. Laughed.
“My Mom's a little over-enthusiastic,”
my daughter said, embarrassed, when I showed
the soil to her friends. Now that it's spring
and the farmers are plowing twelve hours a day,
I wish those New England forebearers would
turn up here in Coles County. They'd stand
in the center of an enormous field, bespangled
and dazzling in resurrection white, bend down
and touch the soil, proclaim this New Jerusalem.
Walking to an Eight O'Clock Class

The sky looks stiff as if rinsed
In blue starch, air buffed and crystalline,
The first clearly cold day, a gift to cuff
Through yellow maple leaves that stream
Across lawns and splatter parked cars,
And pass sixty or so faces forever
Nineteen or twenty-one, faces that
Replace themselves each fall as if
Under contract: you cannot graduate
Unless you replicate yourself, so each
Does miraculously, a senior becomes
A freshman, ad infinitum, and only
The faculty ages, develops arthritic knees,
Dowager humps, cataracts; brain-dead
After reading eighty thousand freshman
Compositions. But I push all that aside
And think of Dickinson and Millay, how
They'd have loved this pearl-like light,
The sheer delight of dwelling in a body
That propels its way through space,
Having a future, anyone's future,
More rapture than the dead can stand.
And there are the poems to pitch
For an hour, power enough to brush aside
Those first wisps of decrepitude, and
Besides, the Holy Company draws near,
Those like-minded spirits, not angels
Precisely, but guardians nevertheless.
For me, at least, they're kept in books,
And I've got Keats and Coleridge in hand,
And moreover, damp wet branches overhead,
Blackbirds feeding in the yard,
These endlessly replicating bodies and minds,
More than half-asleep, flowing into
The silken dream of their tiered existence.