

POETICS OF
QUALITY TIME

William Hayden

selling poems

I'm cleaning out my poetry folders,
the love poems and the ghost poems,
a meditation on loss over a bridge
and the one sonnet I tried in college
that nobody ever read because it
plagiarized Shakespeare too tight
and still didn't meet the pentameter
he asked for. I'm rereading old Neruda—
from before his political career when he
saw himself as smaller than an insect—
to learn how to say *te quiero mucho*
without Viagra tension, and in English,
but more beautiful. Sherman Alexie wrote
The Powwow At The End of the World
before we knew the end of the world
was already here, to make me dance
like a fish today (I dance like a politician
tricking you to your feet) and tomorrow,
when I'll scramble up geopolitical solutions
like hash-browned arias; little lyrical things
for sale, with nobody to bear the cost.

breathing

My chemical nature is stubborn.
I was born already willing to die.
I said something like, I'm not afraid of that,

respectfully.

The movement of time is vibrant, is bent
like a banana, but not always yellow.

We cannot escape death, said Epictetus.
Or he said something basically like that
in ancient greece. We cannot escape time

that is offered to us by someone. Hours ago,
exploring the boundaries of allergens,
we spoke about banana-flavored things

near a sweet shop on Houston.

The sunset passed time, yellow, and
we gave up things that would kill us:

exhale, don't inhale.

imploding

In the last cold summer
the bones of great trees softened
and folded over to wither.
Trees with closed eyes. Their blossoms
lost to the season. Their memories,
the last of their memories,
fallen. Seeds

eager to rupture above this frost— imploding
to set roots, digging down to reach out arms
that help you climb up, and higher,
to meet sunlight, gather its freshness,
arch your spirit over the memory
of what was broken, what is
meant to be unbroken. Your spirit is

attached to the seed of a tree.
It will grow
to reach above the skyline
and meet me.

don't fall in

I got this wrong, but I can't tell you that.

I got this wrong, and the shell of life is cracking away in shards, big ugly shards like I'm hatching into an underworld, a darkened underworld for regretful souls and I can't tell you about it. Everything I feel is a little bit like torture, mostly everything is torture, but I can't tell you that.

Every good memory is a sad memory.

Every bit of love is wedded to the force of regret that cracks this shell. I got this wrong and everything I feel is a little bit like torture, and in every passing beautiful thing I see you, but I can't tell you that. I am working on resurfacing in the world. Any time you walk off to the bathroom I speak a reminder about these breaking holes: Don't fall in, we can stay here. It's beautiful here.

elevator

It never made sense to feel great love
or great pain
as if a short flight was less likely
to crash down
my movement close to the ground
and staying low until I surrendered against
your force of arms in an elevator
raising me somewhere high

And now I do
gather the scrapbook of pictures
in my mind, a life punctuated with children
and love and sweaty palms
that I can hold
 how lightly your touch
opened my touch
to graze lightly on
possibility here

elevator (cont.)

Now I do
live in greatness that disciplines me
painful greatness and loving
greatness that feels like
a hotel in upstate new york that lets
you sleep in while I suffer in a sauna
where all the heat lays on the surface
and I burn until my passion is cruelty—
it spins like the world for us is changing

Now I do
awaken in a low place with a memory
(you've spoken in the night, in my sleep)
of how to continue life without you. I've
forgotten the words but not the voice
or the sense missing from the ending

This ache as the elevator doors open
now I do

rocks are stacked for you

For John Giorno

With every errant misspelling I
dispelling with the defense that I'm not high
prove the who of everybody is a
complete disappointment
feel how you feel really good in
grey or watercolor, in a great big storm
when you realize things are not going to get better

may my gift to you be sunlight and a poem
that I wrote standing up, may every song be
a poet's song and may time and nature curl
your mouth into a smile when space forgets you
when you realize things are not going to get better
and may every piece of bad news you've received
release so that you feel the same as before

and I can say I didn't sell out I bought in
and I can say with words how I look with feelings
with daffodils for eyes and baptized at a factory
freed from grasping attachment and guilt
when you realize—

rocks are stacked for you (cont,)

rocks are stacked for you and for all of the burning

for all of the burning

perfection is not something waiting for us in the future
we are gods and goddesses right at this very moment
this is our evolution— things are not going to get better

i've given up on sleep

i might stop somewhere, waiting for you
huntress to the pride, i need you.
i long to drink from you
deep
it might come to resemble love

i rush toward you suddenly, or
is it more of a scuttle, as if you were
the ocean and I am something crablike
(a crustacean) and startled, so
still fast, but not violent, more fleeting
than that and gentle,
lifted up slightly in the chest
as if carried by the wind.

i might look back, waiting for you
you speak to me with words and
i bite you with my
teeth
it might come to resemble love

i prefer screaming into a pillow

let me dare to agonize about love

to what purpose, then, do you arrive at the word?
your dreams fraught with romantic regimes as if
it weren't a superhuman power to decide about
whom to get intimate with