

Six Poems



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Keywords: William H. Poteat, Polanyi, Augustine, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, Auden, Agee

Guest Editor's Note:

Jerry writes, "I am pleased to be a (marginal) person within the swirl of the convivial cross currents concerned with the mindful connection the self as agent (a body) has in unraveling the 'mind over body' dichotomy."

The last poem, "Not Unlike Baseball," was a favorite of Poteat's. Poteat included a line from it, "no word is neutral upon utterance," among the epigraphs at the beginning of *A Philosophical Daybook: Post-Critical Investigations* (University of Missouri Press, 1990).

Two of the poems have been published previously in places indicated below and are reprinted here printed by permission of the copyright holder, Mr. Eidenier.

KNOWER AND THE KNOWN

for Bill Poteat

Words appropriate granules of thought.
 language-shaped
 meaning shifts...
 still

there remains the persistence of the real
in the fabric of vowels—uttered from the personal;

 the I
 of each self stands
 within,
 behind,
 before

words we choose having been chosen to speak.

PEGASUS AND PORTRAITS

Did you leave the golden bridle
In deep love, unfolding his animal wings?
And carry the innocent eye to saddle,
Through dangerous game to sing?

Between thumb and finger
A clairvoyant love of care,
Soaring through sea and sky to configure
The dying ripeness of their lyre.

Words hang upon the smallest star
And shine through the human world
To rise full song in their art.
In the cradle between shadow and light

A deep love unfolds in word,
The muses of their day and night.

Published in *Sonnets to Eurydice* (Windy Row Press, 1976).

ELEGY FOR BILL POTEAT

“to say I love you is to say I want you to be...”

—St. Augustine

It is not possible
to impersonally think
for thinking blooms
within the incantations
of another’s voice.

Reason remains
more than the sound
of all its parts.

Let us take
the upper case
from the noun of our names
and be lowered
to the care of this earth.

The shadows of ambiguity
always surround the self;
even after long years
the surprise that our bodies still belong.

All which makes a person
is too much magic
for the sum of words.

Creation is in the giving
or taking of a rib;
the apple when offered
glistens in the promise
that no self which belongs
to another’s yes, shall be undone.

FAILURE OF LANGUAGE

She uttered what was lodged
within her heart, that desperate

need to share another body's warmth.
Ophelia's touch might have melted

Hamlet's cold suspicion, but care
could not wrap round her words,

carry them home to quilt his thoughts,
straighten the corridors of his mind.

Here is the failure of language:
words shifting from what is meant

to what is thought, to what is surmised;
unraveling all the sinews of care.

A stream-shroud covers her, and sorrow
lifts her body just above the stones.

Published in *In a Fine Frenzy: Poets Respond to Shakespeare*,
edited by David Starkey and Paul J. Willis (University of Iowa
Press, 2005).

ON EARNING AN HONEST LIVING

for Bill Poteat

“...that truth is neither mine nor his nor another’s, but belongs to us all, and we must never account it private to ourselves, lest we be deprived of it.”

—St. Augustine

Middle C excites mosquitoes to swarm. Know the body’s insistence—
hum of the human. There is an archeology of the heart, a poetic
delight in thought. Truth grabs you by the hair,

shakes you clean. In our time reason is easily assumed—collectible.

Our words a vaporization. The poles of earth wander. This
world bobs, up and down. Rethink a moment, of velocity,

inertia, latent heat. How iron dissolves to electrons, protons sound
undulations of air. How the blue jay might absorb the pterodactyl.
It takes over 150 elephants to make a whale.

Learn the smell of unreality. The sham of intellect with no grace.

The knowledge there are ass holes who don’t know how to fart.

Acts are irreducible. Thinking is an act. A being possessed.

Names stand real as trees. Hard knocks, bark! Wittgenstein,

Merleau-Ponty, Polanyi, Auden, Agee.

The consequence of vision thickens on the tongue.

Words, heart of pine, grains around the disappearing. Truth clings

as seeds, cocklebur, Xanthium strumarium—beggar lice,

Bidens—a dancing bramble.

Wade in a mud hole where elephants bathe. Wallow.

Squat your haunches down. Let the elements cling.

Get down to know that the gratuitous is sacred.

Dew seeks a thing stable. Truth clings to the underside.

Language is a tissue. All the echoes are at the bottom.

NOT UNLIKE BASEBALL

rotation of language things thoughts
 present themselves—
no word is neutral upon
 utterance

effort split finger or spit
 ends seams spinning
knowledge comes a blue darter
 Dizzy Dean

intent has a body will one thing only
 raw hide to wood
 a moment cracks