

Jun-2006

Poetry

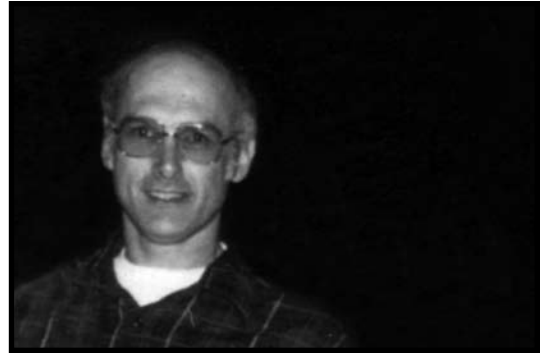
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Gift

When we meet for the first time
in forty years, you say my poems
are mysteries, yet within two months
you send me a hand-crafted knife,
bolstered and pinned in brass, handled
with the aged koa another friend,
sent from Hawaii. The matched grips,
sliced thin as a Roman coin thumbed
almost faceless, parenthesize
three blades ground and stropped
to an edge only good light (or blood)
reveals. Oh, it can cut, your gift
of skill and work and love, but
it, too can be folded up and pocketed.

—Don Johnson, for Ed Sheets

After the Ice Storm

for Doris Toyooka Johnson

In the crawl space under the kitchen, I kneel
in a bubble of light where the ruptured fitting
drips, though I've shut off the flow at the valve.

Outside, under the ice-storm's glittering tonnage
sycamores hum and groan. When their limbs explode
I think of your father on his hands and knees
tamping black powder into the hole he had drilled
in the lava rock beneath your house in Honolulu.
Upstairs your baby brother slept. You sliced
ginger for the chicken *hekeka* while your mother
stitched *futons* in the alcove just above the detonation.

Only the persimmon balanced on the New Year's shrine
toppled. The Morishiges next door never knew
how with each small charge he lowered the floor, pushed
back the walls of a cellar he could finally stand in.

Now you watch his monitored sleep, gauging the slow
spillage down a silvered tube. Nurses carry away
whatever breaks down inside him.

Here, on my knees
in cold mud, I finger the bread he taught me to pack
into wet pipes to halt seepage, so the joint
will heat up, liquefy the flux and suck in solder
seal the fitting right, so it won't let go, ever.

—Don Johnson

The Latin Root for *Cultivate* Means *Cherish*

My ninety year old neighbor's winter crop
Has sprouted, softening October's show
Of brittle reds and yellows. Through leaf drop
And frost these fields against the hill will glow
Green, percolating up through snow, that first
Leveler, to pool, as light unbends each stalk,
Until all sixty acres lie immersed
Again in green. Those winter days when I walk
His road, I'll picture him overalled in sun
Collecting wagonloads of windrowed stones,
A yearly harvest, labor never done,
A miracle of strength in those old bones.
His verdant fields illuminate dark days.
Those hard loaves stacked enlighten other ways.

—Don Johnson

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