THREE POEMS

MAX WICKERT

The Poetry Collection is proud to celebrate National Poetry Month with the publication of both Max Wickert's and Ann Goldsmith's *Three Poems*, the ninth and tenth in a series featuring the work of poets living in Buffalo.

2009	Bernhard Frank
2010	Ansie Baird
2011	Jorge Guitart
2012	Ross Runfola
2013	Norma Kassirer
2013	William Sylvester
2014	Robert Giannetti
2015	Sally Cook

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THREE POEMS

MAX WICKERT

NOT AS DESPERATE BUT MORE PROFOUND

I can't make out the meaning but recognize the tone.
Somehow that babbling is all about us.
We don't so much hear it, we feel it in the bone.
Weird pleasure in guessing what we are missing…
Time was when we were sure we had no time.
Spontaneous joy, ephemeral grief—obscure joke we gaily
Admitted we couldn't explain to our satisfaction.
Is it the world then we're in love with? Yes, I'm

Yours, you're mine, and the rest are part of the action.
The ice on the fountain grows thinner daily.
What harm could there be in remembering the kissing?

To be apart is not to be alone.
Light in the mountains keeps shining without us,
Not altogether imaginable, but known.

SELFIE TWEETS

The self comes from nowhere,
settles in and keeps
busy, going nowhere.

Seeing how I'm making
a spectacle of
myself won't make me stop.

I've weaned myself of all
addictions except
addiction to self-love.

Let the simplicity
where I lose myself
keep hiding in my path.

Remember: kill yourself
each time you suspect
that you've been born again.

You were perfect at birth
and now is the time
to throw yourself away.

Keep lying to yourself.
Stay cheerful. Don't show
the abyss to the kids.

Your false self said so but
your authentic self
(just wait!) will say so too.

I never guessed my mask
could freeze on my face
and turn into myself.

Though I say so myself,
most of us frauds don't
think of ourselves as frauds.

The self masters the word
in order to find
itself mastered by it.

Little Dark Sequence

1

There is something in the stars.
There is something in the wind.

It is not yet an odor
but promises to become one.

Trust it and any coincidence
may be the one to bring it to you.

It may arrive like a pin prick
tearing itself out in a huge rose,

or like sponge-pulp film shrinking
into earth before your eyes.

Its fragrance in either case
will be overwhelming.

It is always in the wind
but appears only when its star

plants in your mind inspiration
enough to let you call it.

You say “Here you are!”
and it grows all around you,

like death, if death is a flower,
like a flower, if life is a flower.

2

And while you are smiling,
panthers are smiling in the dark
and kids in the dark of the stable
are smiling and the bright landscape
smiles in the dark peace of the smile
of whatever painter painted it whose skull
has by now worn its smile for ages.

Modestly, the museum guide smiles
at the groups of art lovers smiling back—
tourists, priests, lovers of crowds,
lovers, loners—all smiling back
and me among them at this very moment

smiling so darkly under the sky lights
that I think "Life must be like this
smiling in the dark."

3

I am reeling after the shadow of my pen.
Just now I ignored a tempting interruption,
and here I am once more, in the dark as ever,
splashing after new life, deliberate stroke

after stroke, clamoring “Hey! hey, you
who…” I take a sip of wine. “You
here again, up to your old game?
inhering in your absence, tied to it,

your body in a spiral of black twine,
string after string of black motes, a black river
drifting, and you drifting in it?” More wine!

Let me be sure enough of your trail to write:
“Let me keep on writing until I am
so drunk that I dip my pen in the wine.”

4

howsoever far
I go into light
I wait
for something
to come out of
darkness
from the world's rim
dark things quietly
hurtling into
a pin prick of
light
the light
fueled
to burst
the world
like a star

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Max Wickert, Professor of English Emeritus, University at Buffalo, is a poet, translator, and publisher. He is the author of three books of verse: *All the Weight of the Still Midnight (*1972), *Pat Sonnets* (2000), and *No Cartoons* (2011); and of three books of verse translation from the Italian of Torquato Tasso: *The Liberation of Jerusalem* (Oxford University Press, 2009), *Love Poems for Lucrezia Bendidio* (Italica Press, 2011) and *Rinaldo* (Italica Press, 2017 forthcoming). In 2013 he edited and published *An Outriders Anthology: Poetry in Buffalo 1969-1979 and After.*

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