THREE POEMS

Irving Feldman

"To myself unknown, whimsical, drawn apart."

Irving Feldman

February 1976

The Poetry Collection is proud to celebrate National Poetry Month with the publication of Irving Feldman's *Three Poems*, the thirteenth in a series featuring the work of poets living in Buffalo.

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FRAGMENT

for John Hollander

The language isn't saved by style
but by a tale worth telling.
Not, then, to purify the old words
but to bring new speech into
the lexicon of the tribe,
to tell, for example, how they
received their names—the gods—
who die in every generation
—the world ends—
and are revived under new vocables
as yet unknown to us
and in other, still unguessable shapes
—that must be the world renewed, the new world.
Or even to tell—if we can tell
no more than this—how they came to die
and lost their names and their allure, were husks
hardly able to hold our whispers,
even this allows us a kind
of communion, a beginning of sorts,
a way to keep feeling alive.

APOCALYPSE

At the end of Forty-second Street
A broken sun goes down in squalls.
The wind-bewildered twilight
Is blasted on the cracking walls.

The bells begin, against the stone
They butt their swollen volumes of doom,
The auto horns cry out, Atone!—
From their jobs the poor go crowding home.

Ragged glory of the day's
Dying; winter riots on the drum,
Summoning the poor to their patience.
Salvation is a growing numb.

The bells are pounding the last glint.
Where Seventh Avenue makes a cross,
Grazing on the shores of print,
They await the coming of the bus.

HOW WONDERFUL

How wonderful to be understood,
to just sit here while some kind person
relieves you of the awful burden
of having to explain yourself, of having
to find other words to say what you meant,
or what you think you thought you meant,
and of the worse burden of finding no words,
of being struck dumb . . . because some bright person
has found just the right words for you—and you
have only to sit here and be grateful
for words so quiet so discerning they seem
not words but literate light, in which
your merely lucid blossoming grows lustrous.
How wonderful that is!

And how altogether wonderful it is
not to be understood, not at all, to, well,
just sit here while someone not unkindly
is saying those impossibly wrong things,
or quite possibly they're the right things
if you are, which you're not, that someone
—a difference, finally, so indifferent
it would be conceit not to let it pass,
unkindness, really, to spoil someone's fun.
And so you don't mind, you welcome the umbrage
of those high murmurings over your head,
having found, after all, you are grateful
—and you understand this, how wonderful!—

that you've been led to be quietly yourself,
like a root growing wise in darkness
under the light litter, the falling words.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Coney Island, New York, in 1928 and educated at the City College of New York and at Columbia University, Irving Feldman is Distinguished Professor of English Emeritus at the University at Buffalo where he taught from 1964 to 2004. He has received a National Institute of Arts and Letters award and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts as well as fellowships from the Academy of American Poets, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Ingram Merrill Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation. Feldman's twelve books of poetry include *Works and Days* (1961), winner of the Kovner Poetry Prize of the Jewish Book Council; *The Pripet Marshes* (1965) and *Leaping Clear* (1976), finalists for the National Book Award; *All of Us Here* (1986), finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award; *Beautiful False Things* (2000); and *Collected Poems 1954-2004* (2004). The Waywiser Press will publish later this year *Usable Truths,* a collection of 1,000 of his aphorisms and observations. In 2019 the Poetry Collection acquired the Irving Feldman Collection of his papers.

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