

Ode to Tomatoes by Pablo Neruda

The street
filled with tomatoes
midday,
summer,
light is
halved
like
a
tomato,
its juice
runs
through the streets.
In December,
unabated,
the tomato
invades
the kitchen,
it enters at lunchtime,
takes
its ease
on countertops,
among glasses,
butter dishes,
blue saltcellars.
It sheds
its own light,
benign majesty.
Unfortunately, we must
murder it:
the knife
sinks
into living flesh,
red
viscera,
a cool
sun,
profound,
inexhaustible,
populates the salads
of Chile,
happily, it is wed
to the clear onion,

and to celebrate the union
we
pour
oil,
essential
child of the olive,
onto its halved hemispheres,
pepper
adds
its fragrance,
salt, its magnetism;
it is the wedding
of the day,
parsley
hoists
its flag,
potatoes
bubble vigorously,
the aroma
of the roast
knocks
at the door,
it's time!
come on!
and, on
the table, at the midpoint
of summer,
the tomato,
star of earth,
recurrent
and fertile
star,
displays
its convolutions,
its canals,
its remarkable amplitude
and abundance,
no pit,
no husk,
no leaves or thorns,
the tomato offers
its gift
of fiery color
and cool completeness.

Charles Simic, prose poems

My guardian angel is afraid of the dark. He pretends he's not, sends me ahead, tells me he'll be along in a moment. Pretty soon I can't see a thing. "This must be the darkest corner of heaven," someone whispers behind my back. It turns out her guardian angel is missing too. "It's an outrage," I tell her. "The dirty little cowards leaving us all alone," she whispers. And of course, for all we know, I might be a hundred years old already, and she just a sleepy little girl with glasses.

The hundred-year-old china doll head the sea washes up on its gray beach. One would like to know the story. One would like to make it up, make up many stories. It's been so long in the sea, the eyes and nose have been erased, its faint smile is even fainter. With the night coming, one would like to see oneself walking the empty beach and bending down to it.

We were so poor I had to take the place of the bait in the mousetrap. All alone in the cellar, I could hear them pacing upstairs, tossing and turning in their beds. "These are dark and evil days," the mouse told me as he nibbled my ear. Years passed. My mother wore a cat-fur collar which she stroked until its sparks lit up the cellar.

I am the last Napoleonic soldier. It's almost two hundred years later and I am still retreating from Moscow. The road is lined with white birch trees and the mud comes up to my knees. The one-eyed woman wants to sell me a chicken, and I don't even have any clothes on. The Germans are going one way; I am going the other. The Russians are going still another way and waving good-by. I have a ceremonial saber. I use it to cut my hair, which is four feet long.

“What You Mourn” by Sheila Black 2004

The year they straighten my legs,
the young doctor said, meaning to be kind,
Now you will walk straight
on your wedding day, but what he could not
imagine is how even on my wedding day 5
I would arch my back and wonder
about the body I had before I was changed,
how I would have nested in it,
made it my home, how I repeated his words
when I wished to stir up my native anger 10
feel like the exile I believed
I was, imprisoned in a foreign body
like a person imprisoned in a foreign land
forced to speak a strange tongue
heavy in the mouth, a mouth full of stones. 15

Crippled they called us when I was young
later the word was *disabled* and then *differently abled*,
but those were all names given by outsiders
none of whom could imagine
that the crooked body they spoke of, 20
the body, which made walking difficult
and running practically impossible,
except as a kind of dance, a sideways looping
like someone about to fall
headlong down and hug the earth, that body 25
they tried so hard to fix, straighten was simply mine,
and I loved it as you love your own country,
the familiar lay of the land, the unkempt trees,
the smell of mowed grass, down to the nameless
flowers at your feet—clover, asphodel, 30
and the blue flies that buzz over them.

Madonna and Child By Rafael Campo
from *Diva*, published by Duke University Press. © 1999

By menopause, it's not just estrogen
my mother lacks. She's lost her eldest son—
that's me, the one who's queer—the doctor who
once made her very proud. These days, I do
my own wash when I'm home, I cook for her 5
so she can take a break from all the chores
she now refuses to assign to me.
She sits, half-watching Ricki¹ through her tea's
thin steam, her squint of disapproval more
denial than it is disgust. She hears 10
much better than she sees—it's easier
to keep out vision than it is to clear
the air of sounds—and yet I know it's age
that stultifies her senses too. Enraged
because she's lost so much, I understand 15
why suddenly she looks so stunned
as from the television: “. . . Bitch, she stole
my boyfriend, my own mother did! . . .” I fold
a towel noiselessly. I know she thinks
it's garbage, sinful, crap—just as she thinks 20
that taking estrogen in pills is not
what God intended, no matter what
the doctors say; or that I'm gay is plain
unnatural, she can't endure such pain.
The oven timer rings. The cookies that 25
I've baked are done. I'll make another batch
though she won't touch them: given up for Lent.
My mother's love. I wonder where it went.

¹ Ricki Lake, a day-time talk show.

The Terrorist, He Watches by Wislawa Szymborska

The bomb will go off in the bar at one twenty p.m.
Now it's only one sixteen p.m.
Some will still have time to go in,
Some to get out.

The terrorist has already crossed to the other side of the street.
The distance protects him from any danger,
and what a sight for sore eyes.

A woman in a yellow jacket, she goes in.
A man in dark glasses, he comes out.
Guys in dark jeans, they are talking.
One seventeen and four seconds.
That shorter guy's really got it made, and gets on a scooter,
and that taller one, he goes in.

One seventeen and forty seconds.
That girl there, she's got a green ribbon in her hair.
Too bad that bus just cut her from view.
One eighteen p.m.
The girl's not there any more.
Was she dumb enough to go in, or wasn't she?
That we'll see when they carry them out.

One nineteen p.m.
No one seems to be going in.
Instead a fat baldy's coming out.
Like he's looking for something in his pockets and
at one nineteen and fifty seconds
he goes back in for those crummy gloves of his.

It's one twenty p.m.
The time, how it drags.
Should be any moment now.
Not yet.
Yes, this is it.
The bomb, it goes off.

I Have an Illegal Alien in My Trunk
By Pamela Uschuk

Just north of the border, the migra doesn't consider
this bumpersticker a joke. Only a chihuahua
without papers, maybe a pair of pawned cowboy boots
would fit in the trunk of this mini SUV driving Oracle
swarming at rush hour. Even though half of Tucson's traffic
speaks Spanish, the legislature's declared
English the only legal fuel—it's
the same Continental Divide stubborn and paralytic
as the steel-plated wall insulting our nation's learning curve
as it cleaves us. For over seventy years
my grandma's high cheekbones were illegal. Lovely
as a tiger lily she spoke
the six severed tongues dividing her heart.
In a grave that does not spell out her name
in any language, she is beyond the shovels of police
who would have to dig up her bones to deport them
back to a village outside Prague, where
beneath a Catholic church are layered
the crumbling skulls and femurs
of her ancestors slaughtered by centuries of wars.
I am safe in my adobe house
with its rainbow nations of chuckling quails,
pyrrhuloxia, phainopeplas, choirs of mockingbirds,
skitterish verdins and purple finches, coyotes,
javelinas, rattlers, scorpions, collared and leopard lizards,
and the not so silent majority of English sparrows
who accommodate too easily to walls—there
is not one passport among them. The cactus wren
weaves her tough nest among the barbed thorns
of the cholla, while round-eared gophers construct
complex subways for their babies to run
under chainlink fences separating yards.
Each day along the border of our sealed hearts
gleaming with coiled razor wire, traffic
idles waiting for armed guards
to pillage each car trunk for contraband
people and drugs. I have seen our agents rip
out the interiors of vans, spit commands
at old women with black hair and dark skin.
Sanitary, they use rubber gloves
to deconstruct the meagre grocery bags
and plastic purses of common lives. Indians
are particularly suspect, even though reservations
were drawn like tumors by both governments
to spill across borders, so that whole families
are amputated like unnecessary limbs.
This morning walking the Rillito River,
we read bilingual signs warning the thirsty

not to drink irrigation water slaking imported
ornamental bushes & flowering trees.
This year, statistics say, twice
as many border crossers will die of thirst
in Arizona. Who can stop tongues
alien or otherwise from swelling black at noon. After all,
in the barbed wire waiting room of the heart
there is no seating for sentiment
nor room for the frail arms of hope to save strangers, even
if they are nursing mothers or desperate fathers
looking for work who haven't yet learned
the English word for *por que*.
After all, waging a war on terror
like any war is not for the faint ambitions
of the humane, so, in the game of homeland security,
we erect a bulletproof wall across the borders of our souls
that guarantees destruction must win.

The Gift by Li Young Lee

To pull the metal splinter from my palm
my father recited a story in a low voice.
I watched his lovely face and not the blade.
Before the story ended, he'd removed
the iron sliver I thought I'd die from. 5

I can't remember the tale,
but hear his voice still, a well
of dark water, a prayer.
And I recall his hands,
two measures of tenderness 10
he laid against my face,
the flames of discipline
he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon
you would have thought you saw a man 15
planting something in a boy's palm,
a silver tear, a tiny flame.
Had you followed that boy
you would have arrived here,
where I bend over my wife's right hand. 20

Look how I shave her thumbnail down
so carefully she feels no pain.
Watch as I lift the splinter out.
I was seven when my father
took my hand like this, 25
and I did not hold that shard
between my fingers and think,
Metal that will bury me,
christen it Little Assassin,
Ore Going Deep for My Heart. 30
And I did not lift up my wound and cry,
Death visited here!
I did what a child does
when he's given something to keep.
I kissed my father. 35

Sleeve Under Glass
from Marilyn Kallet's *Packing Light*

Majdanek, Lublin

In a gallery, you'd think
chic, wearable art.

Reread:
"Fabric from Jewish hair."

The tresses above the case
can't scream.

The sleeve pitched
past human.

Blonde in demand. In Berlin,
did the commandant's wife

model this cloak
to soak up *Faustus*?

The sleeve didn't scorch her skin.
Iced champagne. Hen under glass.

The folk of Lublin who lived on the hills
overlooking the death camp,

couldn't unsee 40,000 Jews
file in from the ghetto, thousands more

from the station. In the town square,
speakers blasted Beethoven to drown screams.

Locals breathed smoke in autumn, 1942.
At the "Harvest Festival," code name *Erntfest*,

how many heads reaped
to make a pale coat?

Poem Seen on a Motel Fan
Alberto Blanco

The heat slows everything down.
Even the fan burns;
its blades have begun to protest.
Then a cool breeze comes;
the curtains begin to dance...

The core of the fan is still
a convex mirror, the eye
of a wide, incredulous fish,
a smooth helmet of gold.

In it, reflections turn
with the noise of the motor inside,
and yet stay in one place.

I turn the speed up and the blades
Go round almost invisibly; they become
only a gauze, pale as ash, or a dirty-white gas.
the mirror at their center stays the same.
images spin in its curvature. And that—

I tell myself—this is how the universe works:
the surfaces moves, superfluous, at great speed,
and the core does not; the manifestations change,
but the forms they reflect never do.
The individuals pass, and the species remains.

The townsmen pass away; the town goes on.

The poets die, but the poetry remains.

Our thoughts—this one, for example—pass away too,
But someone or something is watching. Something remains.

Changing What We Mean By Eloise Klein Healy

Turning your back, you button your blouse. That's new.
You redirect the conversation. A man
has entered it. Your therapist has given you
permission to discuss this with me, the word
you've been looking for in desire.
You can now say "heterosexual" with me. We mean

different things when we say it. I mean
the life I left behind forever. For you, it's a new
beginning, a stab at being normal again, a desire
to enter the world with a man
instead of a woman, and of course, there's the word
you won't claim for yourself anymore, you

who have children to think of, you
who have put me in line behind them and mean
to keep the order clear. It's really my word
against yours anymore in this new
language, in this battle over how a man
is about to enter this closed room of desire

we've gingerly exchanged keys to, but desire
isn't what's at issue anyway, you
say to me. Instead I learn a man
can protect you in a way a woman only means
to but never can, and my world is too new
when there's real life out there, word

after word for how normal looks, each word
cutting like scissors a profile of desire—
a man facing a woman, nothing particularly new
or interesting to me. I've wanted only to face you
and the world simultaneously, say what I mean
with my body, my choice to not be a man,

to be a woman with you, forget the man's
part or how his body is the word
for what touch can contain, what love means.
If this were only about desire,
you say, I'd still desire you.
But it isn't passion we're defining, new

consequences emerge when a man and desire
are part of the words we hurl, you
changing how you mean loving—this terrible final news

_____ by Terrance Hayes

Blacks in one box
Blacks in two box
Blacks on
Blacks stacked in boxes stacked on boxes
Blacks in boxes stacked on shores
Blacks in boxes stacked on boats in darkness
Blacks in boxes do not float
Blacks in boxes count their losses
Blacks on boat docks
Blacks on auction
Blacks on wagons
Blacks with masters in the houses
Blacks with bosses in the fields
Blacks in helmets toting rifles
Blacks in Harlem toting banjos boots and quilts
Blacks on foot
Blacks on buses
Blacks on backwood hardwood stages singing blues
Blacks on Broadway singing too
Blacks can Charleston
Blacks can foxtrot
Blacks can bebop
Blacks can moonwalk
Blacks can beatbox
Blacks can run fast too
Blacks on
Blacks and
Blacks on knees and
Blacks on couches
Blacks on Good Times
Blacks on Roots
Blacks on Cosby
Blacks in voting booths are
Blacks in boxes
Blacks beside
Blacks in rows of houses are
Blacks in boxes too

On the Amtrak from Boston to New York City Sherman Alexie

The white woman across the aisle from me says 'Look,
look at all the history, that house
on the hill there is over two hundred years old, '
as she points out the window past me

into what she has been taught. I have learned
little more about American history during my few days
back East than what I expected and far less
of what we should all know of the tribal stories

whose architecture is 15,000 years older
than the corners of the house that sits
museumed on the hill. 'Walden Pond, '
the woman on the train asks, 'Did you see Walden Pond? '

and I don't have a cruel enough heart to break
her own by telling her there are five Walden Ponds
on my little reservation out West
and at least a hundred more surrounding Spokane,

the city I pretended to call my home. 'Listen, '
I could have told her. 'I don't give a shit
about Walden. I know the Indians were living stories
around that pond before Walden's grandparents were born

and before his grandparents' grandparents were born.
I'm tired of hearing about Don-fucking-Henley¹ saving it, too,
because that's redundant. If Don Henley's brothers and sisters
and mothers and father hadn't come here in the first place

then nothing would need to be saved.'
But I didn't say a word to the woman about Walden
Pond because she smiled so much and seemed delighted
that I thought to bring her an orange juice

back from the food car. I respect elders
of every color. All I really did was eat
my tasteless sandwich, drink my Diet Pepsi
and nod my head whenever the woman pointed out

another little piece of her country's history
while I, as all Indians have done
since this war began, made plans
for what I would do and say the next time

somebody from the enemy thought I was one of their own.

¹ Musician, founding member of The Eagles.

