

A Quiet Poem

When music is far enough away
the eyelid does not often move

and objects are still as lavender
without breath or distant rejoinder.

The cloud is then so subtly dragged
away by the silver flying machine

that the thought of it alone echoes
unbelievably; the sound of the motor falls

like a coin toward the ocean's floor
and the eye does not flicker

as it does when in the loud sun a coin
rises and nicks the near air. Now,

slowly, the heart breathes to music
while the coins lie in wet yellow sand.

—Frank O'Hara

A Downward Look

Seen from above, the sky
Is deep. Clouds float down there,

Foam on a long luxurious bath.
Their shadows over limbs submerged in “air”,

Over protuberances, faults,
A delta thicket, glide. On high, the love

That drew the bath and scattered it with salts

Still radiates new projects old as day,
And hardly registers the tug

When, far beneath, a wrinkled, baby hand
Happens upon the plug.

—James Merrill

Gray Day

“There is a cloud,”
Fairfield used to say,
“that stretches from
Richmond to Bangor:
its center is Southampton.”

Today,
gray day,
its center is
Bridgehampton,
a nimbus over the pond
you made,
where a willow
jerks its leaves
and the oxeye daisies
stand in unsevered ranks.
Helena is on a bench
by the pond, writing
a poem, I bet.

I opt
for the living room and
the squishy chairs
and Rachmaninoff
played by Richter
(who else?) and
here comes Oriane
with her ragged ruff:
“Oriane, there are hairs
all over my blazer:
would you care
to discuss it?” She
would not and stalks
haughtily out of the room,
leaving me with the music
and a window
full of leaves.

—James Schuyler

Clouds

A whip-poor-will brushed
her wing along the ground
a moment ago, fifty years
in the orchard where my father
kept pear and plum,
a decade of peach trees
and Antinovka's apples
whose seeds come
from Russia by ship
under clouds islanding
a window very past
where also went
the soul of my mother
in a boat with blossoming
sails like apple petals
in wind fifty years at once.

—Caroline Forché

Cloud

A blue stain
creeps across
the deep pile
of the evergreens.
From inside the
forest it seems
like an interior
matter, something
wholly to do
with trees, a color
passed from one
to another, a
requirement
to which they
submit unflinchingly
like soldiers or
brave people
getting older.
Then the sun
comes back and
it's totally over.

—Kay Ryan

Enter A Cloud

1

Gently disintegrate me
Said nothing at all.

Is there still time to say
Said I myself lying
In a bower of bramble
Into which I have fallen.

Look through my eyes up
At blue with not anything
We could have ever arranged
Slowly taking place.

Above the spires of the fox
Gloves and above the bracken
Tops with their young heads
Recognising the wind,
The armies of the empty
Blue press me further
Into Zennor Hill.

If I half-close my eyes
The spiked light leaps in
And I am here as near
Happy as I will get
In the sailing afternoon.

2

Enter a cloud. Between
The head of Zennor and
Gurnard's Head the long
Marine horizon makes
A blue wall or is it
A distant table-top
Of the far-off simple sea.

Enter a cloud. O cloud,
I see you entering from
Your west gathering yourself
Together into a white
Headlong. And now you move
And stream out of the Gurnard,
The west corner of my eye.

Enter a cloud. The cloud's
Changing shape is crossing
Slowly only an inch
Above the line of the sea.
Now nearly equidistant
Between Zennor and Gurnard's
Head, an elongated
White anvil is sailing
Not wanting to be a symbol.

3

Said nothing at all.

And proceeds with no idea
Of destination along
The sea bearing changing
Messages. Jean in London,
Lifting a cup, looking
Abstractedly out through
Her Hampstead glass will never
Be caught by your new shape
Above the chimneys. Jean,
Jean, do you not see
This cloud has been thought of
And written on Zennor Hill.

4

The cloud is going beyond
What I can see or make.
Over up-country maybe
Albert Strick stops and waves
Caught in the middle of teeling
Broccoli for the winter.
The cloud is not there yet.

From Gurnard's Head to Zennor
Head the level line
Crosses my eyes lying
On buzzing Zennor Hill.

The cloud is only a wisp
And gone behind the Head.
It is funny I got the sea's
Horizontal slightly surrealist.
Now when I raise myself
Out of the bracken I see
The long empty blue

Between the fishing Gurnard
And Zennor. It was a cloud
The language at my time's
Disposal made use of.

5

Thank you. And for your applause.
It has been a pleasure. I
Have never enjoyed speaking more.
May I also thank the real ones
Who have made this possible.
First, the cloud itself. And now
Gurnard's Head and Zennor
Head. Also recognise
How I have been helped
By Jean and Madron's Albert
Strick (He is a real man.)
And good words like brambles,
Bower, spiked, fox, anvil, teeling.

The bees you heard are from
A hive owned by my friend
Garfield down there below
In the house by Zennor Church.

The good blue sun is pressing
Me into Zennor Hill.

Gently disintegrate me
Said nothing at all.

—W. S. Graham