

The Man on the Dump

Day creeps down. The moon is creeping up.
The sun is a corbeil of flowers the moon Blanche
Places there, a bouquet. Ho-ho ... The dump is full
Of images. Days pass like papers from a press.
The bouquets come here in the papers. So the sun,
And so the moon, both come, and the janitor's poems
Of every day, the wrapper on the can of pears,
The cat in the paper-bag, the corset, the box
From Esthonia: the tiger chest, for tea.

The freshness of night has been fresh a long time.
The freshness of morning, the blowing of day, one says
That it puffs as Cornelius Nepos reads, it puffs
More than, less than or it puffs like this or that.
The green smacks in the eye, the dew in the green
Smacks like fresh water in a can, like the sea
On a cocoanut—how many men have copied dew
For buttons, how many women have covered themselves
With dew, dew dresses, stones and chains of dew, heads
Of the floweriest flowers dewed with the dewiest dew.
One grows to hate these things except on the dump.

Now, in the time of spring (azaleas, trilliums,
Myrtle, viburnums, daffodils, blue phlox),
Between that disgust and this, between the things
That are on the dump (azaleas and so on)
And those that will be (azaleas and so on),
One feels the purifying change. One rejects
The trash.

That's the moment when the moon creeps up
To the bubbling of bassoons. That's the time
One looks at the elephant-colorings of tires.
Everything is shed; and the moon comes up as the moon
(All its images are in the dump) and you see
As a man (not like an image of a man),
You see the moon rise in the empty sky.

One sits and beats an old tin can, lard pail.
One beats and beats for that which one believes.
That's what one wants to get near. Could it after all
Be merely oneself, as superior as the ear
To a crow's voice? Did the nightingale torture the ear,
Peck the heart and scratch the mind? And does the ear
Solace itself in peevish birds? Is it peace,
Is it a philosopher's honeymoon, one finds
On the dump? Is it to sit among mattresses of the dead,
Bottles, pots, shoes and grass and murmur *aptest eve*.
Is it to hear the blatter of grackles and say
Invisible priest; is it to eject, to pull
The day to pieces and cry *stanza my stone*?
Where was it one first heard of the truth? The the.

—Wallace Stevens

Skunk Hour

Nautilus Island's hermit
heiress still lives through winter in her Spartan cottage;
her sheep still graze above the sea.
Her son's a bishop. Her farmer
is first selectman in our village;
she's in her dotage.

Thirsting for
the hierarchic privacy
of Queen Victoria's century,
she buys up all
the eyesores facing her shore,
and lets them fall.

The season's ill—
we've lost our summer millionaire,
who seemed to leap from an L. L. Bean
catalogue. His nine-knot yawl
was auctioned off to lobstermen.
A red fox stain covers Blue Hill.

And now our fairy
decorator brightens his shop for fall;
his fishnet's filled with orange cork,
orange, his cobbler's bench and awl;
there is no money in his work,
he'd rather marry.

One dark night,
my Tudor Ford climbed the hill's skull;
I watched for love-cars. Lights turned down,
they lay together, hull to hull,
where the graveyard shelves on the town. . . .
My mind's not right.

A car radio bleats,
"Love, O careless Love. . . ." I hear
my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,
as if my hand were at its throat. . . .
I myself am hell;
nobody's here—

only skunks, that search
in the moonlight for a bite to eat.
They march on their soles up Main Street:
white stripes, moonstruck eyes' red fire
under the chalk-dry and spar spire
of the Trinitarian Church.

I stand on top
of our back steps and breathe the rich air—
a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the garbage pail
She jabs her wedge-head in a cup
of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,
and will not scare.

miss rosie

when i watch you
wrapped up like garbage
sitting, surrounded by the smell
of too old potato peels
or
when i watch you
in your old man's shoes
with the little toe cut out
sitting, waiting for your mind
like next week's grocery
i say
when i watch you
you wet brown bag of a woman
who used to be the best looking gal in georgia
used to be called the Georgia Rose
i stand up
through your destruction
i stand up

—Lucille Clifton

Burning Trash

At night—the light turned off, the filament
Unburdened of its atom-eating charge,
His wife asleep, her breathing dipping low
To touch a swampy source—he thought of death.
Her father's hilltop home allowed him time
To sense the nothing standing like a sheet
Of speckless glass behind his human future.
He had two comforts he could see, just two.

One was the cheerful fullness of most things:
Plump stones and clouds, expectant pods, the soil
Offering up pressure to his knees and hands.
The other was burning the trash each day.
He liked the heat, the imitation danger,
And the way, as he tossed in used-up news,
String, napkins, envelopes, and paper cups,
Hypnotic tongues of order intervened.

—John Updike

The Apotheosis of Tins

Having spent the night in a sewer of precognition,
consoled by moon-glow, air chuckle
and the retarded
pathos of mackerel,
we wake among shoe-laces and white wood
to a raw wind and the cries of gulls.

Deprived of use, we are safe now
from the historical nightmare
and may give our attention at last
to things of the spirit,
noticing for example the consanguinity
of sand and stone,
how they are thicker than water,
and the pebbles shorter than their shadows.

This is the terminal democracy
of hatbox and crab,
of hock and Windowlene.
It is always rush-hour.
If we have learnt one thing from our desertion
by the sour smudge on the horizon,
from the erosion of labels,
it is the value of self-definition.
No one, not even the poet
whose shadow halts above us after
dawn and before dark,
will have our trust.
We resist your patronage, your reflective leisure.

Promoted artifacts by the dereliction
of our creator, and greater now
than the sum of his skills,
we shall be with you while there are beaches.

Imperishable by-products of the perishable will,
we shall lie like skulls
in the hands of soliloquists.
The longer queues in the science museum
will form at our last homes
saying, "Think now,

what an organic relation
of art to life
in the dawn; what saintly
devotion to the notion of permanence
in the flux of sensation
and crisis, perhaps
we can learn from them."

All the Garbage of the World, Unite!

On the seat you left, two beer bottles, a cigarette butt, two pieces of scratch paper.
Why are you screening my calls, my messages? Don't you have anything else to do?
You are the bourgeoisie of communication. Why am I always afraid of the phone?
When you look at me, I always feel as if I should change into something else.
How about changing myself into a bundle of clothes dumped on the sofa
or a pale pink wad of bubble gum dangling from someone's lips
like the poor tummies of all the animals that flail about when they are turned over?
Do you know?
Eyesnavel god. Forearmsearflap god.
Sweetpotatokneesappleseed god. Pigstoenailschick god.
Dreamingdivingbeetlesashtree god. Lovelygirlsheelstoenail god.
Antsghostscatseyeball god. Ratholescatsrottingwater god.
Mrsdustingarmselephant god. Salivadropexplodeslikefreongas.
Salivafountainevenmoremortifyingnauseatingthanthesmelloflionsrottenbreath god.
Do you know all the dearest gods that are hanging onto our limbs?
On the seat you left, a wet towel, a wad of gum, a crushed tomato.
Dear blackgarbagebags who thankfully lent each one of their bodies.
Dear foldedarms of the window and concrete and steel under my feet.
How high the armsofthemachinehammers that beat down steadily upon
those foldedarms.
All the pigs of the world unite god. All the cats of the world let's become a butter god.
Dear wrists escape from the arms god. Heap of curses, mackerel corpses spit out from a
soccer player's mouth god. There are 3 million gods in India. How many people live there?
Dearest multiple gods that have swarmed in from the sky, land, sea.
On the seat you left, I sit like a garbage god, and do you or don't you know
that I wait for the green truck heading to the landfill like the dearest dirtiest loftiest god
who has long endured till now because of its hunger for humans?
Do you or don't you know that every day our hair falls and mixes with the melting water of an
iceberg in the faraway sea?
Yournostrilssingledropofapricklynosehairearth god!

—Kim Hyesoon,
Trans. Don Mee Choi