

Anybody Can Write a Poem

I am arguing with an idiot online.
He says anybody can write a poem.
I say some people are afraid to speak.
I say some people are *ashamed* to speak.
If they said the pronoun *I*
they would find themselves floating
in the black Atlantic
and a woman would swim by, completely
dry, in a rose chiffon shirt,
until the ashamed person says her name
and the woman becomes wet and drowns
and her face turns to flayed ragged pulp,
white in the black water.
He says that he'd still write
even if someone cut off both his hands.
As if it were the hands that make a poem,
I say. I say what if someone cut out
whatever brain or gut or loin or heart
that lets you say hey, over here, listen,
I have something to tell you all,
I'm *different*.
As an example I mention my mother
who loved that I write poems
and am such a wonderful genius.
And then I delete the comment
because my mother wanted no part of this or any

argument, because “Who am I
to say whatever?”
Once on a grade school form
I entered her job as *hairwasher*.
She saw the form and was embarrassed and mad.
“You should have put *receptionist*.”
But she didn’t change it.
The last word she ever said was No.
And now here she is in my poem,
so proud of her idiot son,
who presumes to speak for a woman
who wants to tell him to shut up, but can’t.

I ♥ Poetry

but poets are assholes.
Once I was lost in a cornfield.
Not metaphorically.
In Pennsylvania.
I was four feet tall,
the corn, six.
A hundred feet in
I lost all direction.
The land was flat.
No mountains to gauge,
no grade to track,
no box on which to climb.
Featureless white sky above.
So I ran.
The dry corn cut me.
After minutes
still nothing but corn.
More minutes the other way,
corn still.
And another direction
and another.
Panic: all the stalks
were rows of teeth
in the flat open face
of a mountainous worm.
Not metaphorically;

that is what I thought.
I screamed and wept and ran
through the vaporous bile belching
from the monster worm's ready gut
and suddenly found the road.
Quiet gravel,
two miles
from my father's boring house.
So I walked back.
Where's the syntax of
the ridiculous fat child?
The nostalgic redemption
of the nightmare made mist?
There's none.
Fear, then shame
for feeling fear.
Stupid.
The words aren't new at all.
Nor are their synonyms better.

Panic: A Retrospective

Look, everybody, who got dizzy!
Little Baby! Little Baby
sat in the street
because he couldn't stand.
Little Infant Inner Ear
had no balance left.
His inner gyroscope
failed.
He was running
and he fell.
There was not a thing
to breathe.
From what did Little Baby run?
Whose fangs were at his rump?
The shark beneath the kitchen floor.
The tiger in the dining room.
The daddy longlegs in the milk glass.
Hungry animals in the home!
Look at their rabies.

Literalness

There is no real word for fear
or light or rabid grief.
My mother's body lay
in the pink-painted room.
The outline of her skull was clear
and her barely open mouth
seemed small. Not-
Your-Mother-But-
Her-*Body*
say my aunts; that is,
the shell that carried her
and malfunctioned
and tried to fix itself
and for its effort gets
a gaudy steel shell of its own,
which itself is interred
in a concrete shell
that bears the weight of dirt
and rainwater, the world
insisting itself on everything
in the world. It's the least
original thing in the world.
For the last two days
we would sit my mother up
and NyQuil-green bile
would pour from her mouth,

her irreversible body
trying to expel what it could.
The only things she could say were No
and I Don't Know. And babble.
The bottom halves of syllables.
Any flotsam
the dying mind could grab
because apparently there
was something to say.
Then that stopped too
and briefly I saw nothing but
the pink paint and
the chipped wood floors.
The traffic was average outside
and Baltimore was Baltimore,
the perpetual 1940s light.
There were several children there.
"Here," my cousin said,
"I burned this CD."
And then I started to talk,
like my many aunts.

Comment on the Sale of
My Grandmother's House

I wake up I smell like
Winstons and Scrapple

I am the perfect bait
for rats

they breed in the shed among
the four artificial Christmas trees

they breed
in the red velour chairs