

## William Doreski

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### Victims of Art

You stand among the victims  
of art, looking nonchalant.  
Goya's war dead shattered

and oozing; van Gogh's ear,  
missing; General Wolfe dying  
in the embrace of a teary aide.

You've been painted, photographed,  
and silhouetted by genius  
of the home-grown variety;

but here among the greatest  
of paintings you look so cozy  
you could step inside a canvas,

adapt to only two dimensions,  
and cuddle into the pastel warmth  
of a Favre or Impressionist

masterpiece: one all the better  
for your coy and winsome presence.  
But let's get away from the art

before someone's feelings are hurt  
and have lunch in the atrium  
where the winter sunlight pools

in swaths of painterly indulgence.  
Seated at a white metal table  
with your tuna salad grinning

you don't look like a Renoir  
or even an early Picasso  
before his victims lost dimensions

and began resembling flatfish.  
No, you're a self-portrait almost  
come to life, your expression

a gesture you bestow as gladly  
as the Mona Lisa does, but  
lacking her generous nature

and replacing it with a shark-smile.  
You aren't a victim of art  
but an artwork of which we,

the viewers, are victims, bloodless  
and shaded in the background  
of your deeply limned regard.

## **Scrawny but Tattooed**

The more tattooed you are the more aggressive. So this fellow's stance argues. His wristwatch shines like an open porthole. His hat crushes him. He has yanked his trousers to the knees to expose his tattooed shins.

The tattoos begin everywhere, end nowhere. He has engorged himself on tattoos. His quarrel with naked flesh has ended. How masculine his seated stance, legs spread because powerful genitalia hide there, hands on his knees to keep himself from punching whoever looks or fails to look.

The tattoos feature mostly foliage. Remember when I had poison ivy rash? It spread over every inch of me. That's what real foliage does when cornered. His will never turn on him. When he dies he'll fold it into himself the way winter folds flowers into itself and loves them.

## Snow Bloom

You've brought a bag of bones  
and expect me to assemble them  
into the child we never had.  
Yes, creation asserts itself  
in the darkest winter moments.  
The snow bloom encourages  
haiku, watercolor, strumming  
folk songs on a cheap guitar.  
Friends in the coffee shop chat  
about fellowships to Rome  
or Athens, shopping in Paris,  
theater in London. Winter  
touches the essence, chilling  
but arousing our finer instincts.  
But why this interest in bones?  
Dandling an infant skeleton  
would *épater les bourgeois*  
but wouldn't satisfy instincts  
you mistake for maternal ones.  
Do you expect me to clone or grow  
organs and then stretch a skin  
to animate a flesh creature  
we'd claim as daughter or son?  
The snow bloom, a state of mind,  
has numbed you to the distance  
between self and other. Your child,  
our child, lacks body and soul.  
He swims above the winter light  
with arms and legs flailing,  
but never reaches land. You want  
so badly to embody him  
that you stumble into the waist-deep  
snow bloom in which we've buried  
everything worth remembering—  
whether it shines like Jupiter  
in the west, or glooms like Pluto  
in the corner of one eye.

## **Man in Bowler, London 1951**

Prattle of double-decked buses  
further smudging grainy fog  
comforts the man in bowler  
clutching newspaper and stick.  
London after the war stank  
of char and ruin. Dead churches  
littered the City. Rebuilding  
consumed half a lifetime;

but this bowler can't wait  
to transact necessary affairs  
on Threadneedle Street, where bluff  
facades buffet each other  
in those parodies of manhood  
war almost rendered obsolete.

## The Dead of Winter

Behind the convenience store  
two guys duke it out. Their fists  
windmill the dull winter light,  
drawing blood. Their faces knot  
into wooden expressions their wives  
wouldn't recognize. I phone the cops  
to prevent some fatal gesture,  
but the voice of a long-dead lover

answers, and I drift a hundred miles  
into northern Vermont where skis  
hissed across the undulant slopes  
and cars skidded, crashed and killed  
without remorse or even regret.  
That winter smacked of salt and blood.  
Hunters dragged carcasses to weigh  
at the local general store.

Drug-addled students abandoned  
expensive textbooks in snowdrifts.  
The scenery wobbled and sometimes  
collapsed like a flimsy stage set.  
Behind it, vacuums devoid of stars  
absorbed the flimsy intellects  
of almost everyone I knew  
in that generally wide-eyed region.

Now these guys with their foolish  
but sincere fist-fight have invoked  
the dead of that long-lost winter.  
The cops arrive, break it up, and prod  
the tough old men into shaking hands.  
As the patrol car prattles off,  
driving them home, I'm standing  
beside a frozen lake at night.

Someone with a flashlight crosses  
on foot, the ice groaning. A hand  
reaches through the ice and waves,  
but the figure with the flashlight  
doesn't notice. She reaches shore  
with her long hair streaming about her,  
and her flatfish gaze affixes me  
as I grope for one saving word.

**William Doreski** lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and teaches at Keene State College. His most recent book of poetry is *The Suburbs of Atlantis* (2013). He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals.