

Bill Minor

Snowy Egret Cove, Revisited

My mother died three months before
she would have been one hundred two
years of age, and I come now
to Snowy Egret Cove, often, as I once did

to dwell on lovers I found here: two snowy egrets
perched on a submerged rock, two
pinnacles that emerge above water;
two snowy egrets who loved one another,

but side by side, they did not touch,
although they were so much in love
they seemed to touch the full length
of their bodies.

I come now as a son
who sat here with his mother, hand
in hand on a bench, talking to one another
as I did with her on a couch

in her apartment in Connecticut.
Today is not a dream, nor Connecticut.
This is a place where one can never know
when impossibility just might arrive,

not only to show its face, but its whole body.
Everything here has a touch of God
about it--and the voice of my mother.
The grass itself talks in human terms,

a song woven of silence and the wind,
soft and subtle as the flight of birds
--cormorants, seas gulls, pelicans,
shore birds—and the one I most love:

the Snowy Egret whose name I have
bestowed upon this place, this sacred ground
where the external and internal meet,
no halfway house, but the whole show

of infinite possibility. Here, where I come
to talk with my mother, whose dignity
is best expressed not only in soft speech, *still*,
(the woman who taught me to speak softly)

but the way in which she listens.

The Mask

A mask that truly fits the face
has no secrets to keep, no deception;
it reveals who we are--*all* that we are--
and has nothing to hide.

Above all it provides a host of means
to laugh at everything, yourself
included (and perhaps most of all).
Whom shall I be today? Everyman

in all his glory. No vacuum this,
but a fundamental, timeless
connection with everyone
who ever lived. A mask is not

an object to be worn, but a state
of being—perhaps the highest we
can know. Look! I've taken on
a set of angel's wings, not horns

atop my head. I bore a monk's
demeanor when I asked the girl
who waited on us at the Brew Pub
to bring me any ale that possessed

the word "Trappist" in it, and when
she gave me that knowing look, I said,
"I've just been released, or ejected
from the monastery I inhabited

for fifty years." "Well, welcome
back," she said, suggesting that
back was my true home, and flashing
a smile I will never forget

no matter what mask or face I wear
the next time I am *out* on my own.

Gypsy Wisdom

“Hope lasts a long time if you’re happy.”

William Stafford

Present poise; something you may have worked for
all your life: William Stafford’s gypsy wisdom
that “if God doesn’t care” nobody does; their wagons
carting stories and songs, here and gone, living
on the edge of music as I love to, whenever I can;
or living solidly within it, that great good place—
a world I never want to come out of.

There, whatever we touch, we touch with love,
caressing ivory tokens with respect, as if they were
resilient flesh aligned in fortunate rows,
order seldom found in the daily round
but only *here* in this moment: all that is yours
for keeps if you can keep it: the near, the dear,
dignity and delight embodied in sound.

Bachata rhythms dance with my soul, and within it,
that joyous beat a brother, sidekick, comfortable
spiritual companion (albeit also sensual, another
fortunate alliance): music content within
its curious neighborhood sainthood: hopeful
and happy on its own terms, and within
its own sweet place and time.

Macreon

*“A poem must be a holiday of Mind.
It can be nothing else.”*

Paul Valery

In Greek, the word means “burdened with years”—
a condition I can fully understand,
but My Man Rabelais turns it upside down
(as he did much of the world he lived in
and taught how to laugh—at itself), and allows
his Panurge to claim the French word “marguerette”
(mackerel) derives from that source: so aging,
as I’ve begun to suspect (and owning a somewhat
playful nature myself), may be directly related
to activity as natural as squeezing thighs
among the young, or going “all the way”
(as we used to say in my day).

I love words,
for every single one of them is drenched
in ambivalence, like existence itself, be it
young or old. It took a heap of skill
(and a Savior’s mercy and might) after the storm
for Pantagruel and his crew to land safely
on the island of the Macreons (just as I’ve
had to master a few moves myself to arrive

here, wherever I am, “burdened with years”)
Pantagruel attributes such an act
to simplicity, sincerity, and the fellowship
within his party, traveling devoid of thought
of profit or gain. That sounds as good a goal
as any, to me, so praise be. Pass me,
if you please, your mackerel, my Love.

Empathy

Is this just more aging or has everything
I touch now truly acquired a personality
of its own, affording me unique companions
at the close of my life?

For example,
after I rinsed my failing eyesight tonight
the towel I reached for casually slipped
from its rack and danced to the floor—as if
to remind and advise me that I should
show more consideration to all
that surrounds me, for I may be seeing
it for the last time.

I suppose I should
have more respect for the rack itself,
for the floor, the mirror, the wash basin, water,
the room in which I stand, and every room
I enter now--even the great out of doors.

I am learning high regard for all that surrounds me,
including the air that clings to my body,
both within and without.

Bill Minor has published six books of poetry, the latest *Some Grand Dust* (Chatoyant Press; finalist for the Benjamin Franklin Award), and *The Heart Within: An American Memoir*. A professional musician since the age of sixteen, he has set his poems to original music and released two CDs (*For Women Missing or Dead* and *Mortality Suite*). Commissioned by the Historic Sandusky Foundation in Virginia to write a suite of original music to accompany a married couple's exchange of letters throughout the Civil War, he released a third CD, *Love Letters of Lynchburg*—with six live performances in the Monterey area and one in Virginia.