



Featured Poet

Jan Schreiber – Five Poems

The Stoic

A hawk commands the branch
that twists about and dips,
meandering toward the sun.
The hawk will never think
that hawk and branch are one.
It neither rules the air.
nor scans the frozen ground.
It stares from side to side
without a clear intent,
without the slightest sound,
as if in reverie
or winter meditation.
What hunger pangs it feels
are not enough to rouse
the raptor to predation.
We long across a void.
When seen, what is a mouse
in a hawk's shadowed plan?
When thought, what is a hawk
in the rapt mind of a man?

Abraham in Wisconsin

Why he started out with two thick planks
strapped to the car the day we were to visit
our aunt in Marinette, we did not know.
We all piled in – Dad driving, Mom beside him,
the three of us in back. The road would lead
far down the long peninsula, then up
the deep bay's other side. It used to take
a hundred miles and precious gasoline
to reach the town whose lights we'd see a mere
eighteen miles across the water when
we gazed on summer nights. But this was March
and it was winter still. Reaching the shore,
we headed out across the frozen bay,
furrowing snow that covered foot-thick ice.
Over the steady engine now and then
we heard the eerie boom of shifting plates.
He drove as if he motored down God's highway,
past guidepost branches men had stuck in snow,
but halfway through the trip he had to stop.
Late winter ice had cracked and pulled apart,
leaving a watery chasm two feet wide.
The planks would be our bridge. He took them from
the roof of our still throbbing touring car,
laid them across the gap, then drove us all
to the new continent as if it were
an ordinary act, relashed the planks,
and on we went until we reached firm land.
What voice commanded sacrifice that day
only to grant reprieve by mere caprice?
I've asked myself for years. I think it was
some pale implacable far northern god
indifferent to the petty loves of men,
demanding loyalty to an ideal.
I'm in that car again, in thought or dreams.
The scene keeps shifting – might he still turn back?
He never does. What dark enigma spans
this world of fragile life and that indifferent
universe that haunts his thoughts?

A god
does not disclose his motives or his plans.

An Apparition of My Father

Why shouldn't he be here?
This is his house –
the one he built in '49
and faced with field-cut stone.
Across the endless yard
I glimpse the blue-green harbor where
tourists in yachts carouse.
It must be lunchtime, otherwise
he'd be behind the counter at the store.
Something needs fixing – part
of the furnace maybe, or
a broken water line.
He's searching for a washer in a drawer
and hasn't said a word so far.
I hear my boy-self say,
“ ... soon as the grass has dried ...”
“Well, thinking
about it still won't get the lawn mowed.”
Aware that I'm at last
free to apologize
for all those heedless years,
I nerve myself to ask
him what he's looking for
and can I help. He doesn't let
the moment stay
but, singing
almost under his breath, “Mimi,
you funny little good-for-nothing Mimi,”
still busy with his still mysterious task
(as if from time's assaults he bore
only the lightest inkling of regret),
slips out the other door.

The Leaves

The leaves are everywhere,
a blizzard in the mind,
the colors of lost days
swirling about your feet.
Hurry, rake up the drying
stains of sun, the exposed

records of your deceit.
Rake up rejection, loss,
callous indifference,
words that you can't unsay,
a vagrant tumult in
the unsettled air. Nothing
is going to assuage your sense
of failure, your chagrin.
There's no escape. You can't
retreat into a dream
or stifle memories of
those never-outlived times.
They riot among the leaves:
furies bent on avenging
your ancient squalid crimes.
You thrust them from your mind.
(A word can overcome
the terrors of a child.
It's confidence you lack.)
Destroy the leaves. They're dead.
But though you quash them they
come back, come back, come back.

The Pine Forest

See how the needles fall from high trees where
they ride down spillways on a canted shaft
of light; and as the drifting cast-offs waft
like random memory through immobile air
they execute a
danse extraordinaire
in silence weighted down by lassitude,
grief and regret,
closing an interlude
of life in which each claimed a tiny share.
Unmoored like words that now no longer bear
a meaning or recall a once-sought key
to happiness, they yield to gravity
and drop without distinction, settling where
today will merge like each preceding day
into a timeless archive of decay.

Jan Schreiber was Poet Laureate of Brookline, Massachusetts from 2015 to 2017. His books include *Digressions* (1970), *Wily Apparitions* (1992), *Bell Buoys* (1998), and *Peccadilloes* (2014), as well as two books of translations: *A Stroke upon the Sea* and *Sketch of a Serpent*. A cycle of his poems, *Zeno's Arrow*, was set to music by Paul Alan Levi in 2001. His criticism has been widely published and was collected in his book *Sparring with the Sun* (2013). He teaches in the BOLLI program at Brandeis University and runs the annual Symposium on Poetry Criticism at Western State Colorado University.