

Harris Gardner – Five Poems

Will and Witness

I have tilted at the windmills of time
for the greater part of my fragile breath.
Death sits mounted, holds a poised lance
to challenge to a game of chance I cannot win.

Though I go ten rounds, and still ten, again,
though the referee may deem it a draw;
though I dance and weave around the ring,
Death will sound the knell for a t.k.o.

A stealthy shaft in the shoulder
or a toothy twinge in the knee
warns that I should devise a will.
There is still the won't of denial.

Perhaps, let them make a well-stoked pyre.
My body will briefly feed the flowering flames.
Then, let the wind take my powdered remains
to sate the salivating maw of the sea.

My sanity grows wings, becomes suspect.
I appoint G-d to be both expert witness
and executor of my final designs.
He may choose first from my lean legacy.

The wattage of my inner light wages with the wind.
Heaven may take me on a simple whim.
My knickknacks and baubles left behind
go to those who wish to reap an odd keepsake.

The will, though strong, bends like a willow
I prepare to submit to the terminal triumph.
My pen is poised to write a sole codicil.
I am content to contemplate my ashes.

The Wonderland Train Is Arriving

Attention, slow transit travelers!
The next warehouse on wheels
to Never-land will arrive shortly,
eventually, perhaps never.
If you do not wish to wait,
then you may board the next
scheduled transit that may arrive
approximately on time.

Wait! Let's back this up.
Insert, "transit to Wonder."
Wonder-light, wander lightly. White
bread is porous, full of air.
Will this ever return, get back on track?
Wishful thinking on your part.
Where is this going? You can't get
there the way this is rolling along.
This may be air-lite, big wind.

Don't vote for your local rascal.
Vote for the environment!
"All we are saying, is give Earth a chance."
That's the ticket! Want to be my running mate?
We'll do one of those cross-country train campaigns,
cast a line at every whistle stop.
If you want to be saved, step this way,
unless you prefer to wait at the end of the line.

"This train is bound for glory"
if a miracle gets us elected.
We all roll somewhat merrily along,
more or less willing passengers of time.
I'm sorry, my time is up.
Be happy yours isn't.
Please deposit \$150 in the pay phone.
Sorry, I haven't got change.
Oh, well, better luck on your next dime.

Shoestring

“Trust me. The world is run on a shoestring.”-
In Shadow Trail from Hard Times by John Ashbery

Heaven waits for some of us to call.
You vow that you reach an over-loaded line.
You are busy vying to survive
on the proverbial shoestring and prayer.

The over-worked shoelace breaks.
If you ignore it, the footwear falls off,
perhaps in pursuit of a bus.
For lack of a shoe, you miss
that crucial power point presentation.

You don't close the must-or-bust deal.
Now, you don't know the hour of your next meal,
The overdue rent hangs like a sword or noose.

The game master offers door number two.
You refuse. You have one stance to choose.
You turn to the audience for a life line,
but only shadows occupy the seats.

This is someone else's semblance of reality.
A surreal fog descends on your mind's city.
The street lamps are snuffed. Most folk are snug,
snuffling in their serial dreams.

Your muffled scream ripples the night's seam.
Your frayed life twirls on a string.
You dash into the dust-shrouded booth,
your new-found cathedral.

You fish through your pockets for substance.
The cloud-filtered moon reveals lint, a lifesaver,
and a somewhat useless Canadian dime.
A miracle dial tone! You punch the grimy numbers.

The staccato notes seem fore-told..
The coin drops through and disappears.
You limp in your one shoe down the vacant avenue.
Your frantic eyes scan the concrete for a sign.

Mirabile dictu, a dollar flutters on a vagrant breeze.
You give chase and seize emptiness.
Hope drifts into a teeming sewer.
Still you muscle on, although a bit more poor.

White Rose

Declining rays halo me.
Flesh tones drain from picture frame.
All worldly possessions are at risk.
The wager this last hand is poetry.
Night wrestles day's ardent disk.
The prize, my mortality.

Sleep ends the vigil of family
and lingering friends who stood
sentry with leaden eyes
dreading my predicted demise.

My vision clears leaving my face
fixed in a look of eternal surprise.
Mouth forms an imperfect *O*.

Through the light-fringed window,
an iron door hovers,
clinging to a single hinge.
A rainbow glimmers in the entrance.

So, what could I do but follow
my soul-guide through the multi-hued arch.
Parched throat yearns for the pitcher
of ice left behind with shriveled remains.

With my passage, the colors dissolve to dust.
The stark sun burns all promise of rain.
Crumbling sandstone steps warn my sole course
through relentless naked terrain.

Lower, ever lower, constricting spiral
leads laggard blistered feet.
I concede the need to repent:

Fine works I find insufficient;
seeking perks for constrained good deeds.
Small acts of charity replaced
grand gestures of philanthropy.
I walked a tightrope between saint and sinner.
A willing heart was much desired.

Ah, now the ranks of steps grow thinner.
Now, I am confined in a bleak hall.
Night surges within towering walls.
Pale stars cast starving light.
Hope flutters weary wings and drops, silent.

Eyes alight on a frail table
prepared with paper and antique pen.
A lop-sided chair summons, I sit.

My thirst disappears, I yearn to write.
Ah, no! Pages turn to dust at lightest touch.
The pen is a desert, no ink.
This much I can do, I can think.

My memory reviews King David's psalms;
Ovid's perfectly measured *Amores*;
leaps to Shakespeare's immortal sonnets;
fallen angels of *Paradise Lost*.

Nightingale sings unbounded notes.
Sight of shimmering sand palace unsettles.
Sexton's soul-baring words make me weep.
I linger by woods lying deep in snow.
Dickinson notes that I'm no-body.
Wordsworth worries that I wander lonely.

How to escape my windless waste land,
What further cost will it demand?
Memory refines my own body of work;
continues to explore unknown lines.

My brain sculpts and shapes new verse
to savor and rehearse.
I almost fail to discern a strange event.

A white rose takes root in air.
No sun or rain sustains it.
I marvel as the unclothed sky appears.

As if to recall a meandering mind,
marble stairs materialize.
Thoughts and sentence end.
I begin to ascend.

Time- Sensitive

This male is time-sensitive.
This letter has a tear in it,
a rain drop smudge. No doubt.
it is sensitive, too.
It senses its transience,
its brief transit
on the daily stage.

Perhaps that should read, *page*.
So, then someone reads it.
What, then, of the message?
The dressage is formal.
Introductions are in proper form.
The body is casual.
The end is evident.
Eventually, all must come to a close;
but not here, not yet.

Breath proposes a century.
Time insists on a compromise.
All right, then, two hundred years,
a brief flicker measured with eternity.
It's all relative. Even the relatives agree.
If the letter is lost, will it cost a kingdom?
Perhaps, perhaps not.

Some unsolicited advice:
Get a sturdy horse.
Let the wind chase you in second place.
The steed knows the route.
Let the noble beast lead.
If need be, you can follow on foot.

Perhaps your cap is a bit askew.
You wave your crop like a wild baton.
The wanton wind laughs in your ear.
Dust dresses your dragging boots.
Not so proper or propitious, now.

Harris Gardner's poems have appeared in *The Harvard Review*, *Midstream*, *Cool Plums*, *Rosebud*, *Fulcrum*, *Chest*, *The Aureorean*, *Endicott Review*, *Ibbetson Street Journal*, *Main Street Rag*, *Facets*, *Vallum (Canada)*, *Pemmican*, *The New Renaissance*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *I Refused To Die: A Holocaust Study* by Susie Davidson and about fifty other publication credits. He has published three collections: *Chalice of Eros* (Co-authored with Lainie Senechal) 1999; *Lest They Become* (Ibbetson Street, 2003); *Among Us* (Cervena Barva Press, 2007). Gardner is co-founder of Tapestry of Voices with Lainie Senechal (1999-Present) and Co-Founder, with Doug Holder of Breaking Bagels with the Bards, a community of Poets and Other Writers (2004 – present). He is Poetry Editor of *Ibbetson Street*.