Bio

Teaching Statement
I begin my introductory poetry courses by talking about images: first how to make a picture with words, and then how to get that picture to twist into meaning. Transformation is the heart of poetry, and when we read it and write it in my class, we look at how poets take the sounds of language (rhythm, rhyme) and cross them with its voices (diction, syntax) and its meaning (images, metaphor) to create new species of poems. James Dickey begins a poem with a pickled sheep-baby and turns it into a beautiful pastoral meditation on humans and nature. How the heck does he do it? We figure it out—and our own poems—together.

First Encounters
I started writing poetry because I had nothing to contribute at the family dinner table. I had three brilliant older brothers, who hectored each other every night on subjects ranging from a who’s-who of railroad tycoons to why Paul was walking barefoot on the cover of *Abbey Road*. While my brothers spoke fast and funny at their end, I started muttering to myself about my day. I pretended I was talking to my father, but, in truth, I was formulating the person who would, at 16, read Wallace Stevens’ lines “It is an illusion that we ever were alive./Lived in the houses of our mothers” and think *Holy cow! That’s IT!*

I still remember that moment I stood by a winter-lit window, holding a purloined copy of one brother’s *The Palm at the End of the Mind*. I looked into that line break between “alive” and “lived” and felt recognized. I would be the commemorator. I would hang between the present and the past, between the iamb and the trochee. Though I didn’t know enough then to name the lyric impulse, that’s when I began reading and writing for real.

Poems
Station

Days you are sick, we get dressed slow,
find our hats, and ride the train.
We pass a junkyard and the bay,
then a dark tunnel, then a dark tunnel.

You lose your hat. I find it. The train
sighs open at Burlingame,
past dark tons of scrap and water.
I carry you down the black steps.

Burlingame is the size of joy:
a race past bakeries, gold rings
in open black cases. I don’t care
who sees my crooked smile

or what erases it, past the bakery,
when you tire. We ride the blades again
beside the crooked bay. You smile.
I hold you like a hole holds light.

We wear our hats and ride the knives.
They cannot fix you. They try and try.

Tunnel! Into the dark open we go.
Days you are sick, we get dressed slow.

Key

this comb    for the ghost’s hair
this ridgeline treeless and sheer

it smells like tea    gone cold
weighs less than a vein pumped full

it rolls the stone away from the cave
at dawn    rolls it back at night

and one day    it falls into
the snow    grows into a slender

black tree    to shelter your way
though for a long time    you

walk right through it    live
your life as if dread has not
changed you lock the house
from the inside shut
the drapes huddle before
the little door in the hidden wall
behind which the child
rides away on a flat white bed

Courses Taught
EGL-92: Introduction to Reading and Writing Poetry
EGL-94: Writing Across Genres
EGL-192: Intermediate Poetry
EGL 192T: Poetry & Memoir

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