

Poetry Writing

Walsh

A collection of contemporary sonnets

One Morning, Shoeing Horses

I hold the shank while the blacksmith nails a shoe
in place, and think about how many years
I've worked at this—watching the horse's ears
for signs of what he might decide to do,
touching his neck, turning his head to coax
a little weight away from the lifted hoof,
a flywhisk light and always on the move,
the soothing whispers turned to hammer strokes.

But I've been unsteady at it since a day
like this, some ten years back, when a driven nail
got under the blacksmith's wedding ring, unclinchd.
There was a roaring scream, the horse flinched
and snatched his hoof, and there the finger lay
twitching a little, beside the water pail.

--Henry Taylor, *The Flying Change* (Pulitzer Prize winner, 1986)

The Poet, Trying to Surprise God

The Poet, trying to surprise God
composed new forms from secret harmonies,
tore from his fiery vision galaxies
of unrelated shapes, both even and odd.
But God just smiled, and gave his know-all nod
saying, "There's no surprising one who sees
the acorn, root, and branch of centuries;
I swallow all things up, like Aaron's rod.

So hold this thought beneath your poet-bonnet:
no matter how free-seeming flows your sample
God is by definition the Unsurprised."
"Then I'll return," the Poet sighed, "to sonnets
of which this is a rather pale example."

"Is that right?" said God. "I hadn't realized."

--Peter Meinke, *Trying to Surprise God*, 1981

Sonnet: The Poet at Seven

And on the porch, across the upturned chair,
The boy would spread a dingy counterpane
Against the length and majesty of the rain;
And on all fours crawl under it like a bear
To lick his wounds in secret, in his lair;
And afterwards, in the windy yard again,
One hand cocked back, release his paper plane
Frail as a May fly to the faithless air.
And summer evenings he would whirl around
Faster and faster till the drunken ground
Rose up to meet him; sometimes he would squat
Among the bent weeds of the vacant lot,
Waiting for dusk and someone dear to come
And whip him down the street, but gently, home.

--Donald Justice, Selected Poems, 1979