

## Progress Notes

"I want to be treated by a doctor who has read *Macbeth*."

--Jaroslav Pelikan

The doctor is  
a 52 y/o man coming into  
our lives  
unbidden.  
A preliminary examination  
reveals him to be  
sound of science,  
if disengaged.  
His understanding of  
wonder  
is impressively restricted.  
He denies reading *Macbeth*  
and reports having known  
no connection  
between cytogenetic studies  
and the mysteries we note.  
The doctor appears  
to be clinically deficient  
in Shakespeare,  
as indicated by  
standard methods  
of describing a stain  
in efforts to know  
the nature of blood.

## **The Last Jazz Fan**

*for David Peirce*

The last Jazz fan slipped  
from the world one night  
like the amorphous  
notes of a trumpet solo  
at closing time. Some say  
reedy melodies hovered  
above him like nimbus clouds  
at the exact moment rhythm  
left the room. Explosive riffs  
be-bopped across the sky  
when the last jazz fan  
returned to stardust,  
and clarinets cooled  
the darkness. Some say  
it is the silent spaces between  
that describe the song,  
but some say the spaces  
might expand until  
they swallow the song  
and silence is certain.

## **An Editor's Note**

This is your assignment,

Christy:

describe a distance between this newborn and

these dingy, bloodied bedsheets easing  
one life out, one life in, when  
just a boy and pregnant with despair

and petty crimes and grand intoxications  
wraps a simple bedsheet around his neck,  
a bedsheet not unlike the one

the boy and girl have stained and bloodied  
in their astonished quick breaths  
some night not long before the jail cell.

That's old news now, like the boy's  
last troubled gasp, but there's a story still  
in the new breaths this baby dares to draw.

## Tango Lessons

*for James Tipton*

Step slow slow quick quick  
slow  
through a lifetime  
of swivels and turns  
and graceful *cortés*.

Embrace your partner  
sensuously  
as you wished to embrace  
life itself, wrapping your arms  
around a space between  
the firm grasp of certainty  
and the loose elegance  
of letting go.  
Step slow slow  
quick quick  
slow toward  
the final *tanda*.

Death — the poet of love said  
edging unto the dance floor —  
comes in a dream  
wears a miniskirt  
and teaches the dying  
to tango.

## On the Day of the Dead

This is the day we welcome the not-yet-dead. They come to our crypts or graves to bury us beneath armfuls of marigolds, to dine with us on candied pumpkin, *pan de muerto*, sugar skulls, jars of *atole*. They make a resting place of the cold, packed earth at the base of flowery *ofrendas*. With *copal* incense and seashell rattles, with *Catrin*as and *calaveras* said to honor us, the living-still struggle to carve in stone or custom a wedge between themselves and us.

## There is a small room in a blue house

“The art of Frida Kahlo is a ribbon wrapped about a bomb.”

--Andre Breton

There is a small room in a blue house  
where memory is the scent of dahlias,  
the sound of green silk kissing steel.

The cruelty of the corset.  
The strength of an insistent palette.  
Reflections of impossible realities.

The garden still remembers  
hummingbird and caracara  
plotting revolutions.

In *Tehuantépic* the women  
hold fast to heritage and power;  
the colonists are coming still.

What is irretrievably broken  
might be finely wrapped  
in the fabric of Mexico.

On a small bed in a small room  
in a blue house, a death mask  
a mirror a rose.