

The Poetry Porch: Introduction 2023

Blue Borderlands

Listening to the news, we criticize the enforcement of borders yet we admit to the need for boundaries.

About her painting *Hollis Street Walking Blues*, Allegra Printz writes: “Hollis Street is in the small East Bay city of Emeryville bordering Oakland and Berkeley. From 1990 to 2002, I lived in an industrial loft on the corner of 62nd Street and Hollis Street.” How vividly she captures the moody blue shadows of the highway between the low-slung buildings and roadside stand of short trees that extend to the horizon and disappear at the base of mountains. So much of her experience living there, the isolation and dedication, is captured in that depiction of the roadway that lies in between.

On these pages, Richard Dey speaks to the strange bird, the auk with bright red feet: “O guillemot! / . . . your southern ranges off mid-coast Maine/ borders my northern as we meet/ in search of what only the sea can say.” Carl Boon reviews his childhood friendship across the threshold of his adulthood: “When September came, Ahmet raised a flag with a crescent/ while I raised a cross. . . .” Dzvinia Orłowski suggests that the music student engage with her daily lesson by stepping onto the conveyance of metaphor: “Approach a piano slowly as if it is a horse. Ease off the padded cover so as not to startle or scratch beyond its initial shudder to the one small tug.”

Border and space, frame and enclosure. In his poem “Living on the Borderland,” William Doreski imagines John Keats’s achievements between meadow and villa, marshland and high road. How skillfully Keats seemed to elude the enclosure of these borders, to reach up between them. His limitations were not only defined by landscape but by illness. Yet in the many songs of summer, Keats hears the persistence of one voice:

The poetry of the earth is never dead;
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
That is the Grasshopper’s—he takes the lead
In summer luxury

“I have been hovering for some time,” Keats wrote to his friend John Taylor in 1818, “between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for Philosophy.”* Through imagination, he could not stop the advance of time, but he could measure expectations. He was dying of tuberculosis, yet he saw the fullness of summer in the season of harvest. He rouses autumn, “close bosom friend of the maturing sun,” to resist comparison while marking time in the present tense: “Where are the songs of Spring? Aye, where are they?/ Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, . . .”

Joyce Wilson
April 17, 2023

John Keats, *English Romantic Poetry*, Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961. “On the Grasshopper and the Cricket,” 528. “To Autumn,” 638-639.

*Quoted in “John Keats: ‘To Autumn’” by Caitlin Kimball, online at www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69595/john-keats-to-autumn