



Image from Border Crossings

Robert Daseler

## Three Poems

### Uninvited Guests

Beyond the stillness of the evening lurks  
Another stillness, presaging night  
Or something just behind the night, unsought  
And panting slowly. We lift our eyes,  
Investigating clouds the setting sun  
Has turned to salmon or to dusky pink,  
And sip diluted gin. Gradually  
The darkness thickens, colors turn toward purple.  
Then toward gray, surrounding mountains sink  
Into obscurity, and night floods in.

All night the desert sky is crowded, full  
Of stars and galaxies, its depth unprobed.  
We will never know its depths or fires.  
We sit alone beneath the desert sky  
And listen to the sprinklers snickering  
On the fairway near our property.  
We are far away in thought and mood  
From all of this, from winter recreation,  
From television news, museums, and  
Steering committees bent on doing good.

There is a moment when it almost seems  
That perfect peace prevails. Now we dream  
Of other places, other moments in  
Our lives, our children young, ourselves young too,  
That woman there, bare-shouldered and enticing,  
With just a hint of mischief in her smile,  
When we felt amorous and rather drunk.  
These images beset us now like ghosts,  
These remnants of our misconduct, our life,  
Its ambiguities, dismantled dreams.

### Continuity

He came to me out of my past, appeared  
Not much the worse for wear, but for one eye—  
Divergent from its twin, staring, unsteered,  
And glass—more thoughtful now, less comical,  
Less boastful than the younger slender guy  
I'd known back then—boyish, intemperate,  
Handsome, and vain—and yet I knew that all  
Had not gone well with him: the wife he'd lost  
To someone else, the new suspicious mate  
Whose sullen silence spoke an old complaint,  
A really boring job, and what was most  
Conspicuous, the gravid girth he'd gained.

His laugh, however, was or seemed quite close  
To what it had been, and what he laughed at  
Had changed so little that might suppose  
He hadn't aged at all, since knowing more  
About the world does not always equate

To making sense of it, or being wise,  
Or having better answers than before.  
Was he the same person I thought I'd known,  
The raucous youth with both his sighted eyes?  
Or was this someone new who came to clutch  
My worn lapels with hands of solid stone,  
That I might smell his breath and fear his touch?

My own life had been broken several ways,  
But I have always gone on thinking I  
Was just the same impulsive boy whose days  
Were endless, going on like space and time  
Into infinitude and cloudless sky.  
I have inconsequential fervent dreams,  
And I am guilty of a common crime,  
In that I want to be a person who  
Is always something more than what he seems  
And walks across the water of a day  
As if this were a quiet prelude to  
A lovers' tryst at a boulevard café.

We think we are the same because we carry  
These memories of childhood—Mommy crying,  
Daddy bellowing with rage—that vary  
But little with the years and allow us  
To see ourselves as whole, still sweetly trying  
To be coherent, generous, and good.  
But memories, like baggage, follow us  
And cross the borders we have crossed to slip  
Unnoticed into bed with us, renewed  
And confident, and tell us soothing lies  
About ourselves and this, a business trip,  
On which we change identities like spies.

### The Talking God

Sit down beside me here, and let us speak  
Not of indifferent things but of our lives,  
Not as they ought to be but as they are.  
Yes, dreams are also what we are, or were,  
Or might have been, and so we'll speak  
Of those and any other thing that gives

Our tongues a road to ride upon, each one,  
Like tales once told by rogues beneath the moon.

But what are we pursuing over fens  
Of reticence and into brambled brush?  
Is it not the old intelligence  
That's inarticulate, speaks in a rush,  
And seeks the words for things we've only feared  
For countless generations? We smell  
A rodent in a rosebush, something weird  
Or something dead, who has the nose to tell?

How honest are we now, in talk like this,  
And what have we to gain from honesty?  
Is it better generally to kiss  
Or talk of kissing? "The former," I  
Would once have answered, but can't decide  
Between them now. Women speaking of  
The pleasures and the perquisites of love  
Are lovely, in themselves, each vocal bride.

We'll talk about the prices in the stores  
And how we hate those sales events and crowds,  
The hordes of shoppers, lust without remorse,  
While we are running manifestly towards  
An emptiness in plenitude, the stare  
Of naked manikins, the woman pushing  
Against us in the aisles, the wanton rushing  
Of avarice and greed for underwear.

But will we come at last upon the road  
That takes us to the hill or valley where  
We'll stop, amazed, and hear the talking god  
Addressing us? Will we finally hear  
A hopeful sentence or one of despair?  
What we are now approaching brings us close  
To darkness of an avid kind and fear,  
But also dreams. How shall we speak of those?

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Robert Daseler's book of sonnets, *Levering Avenue*, won the first annual Richard Wilbur Award and appeared in 1998. His poems have appeared in *The London Magazine*, *The Formalist*, *Measure*,

*The Cimarron Review*, and elsewhere. He is also author of the plays *Dragon Lady* and *Alekhine's Defense*.