



Robert Ronnow

Two Poems

Life Out of Balance

Tonight I stayed at work until 7:00.
It was dark when I locked the front doors.
Winter approaches again, soon the great coat
huddled like a rug around me. The streets
were active as usual, block residents
hanging out front steps. I said good night
to Nydian Figueroa, after-school counselor.
I bought a beer at the deli on Third Ave.
from the Arab owner. He's a bit upset about
the bottle bill.

Collecting bottles from small groceries
could be a useful youth employment enterprise.
I walked down Fifth along the park in the dark.
Drinking my beer and looking at the women. I need
a good fuck badly. I tried to decide whether
to go to the movies, a Hopi film Howard recommended,
or just go home, watch tv and light a candle.

Maybe I'd meet someone at the film.

Can I handle
the malady of going home tonight? If I die,
I die alone.

I turned west toward the subway
past the museum, through the park.
I can't look at the myriad lights in buildings
large enough to hold a small town. It increases
my anxiety and anonymity to the breaking point.
I hoped to be mugged, for the human contact.
Two big guys looked me over, but I lowered
my center of gravity and they passed quietly. Survival
feels fine, proves I am alive.

The white pines
in this corner of the park hold a cool, earthy air.
reminding me of coming winter, that mortality is
restful, of the black bear and swollen river I saw
500 miles away and only one day ago.

Exponential Day Function

Spring is in its prime again
each leaf beautiful
much is edible
birds and peepers are musical at dawn.

The days walk slowly
toward Utah and Italy.
My left nut hurts.
Joy overwrites death.

Well, well. You're well
alone in your brain
only a negligible fraction
escaping as words and actions.

Every leaf that's coming out
is out. Including the self
to the west and south
a golem, mandragon, an elf.

Aaron was stacking
the last of last year's
firewood. He found
a spotted salamander—

Ambystoma maculatum—
big mouth—hidden
under the final log
with a worm and centipede for a meal.

I exclaimed Rare species!
but it's common, fossorial
lives in moist woods
under cemetery stones and memorials.

Eats earthworms,
snails, slugs
insect larvae
and adult beetles.

One more season and one more after that.
Your last words will be reticent or reckless
as your earliest efforts
at divination and the scientific method.

Robert Ronnow's most recent poetry collections are *New & Selected Poems: 1975–2005* and *Communicating the Bird*.

Photo by Seánín Óg