

Occasional Poetry

-an evening of verse



Neil E. Das

Early Works

Avonlea

In Avonlea, a gentle breeze
Blows softly through mid-summer leaves,
And tickles ripples from the lake,
Then playful dances on its way.
In Africa, no breath of breeze
To comfort wraith-like, naked trees,
To blow back life to fill the lakes,
And drive the stench of death away.

Does God reside in Avonlea;
In bright and good His rule confine,
While death and night unchallenged rule
Without the bounds of sovereignty?
Or, did He share the agony
To hear discord in His symphony,
Forsake pure joy to take on pain,
Anemic of His majesty?

I will cherish life's Avonleas
As foretastes of eternity,
But not lift long their joyous cup,
Lest, giddy, shun the cup He took.

Worlds collide all the time;
Not with cosmic clouds of dust
Or fire in the sky;
But silently
Within my mind.

John 8

It was an odd time to make an ending,
When so much was beginning.
Fresh silence soothing the fever of the night.
Clean sunlight washing the dusty temple yard.
And a young Rabbi softly rending its ancient stony
walls.

But they had brought the woman there to make an
ending,
When so much was beginning,
With scalpel-stones to excise her cancer in the night,
With harsh light to expose her temple's filthy yard,
And have the Rabbi raze her crumbling, ruined walls.

And the woman knew it was her ending,
When so much was beginning.
No dawn would soothe her fevered night.
No light could wash her cluttered yard.
And the Rabbi's word would start the battering of her
walls.

And the Rabbi made an ending,
When so much was beginning.
His scalpel cut the stone throwers' cancer in the night.
His light exposed their hidden dusty yards.
And His word softly slammed their hardened rocky
walls.

And so there was an ending,
And so much was beginning.
The Dawn had soothed the fevered Night
And stones patterned the dusty Temple yard,
And the Rabbi had softly razed its ancient stony walls.

Dog Dying, a Hopeful Sonnet

Dear Bruno, I do not know the answers
Of how it might have been if that First Fruit
Remained unplucked. Would life have surged? The curse
Unheard, would, then, your namesake teeth be moot?
Indeed, would we have come to this sad place
At all? Me muzzling your weakened growl,
Lifting you to this table. Its small space
Bearing the weight of years, of love. A howl,
Like the long, plaintive howls you barked all night
To the pristine, cold moon, barks from from my soul,
Tinged with regret, which only comes with might,
To choose to love, then not. A dog gives all.
But when the New Sun rises in the East.
I'll be a true Master and you my Beast.

A Shift to Haiku

rotting under trees
apples winey, sweet; buzzed bees
late summer orchard

crumbling, waxy
sweetness seeps into my tongue
fall's first candy corn

on art hill, sledders
stipple the snow; bright sprinkles
on a cupcake top

at dusk the bluegill
kiss ripples on the surface
beauty sets its hook

hearing a gentle
thunderstorm roll by; dim, air-
conditioned room

across the prairie
a slow sashay; thunderheads
dragging skirts of rain

asleep in a cold
room with thick blankets; perfect
hot pocket of bliss

as if each snowflake
caught a sound and soothed it down
the city swaddled

home's the skin we live
in, moving its shedding; you
now new and tender

they say you leave your
heart, i say your lungs; it may
take some time to breathe

Sorrow in 17 Syllables -Backward Through a Year of
Grieving

November 7, 2011

A house of mourning
Or of mirth? Enter both. It
Will be the same door.

August 29

The dream, the sort you
Claw to stay asleep. You, sick;
Me, your care to keep.

June 21

At Aldi, I feel
You amidst the aisles, amazed
At all the bargains.

At home I shift some
Cans you bought, and smile to reap
This Happy Harvest

June 9

You in your boxers
And banyan*, eating melons;
Rinds curved like your smile.

In summers, eating
Melons with you; cool like an
Evening in Eden.

* a Punjabi word for an a-shirt undershirt

June 6

Into Illinois,
Traveling old roads; driving
Past into present.

April 25

We always had two
Minds on rain; its lovely greys,
Its melancholy.

In the chair asleep;
The Afghan nestling legs that
Always found the breeze.

We take lunch and tea,
The rain still falling; your smile
To me like sunshine.

April 2

Landscape collapsing;
A mine subsiding; the face
Of someone weeping.

March 18

Oh, come that Day that
Backward cheers all our weathers;
Eternal sunshine.

March 18

My gas bills lower;
Patching through winter, doing
Without you to warm.

March 13

Now the sod is like
Patchwork from grandma's quilts; you
Sleeping till the Day

February 12

In this hard steel town
Black and white and brown; smelted,
At the DMV.

At the DMV,
Waiting, waiting, waiting, for
The license to move.

We have science now
For grief to travel; hearing
Your cell phone ringer.

February 9

When at dusk the day
Collapses, I feel the weight;
Light pressed into dark.

Escaping the crush
Of dusk, the light emerges,
Settling into stars.

January 28

Medicine boxes,
No longer measuring days,
Sit still on the sill.

December 16

Upon tickling,
You'd laugh and smile; silliness
Serious as death.

December 1

I miss you. Eager.

Hello Kitty, horses, cars.
Target dollar aisle.

November 9

Coming home at dusk,
Leaves sunk into dimness; my
Father's weary voice.

Coming home at dusk,
Incandescent greeting; my
Father's cheery voice.

November 7, 2010

Lovely indolent Sunday. We rest and eat and watch television. You talk to each of your grandchildren and sons. In the evening you call me home from visiting with friends. There is fear in your voice. An ambulance comes. Within two hours a doctor gently intones, "And then he did die."

The Ringbearer Sonnets

And we all smiled to hear the Gaffer's son
So named. Should not one born to earth and root,
Indeed, have such a name—the “half-wise” one?
Why, then, this reaching for a foreign fruit?
Why should a gard'ner ever tend to more
Than to roots of glorious taters. Thanks be
For those, for simple fruit and flow'rs. Why put store
In more, in your fancies wild and airy?
Dear, simple Samwise you of all should know—
Strange, wondrous weeds will grow from wand'ring seeds.
Lad, be planted here. Think only of how
To care for roses. Have no other need
For wizard dreams and mountains cold and Elves,
For old-fool Hobbits who forget themselves.

S A M W I S E

Dear, Samwise, you now see you are ill-named.
True wisdom ever shoots from lowly roots.
Of those who faithful stand and seek no fame,
You now belong, to taste its well-earned fruits.
Your love of tree and earth, all living things,
Of holy Elves and song and wizard tales,
Your guileless keeping of the guilty ring,
Your simple wisdom praised in Lorien's vale,
By Lorien's glorious Lady and her gifts,
Bring to the Shire its healing and its rest.
With rose and oak now golden Mallorn lifts
Its leaves to bless; and Elanor, gold-tressed,

Your joy begins. So, Ringbearer, through thee,
To Iluvatar may praise and glory be.

My dear Bilbo, you know it must be so;
The burden has moved on. It came to you
For one purpose alone, for him to go,
Full-knowing of the Dark he must walk through,
To give it up into the Cracks of Doom.
For you it was a treasure far too great.
And taken once again it would consume
You from within. And even now it waits,
Subdued within these holy walls, to rise
Again and chain the neck on which it hangs,
And drag it to the dark where its lord lies.
Your task must be to wait—not hear the clang
Of swords—but help to bear the pangs of fear,
To plead the grace of Elbereth be near.

B I L B O

Dear, faithful tenant of my homely house,
Who melds the joys of Shire and Elven-home,
The time has come. The secret power that rose
Through you was raised, ever to be cast down.
But its failing also begins the end
Of all things foul or fair wrought by the Rings
Of Power. This home I made to blend
The good of Middle Earth with holy things
Must also pass. So, Ringfinder, now come
And taste the joy for which we long have ached.
The homely joys we leave, as such, are done,
But I perceive Iluvatar shall take
Up each reflected image of His face
And make anew a joyous, homely place.

My dear Frodo, I did not ever dream
To be my heir would mean so dark a road.
But adventures never come as it seems
They ought, only at our bidding. A load
Unsought will seldom await our choosing.
But with the load the Unseen Giver also gives
Graces and beauty to soothe the losing
Of homely things. So, take now as you leave
Fair mithril for without, and for within
Fair memories of sunlit days and friends,
Of glorious Elder Days, of Elves and Men
In darkness fighting for a brighter end.
Despair not, if night falls; all will be well.
Sing still, "A Elbereth Gilthoniel!"

F R O D O

Dear Elf-friend well met here under these trees
That bloom in part because of sorrow borne
By you, and of the love and toil of he
Who, gentle, bore you up, who soon will mourn
That you will not savor the fruits of joy
Which bloom in field and hearth since Elven-home
Has stretched to bless the Shire. For pain alloys
Each joy you feel vicariously alone.
But, know, your pain has brought you close to me.
You feel the holy ache we feel who knew
Undying light beyond the Sundering Seas,
And bear a restless wound till all's made new.
You will be healed. The shoot of Melkor's fall
Will fall and Iluvatar be all in all.

S M E A G O L

My dear Smeagol. Indeed, you still are dear
To me. My son, please hear me if you may.
Turn from the dark, from things that crawl in fear
Of light into the earth. Look to the day,
Though it may hurt you for a while. Repent
Of whatever deed it is that chills your heart.
Warmth will return; the daylight is not spent.
My son, seek light again. Come take your part
Again in wholesome meals, in wholesome talk
Around the table. I will make amends
If you will but start; just begin the walk
Towards your healing. There are much worse ends,
My dear son, than to feel chastising pain.
Smeagol, repent. Come back to life again.

G O L L U M

Watching *Hoosiers* in the Himalayas

I never thought I would ache for Illinois.
Especially here in this cherished place,
Amidst these swaying pines that whisper joy,
Of windswept hills and cold alpine spaces,
Amidst these pines that wreathed in monsoon mists
Transform the world medieval once again,
That silent stand like monks in sacred trysts.
Yet in this cherished place there comes this pain
For rich, dark, furrowed fields a world away
For harvest leaves that dying golden fall
On silent walks of silent towns that stay

More silent still when winter carpets all
And winter snowdrifts sweep, and families keep
To glowing houses. I watch this screen and weep.

