

ROBERT HAHN

## New Poems

Robert Hahn, a resident of Brookline, Mass., came rather late to poetry. *All Clear* appeared in 1996, when he was in his fifties, and was followed by *No Messages* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2001). He is also an essayist who in recent years has done work on Tintoretto and on Italian translations of American poetry. (See "Louise Gluck in Italian," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 43 (2004): 422-37.) His poems have something of the essay: they are reflective, slow-paced, and often compare various landscapes and moments of history, classic and modern. In *No Messages* a long sequence, "No One There: In Memoriam James Merrill," can be read as a coming to terms with one of the masters of late 20th century American poetry, who also wrote sweepingly of historical periods and aesthetics, and whom Robert Hahn admires — with reservations. The idea that poetry is a way of reasoning out one's position and emotions is refreshing and is after all not so remote from what many earlier New Englanders understood by poetry.

We are thankful to Robert Hahn for granting us first publication of three new poems, that (as is usual with him) cover a long stretch of time — from Eleusis to jogging in Boston. Americans have always been eclectic and have felt free to take their bearings as they please. They are full of curiosity, and while aware of tension and drama, are tireless in the endeavor to make sense of a multifarious and often threatening reality. Robert tells me that he has recently bought a minuscule plot at Mt. Auburn Cemetery for himself and his wife Nicole Rafter, a student and translator of Cesare Lombroso, where he will be laid to rest in a truly American pantheon. The short second poem refers to this, and to the vagaries of fame. We must give Hahn credit for the streak of humor apparent in this "posthumous" epigram. (He has written a poem about — among other things — Gregory Corso's grave in the English Cemetery in Rome.)

Robert Hahn is also engaged in translating into English some modern Italian poets and has picked up enough Italian to be at home in our country. Meeting him, listening to him discuss translations, reading his carefully yet freely constructed poetic arguments, is an enriching experience.

Massimo Bacigalupo

Stone Girls

One of Rodin's models. Who knows  
What she was thinking

When she rolled on the studio floor and spread her thighs  
So widely, to become *Iris*,

*Messenge of the Gods* — her bronze labia  
Glittering darkly in flight.

Or the girl who shocked Eleusis that night.  
Did she want to see herself

As others could see her? She was anyone,  
Among the initiates

Winding beside the sea, whose waves  
Were glimmering with spirits,

Until she dropped her robe and went for a swim.  
She came out grinning.

But the keepers of the Mysteries were not amused. This  
Was sacrilege. The sentence, stoning.

She was like, sorry, I just wanted to be myself!  
They didn't care. It didn't matter

That her breasts were tipped with platinum  
Before she dove,

Balanced briefly  
In a pose that showed how ethereal

A body could be, like moonstruck marble,  
Like a stele by starlight.

#### Mt. Auburn Posthumous Poem

Winslow Homer is my neighbor here,  
In "the great white city of the Dead,"  
As Emily Dickinson called it. And Margaret Fuller  
Or at least a plaque with her name on it.  
And here in my own row, the great gad-fly,  
The journalist I.F. Stone.  
Remember him? No?

From "Tales of the Prayer Messenger Service"

1.

A Sunday afternoon in July. Dead still.  
Heat near a hundred, humidity, forget it.  
Weather so bad it was news. *Use caution today,*  
Advised the *Globe*. I went out running anyway.

The streets were empty, as if the city  
Had fallen ill or was under a baleful spell,  
As I ran down to the river's edge and the bridge  
Where Harry Houdini had dangled in chains

And escaped, in a miracle of his arrangement.  
But today, nothing. Heat haze. Blank white space.  
Then as I crossed over, a second figure was inked in.  
I saw him standing at the rail. He was looking up

2.

At three kites flying  
In the upper air, tethered to wispy lines,

His arms raised, his palms lifted,  
Two lines tied to his wrists

And one to the rail.  
But how had he broken vacancy's spell?

He stood there like a conductor  
Summoning brassy chords.

The kites soared in the air.  
Was he even there?

