

Poetry Series

Robert Leary
- poems -

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Robert Leary()

I started writing poetry at the age of twenty at the University of Connecticut. At UConn I studied with James Scully and won the Wallace Stevens Award for poetry several times. While there I published poems in the Wormwood Review. Upon graduation I entered Harvard first studying with Richard Tillinghast in the summer. I then was introduced to Robert Lowell, submitted a manuscript and was formally accepted at Harvard to study with Lowell. At Harvard I published poems in the Harvard Advocate. I only recently started writing again for my own entertainment.

A Love So Deep....The Alligator And The Butterfly

It was a love so deep inside
That in his heart
The butterfly doth reside

When first she lit upon his nose
He knew she was the one for him
But when lips met
Their passion grew
And now
Forever they are together
For in his stomach she doth swim

Robert Leary

A Partner

A partner's got to have your back
No handshake cloaked handout
He's got to be there
Thick or thin□
Holding up the space you're in
Through rapids
And perhaps a fall
To rocks below
Where able to climb out
You pick up and start again
A partner's got to have your back

Robert Leary

Alone

It feels awkward walking alone
Along this pier tonight
Shyly I stare at the screws
In the planking
Beating a rhythm to my shoes
Moving before me a young couple
Engrossed in love's conversation
Coming toward me another couple
With a dog
Everyone's attached
I think 'where are my screws'
What keeps me here
Held in the flash of the City
Plankton on a silent sea
Before my bow slipping
Through the waves unheard
But for the helmsman
My mind zooms out
It's me alone
The boat lists
I smile
And steer a course...

Robert Leary

Another Year

As if we were planets
Waltzing into another universe
We sit down to dinner
There's too much smoke between us
Your face locked in a mask
Betraying tears I've wiped from its cheeks
Passions we've unfolded in our soul's
Search for the right recipe
Spiral down the drain
....yet from the pieces left behind
We'll pick up and try again

Robert Leary

Autumn Comes

As autumn comes let us remember
The good that drew us to the other
Not the summer so miserably hot
Let us remember the leaves that fell
On flowers that were our love
For now they weep
Let us remember the happiness
In our laughs together
For they echo like shadows in our sleep

Robert Leary

Bird's Leg Beneath The Dawn

Let the waves brush my soul
Portray me from the pallet
A melting snow flake
Shadows of birds
Bring me water
Dissolve the heat
That is my being
Been□
And will be but
Then
As we all end
In
Pieces running on the beach

Robert Leary

Confrontation With My Face

It bothered me that I could hold
My face out at arm's length,
Pivot it on one finger
And hear it make excuses for its folly.
An iron mask with class
Had been my aim, the glory
Of a painted shield, its cross
Dragging like a carcass behind.
This face, it said it was too human
And that faces in the future
Should be constructed of stronger things.
Perhaps plastic or aluminum alloy would
Enrich this instrument in its future efforts;
A celluloid coating might improve upon
The older flesh models.
Photographs of my younger plumes
Might enable science to restore my luster,
Said the face with half a face's heart.
No, I said, the fault is not all yours,
The eyes now suspended in mid-air
Are much to blame. They did not help
With their insistence on this game.
You're free to go; your homage has been paid,
My indentured parents have been lost,
The ship sails on and I'm no longer
Sure you're mine. I'll grow a beard
And carry my eyes in my hands.

Robert Leary

Death Wait

Death, wait, wait I have more things to do
I'll take care of what's left of me
Just wait, wait, my son's not ready
The boat's not finished
Horses need to be fed, bridles cleaned.
Death, wait, wait I have more things to see
China waits, the Russian Steppes,
Wars will end and I'll walk though
The Khyber Pass on my way to you
Death, wait, wait, I have more things to do

Robert Leary

How Like A Bird

How like a bird you are
Heroic canary
In my heart's mine
Gull hung in the wind
Watching the sun rise
Fragile, I reach for you
Perhaps you'll fly with me
Two gulls held
In life's wind
Eagles
To soar again...

Robert Leary

I Loved You All

I sit alone in the garden on the patio
Overlooking a heart shaped pool
Who would I wish to walk up these stairs
Hand on the white cement balusters
Who would I wish to join the flowers
The green Matisse furniture
Whose feet would I choose to climb the slate
And join me here amid the roses
That speak so freely to my heart
Amidst the bamboo furniture
Painted over a thousand times
Whose "hello... hola" would I cherish most
Through the smoke of my cigar?

Perhaps as in the dark all hearts
Like ghosts are close to mine
Your loves have touched me most
But who among you sits and stares
At a moon over an ocean but all
For hand and hand you dance together
To a distant drum and I, but one
Loved you all.

Robert Leary

Isaura

Like the petals of a flower
Your smile rifts the air
Meddles abundant in the pollen
That is the breath that lifts despair...
To a heart your hand held
Has reached the cords
That to the harp's fingers fold
Delicately in my reach
Through your eyes to mine beseech
To lift your pain and fill the
Vacuous shadow that is my heart

Robert Leary

Last Night

Thanks for last night.
For once I awoke and felt whole.
Not that we'll ever be together again
Only time holds the answer to that question
And time can be so mischievous.
There was a certain closure.
My giving you your Valentine Poems,
Our being able to be comfortable together
Joke, laugh and enjoy whatever it is
We have together and not feel the bleeding
Tenseness' that always left me empty
As I, perhaps more than you, tried to understand
And deal with my feelings.
There's a certain honesty about you that I admire
On one hand and deplore on the other.
It's you, and it's one of your most endearing qualities,
A quality you have almost to a flaw.
Sometimes in our conversation
I feel like we're walking through an English garden
And all of a sudden we stop
And we're staring down into a deep abyss
Where one step more would mean death.
I guess we like taking things to the edge
And together standing there
Staring into the primordial emptiness that's life.
Is this the basis for a relationship? Perhaps,
Who knows....?

Robert Leary

Let Me Be The One

Fukushima Daiichi's shift manager:

"let me be the one..."

I'd struggle to pronounce your name if I knew it
And can only imagine your silent thoughts
As friends helped you into your protective suit
To turn the wheel to open the valve
Letting the inevitable engulf your body
Perhaps your thoughts went to being young
Running in the sun
Meeting your wife
Falling in love
Holding your first child
Or perhaps you froze your heart
And like a robot
Performed beyond heroics
For your love of all....

Robert Leary

Love Lessons

How do you teach someone to love?

They sit before you: "I don't feel the way you do";

"Of course not"; you say..."you have to learn to love..."

You knew it as a child and lost it like a toy, broken.

It's in you hiding behind pain, spite, bitterness.

Move out from the shadows slowly

Placing one foot in the sand and then another.

Do not expect him to be perfect

And you'll reach the shore.

Place one foot in the water, then another.

Let it hold you like a wave,

Do not expect perfection

Letting the water embrace you slowly

Look up into his eyes and see he loves you."

Robert Leary

Ode To Artaud

Has the world become so incestually complex
that song no longer rhymes
that laughter is a sullen gesture to appease another
that being unique we're isolated
like one cube from another?

Is the heart frozen in a tube
to be shaken by a hand we do not see
forsaken to a destiny of prescription drugs
administered to a body
prescribed by lack of destiny
to endure a little longer
as if the truth be found in time...

Or is there something to say for patterns
that obviate from the past that say:
'listen to me or you will not last.'

Robert Leary

Often

as if they were statues in a dream,
people left over from some other party;
not tonight's, some other one - you met them,
yes, partially you met and had meant to meet again.

He'd just published in POETRY and that we nibbled on
as if the idea had been a good once; frozen,
unfrozen for the evening and somehow lost its flavor.

You try again; how many countless times you try
to pick up where you left off -
a forgotten name of a forgotten dog you'd once adored
as a child of your own dreams of being a child
with a dog you once loved.

Wormwood Review
Issue. twenty-five
1967

Robert Leary

Pooch

As faithful as their hearts may be
Everyone shouldn't have dog
As some of us are riding hard
Headed for epiphany...

Robert Leary

Question

I sit alone upon this beach
Two divers one close one far
Patrol the waters to the East
I ponder which one am I
Do I lurk with shells and pebbles
Or do I look beyond my reach
To uncertainties at other levels
Do I comfort in the known
Or choose the fathoms of unknown
Do I travel far and wide
Or seek the comfort by my side
Is it fair to ask her...
For my future's so unclear?

Robert Leary

Reflections In Carpinteria

Of certain sorrows places come
And life is a masquerade
I sit alone upon this beach
For I too have joined the parade
I adore you for the things you are
Abhor for the things you aren't
For you will always be
The girl who climbed the mountain with me
Your happiness when you look out to sea
Not the empty costume life's handed you
For in my dream we approach the floor
Our costumes' hung neatly by the door
And in each other's arms we dance
To a Yankee tune so Latin played
Our hearts filled with gratitude
That each found the other
And left the charade

Robert Leary

Return Blind

The rain growls on the roof,
starving, dog chew bones in the gutter.
All night the frightened trains gape
though the tunnels in my mind
eels heaving from a swollen corpse
the children count them from the bridge
all day the boats have passed this way
this man's been dead a long long time.

First rain they say for a hundred days
it washed the children from the park
the pups wet with mud and filth
their smiles alive with frightened grins...
The world opens up and they walk in
the pipes are lit the lights are low
a candle sings a lonely dance
and arms that reach and enable them
to prove that they were there
pull to refresh the frozen wind.

I have walked the evening, strayed
from an ambition to be warm,
walked the distant edge to check
the silent sharpness of an evening's tricks,
climbed the vines of vice,
tricked and have been tricked in every throw
of human dice.
I have lost forgotten and never won.

Robert Leary

Return To You

I awake
having rummaged the blind embodiment
of bloodshot credulities beguiling
search for clean veins, one stop
friendships, night trains
in the mind of some insipid highball.
Through all this your figure
on the bed oppresses, magestic
not only in the bare fact
it's remained these years...

Soft against thin ears of reception
the morning like a fevered child awakens
in the head dim pulse of recognition.
As light embraces shells of a sun-faced shore
far off the eyes come unto their own.

Sleep dredges from the body. A barge
on way to its tender, open and
moving in the grace of duty, alone
yet not seperate from a pace
that is the grace of waking.

The shore of rooms, doors shut
in shadows between tables of wood
and island devices of an idle day ignite
through windows fuses the sight that seems
at one with all seen and friendless

in the night we come from with our dreams
stuck behind moments yet forgotten to be
remembered only as chances to escape
the importance of action, the city of the mind
on duty behind car mirror remembrances.

Robert Leary

Salsa At The Fair

How impersonal the hour
We're searching for each other
Faces I mistake for yours turn to dust
What was it you were wearing
In this tide of people
Ah! you were dancing...
'all de ladies wants me to teach dem'
You exclaim!
She wants to know what I'm thinking
'I'll pay for your thinking'
What am I thinking...?

Robert Leary

Simply Love

Love's not a two way street
It's often one
For loved is loved
Not for an expectation in return
But for some inexplicit light
That burns...

Robert Leary

Table 26

I had to break this arrow in my heart
That I could ride the horse beneath me
Yet replete with love a storm
Still beats as I leave you
At the altar of this table outside
Dancing shadows of our love
Seething to a froth of peace
Heart in your hand you walk away with mine

Not knowing where paths lead
What serpent from the water
Will rear in furtive ire to be beaten
Down by an ignoble knight
Whose arrow through its heart pierces
The peace that was our light
For we walked in anytime
And would have loved in any time
And waltzed the circle of this table
To the fable that was ours.

Robert Leary

The Beetle

There is a world beneath a leaf
In which the beetle finds relief
There, alone, it ponders what could have been
Until it was too late to start again
It thinks 'perhaps another day'
But soon the leaf is blown away

Robert Leary

The Can Man

He rattles by
Steeped in his Haitian heritage
A furtive glance
Speaks a nervous affirmation of our states
Weighted down with cans that cry
For escape like metal swine
Belching metallic utterances
From a hell likened to Dante's season
Of no seasons
A deaf old man happens by my bench
Carrying a putter reminiscent of past glories
I yell at him once realizing he cannot hear:
"On your way to the country club, why the putter? "
"To fight off predators, ' he quips
Now I'm joined by an old woman:
"Went to Disney last week and rode the roller coaster, "
She shares, "I'm sore"
I note people with dogs are less apt to say "hello"
Content with their alter egos
Do I hear laughter from the can man's bag
Or is it the bantering notes of porpoises'
That idle by?

Robert Leary

The Dream

If I'm sad
It's not for you I'm sad
If you leave me
It's not you I'll miss
For travels still lure
And I will travel
Holding hands on beaches
Will not go away
Bike rides at dusk
Will still be there
Beautiful sunsets still await
What I will miss
Will be the dream
That in our womb
Never came awake
Taken by who knows what
No, I will not miss you
I will miss the dream

Robert Leary

The Fly

In the garden
You sit upon my book
I look you in the eye
...receive a pleasant look

I think myself your master
Too bad you cannot read...
Ah...but kaleidoscopic eyes
See beyond what I've conceived

Now you are my master
And I am but your pet...
Remember me in your travels
For you I'll not forget

Robert Leary

The Pundit And The Puppet

The puppet has a vision
With many strings attached
A life for every season
Winter, Summer, Spring or Fall
Not liking one or all
He can ask the fingers for revision
If he wants to posture large or small
He can change for any reason

For personalities he might jest
Play the role of Rufus Rose
A modern version of Pinocchio
A rendering of Cyrano
Court the lovely courtesan
Princes Summer Fall Winter Spring
Turn the mirror on himself
Act out who he wish he was
Or with flick of finger
Play himself again

Robert Leary

The Road To Erato

I

Oh willow like a bird so fair
Your hair abloom ignites the air
Oh oak so solid stately strong
With only pathos for your song

And yet below the ground
Their fingers meet
Their arteries are one heartbeat
Their breathing but a single sound

□

II

Redeem the tide that draws us all
Our quest for touch is not so small...
Yet as pebbles on a beach
Our eyes are strung
On strings our hearts can barely reach...

□

Naked prawns upon a bed
Each searching for a meaning...
In Passion's lonely head
Fear's screaming
"Love is dead! "

□ III

Now love is lust in the wind
To the branch of a tree it give in
A neck in a noose
The horse is a friend
'Till slap of hand it seduce

Now maybe you say
'Life is short
Why not a toss in the hay'
But battles not fought
Are dreams for another day...

Robert Leary

The Vase

An empty vase upon the table
decorously awaiting your return.
What flowers do you ceremoniously
bring, ambrosial dreams to bloom,
cut and water?
We'll make love and wake delighted
To see their fresh pink faces
in the days that do ensue
our hearts will grin, but soon
beauty will transcend
you'll lay them lifeless in the sun
a memory
pressed between pages
of our life, perhaps a potpourri
or unable to helm the thorns
an urn could be their destiny.

Robert Leary

These Barns

It's been over thirty years I've known these barns.
They've become a part of me like veins on the backs of my hands.
The sawdust and manure fragrant with spices of fresh hay
Wafted in my memories of being carried on to a field
Naked after a night of too much drink
Only to be salvaged by friends sober enough to realize
The mosquitoes would have their way with me.
Friends grown too old to play the game
Exiled to Argentina as all persecuted by time.
How I recall the barbecues
Perpetrated by heroic knights
Now gone but for their Memorials.
The girls, oh the girls from California, London, Australia
How we danced away our youth like Bacchus' hooves
We bled the blood from every grape
And loved and sang as if it would last forever
Around the fires like Druids ignoring the Christians
We danced and now but for the barns it is remembered
And across the polo fields our amazing goals forgotten.

Robert Leary

To My Son

Your life will not always be music
Do not forget to dance
May your frustrations turn to strengths
Your loves and sorrows bare fruit
Your friendships lasting
Your loses bring you knowledge
And may we always share a bond
HAPPY BIRTHDAY
Dad

Robert Leary