

No Soap, Radio!

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Black
Lawrence
Press

For John Heaphy, who taught me what's funny is funny
& in Memory of my teachers: Steve Orlen & Jon Anderson,
who taught me what's not funny is funny!

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Tang

If I do not witness these leaves turning orange, who will?

I stir myself:
I like to think

Of myself as a reincarnated Poet from the T'ang Dynasty,
Dehydrated orange drink
Astronauts gulped orbiting this planet
That became a fun '60s breakfast staple,

The bitter tang of a car's squealing tires as it peels out,
Any distinguishing characteristic that suggests individuality.

Isn't it a very personal moment when each of us
Recognizes we are failing,
That we're incomplete, outdated perhaps,
& need something new to make us valid,

Sobbing on the mudroom floor,
Praying hands through a broken screen door,
Begging the aftermath of someone to come back,

Or watching our planet grow
Smaller below us
That we discover it is
Impossible
To ever become
One hundred percent reconstituted?

I am not where I am right now, in this autumn.

My mind's not what it used to be either.
There is no more just- add water.

None of us can absolutely prove our previous lives.

I mean pervious: I meant disprove:

Never Mind

(In Memory of Steve “Dr. Softy” Orlen, 1942–2010)

*Steve Orlen would pose an awkwardly intimate question
About your life as though your life mattered to him
& magically your life began to matter
To you—lines removed from the poem*

You drum-rolled into my dim-witted frontal lobe a notion
That swapping *truth* for a poem’s emotion & musicality was A-okay.
Now that the documentation of your life is notarized,
Birth & Death certificate time-stamped,
Now that your most recent draft is abandoned,
The primitive ‘60s swallow tattoo on your left forearm will transform
Into a hummingbird, thumbnail-size, so as not to be overstated, co-existing
On the subtle-side of art. The morning after your demise I sat with your wife,
Stood actually, on what used to be your front porch,
(Still a front porch but no longer yours),
& we both admired how this not-quite-a-bird, more an enormous insect,
Hovered around the sugar-water in a cobalt blue bottle that dangled

From a mesquite tree you planted.
It is believed by some Native American cultures
When a well-loved man dies he hovers over his neighborhood,
His personal haunts & hangouts, for a couple of goof-off days,
Eavesdropping on what his pals are saying about him before
The immense undertaking to integrate into the sweet elixir of everything.

Undoubtedly you relished the gossip & little reminiscences we told about you.
Undoubtedly you were concerned
Some secrets would leak out though I swear mine would not,
Including the 3 a.m. episode in the parking lot of a now demolished
Las Vegas casino with that half-black, half-Korean woman in the platinum wig,
The slow dance under the singular street lamp in the world-vacant,
Without the benefit of music. I am not afraid of sentimentality.
I will never fear revealing my vulnerabilities in a dangerous neighborhood.
I sport my poet gang colors anywhere. During your last days
An esoteric population meandered in your backyard to take photos of your swallow tattoo
So they could ink identical shapes & colors into their own skin.
It crossed my mind too, but ultimately
It seemed too much a cliché,
& skin-ink is too permanent for poetry, which is the continual revision of thought
Due to the inaccuracies of life observations.

Make no mistake, my tattoo is here, but invisible,
Visible only to those who know the password, the secret handshake.
I chose the fleeing hummingbird, which hovers, eavesdrops,
Has the physics-defying ability to fly in place & preserve secrets
Before it zooms off to strange & mysterious intuitive places.

The Outcome

In summer, neighbors lounge in wobbly pool chairs with cocktails
Imperfectly balanced on armrests while kids splash with inflatable devices
& burning skin. Daughters do the dead man's float in self-conscious water,
Chewing split ends, camouflaging their bodies in double XL t-shirts

While wives prod hubbies to fire up the grill & hush-talk about marriage-flaws
& offer advice to the one single woman while these week-end men bemoan
The absurdity of astronomical salaries paid to professional jocks & how
They can point to any woman in the bleachers & she would sleep with them.

But it is not at all in the least bit summer now. Do-it-yourself men change
Spark plugs in snow removal apparatuses. One man in a posh suit falls
Into his pool, or staggering half-drunk, (or does one say half-sober),
This man, maybe because it's dark & he expects the ground to be there,

Takes a misstep into the pool he never wanted, now closed for the season,
Being mid-autumn. You might think the water had already been drained,
But in fact, a few orange leaves float on the surface. It's rare for people
To have real conversations. The man who tripped or jumped latches on to

His martini glass like a stubborn belief in a childhood God & because it is not
Entirely empty, a few thimblefuls of vodka dilute the fabric of the algae crusted
Water the way kids urinate in the shallow end when they suspect nobody's looking.
His wife, on many occasions, accused him of having *a few too many*. The man

Automatically denied this. His wife insisted he was not just drunk, but **a** drunk,
That he should talk to somebody, attend a meeting. It wasn't so much a one-sided
Conversation, an argument per se, but a kind of debate between two helpless selves,
Well meaning, a sense life wasn't shaping up as either had imagined. Impatient with

How long it took her to dress for the party, he paced outside. Life: five minutes out
Of the package & the stocking gets a snag. Hearing the splash, his half-dressed
Wife stabs imprints in the dewy grass, half-running, stiff-legged in the way women
In high heels scamper in an emergency. Their daughter darts to look out her

Dark bedroom window into the darker adult world. You are concerned, reader,
That the man may have drowned, or wonder how long he flailed in the partially
Frozen water till he sobered up enough to climb with his weighty chlorinated
Suit & ruined shoes up the aluminum ladder. His billfold, of course, was inside

His chest pocket. I should tell you, a few hours from now, the house will burn
Down, after the party & argument on the ride home where he threatened to drive

Over a ledge. The wife blacks out on the couch with a lit cigarette, the TV blaring,
Some drama she'd thought she'd seen before but forgot the outcome of, or perhaps

She thought she remembered, but it concluded not at all as she recalled. Upstairs,
He flattened the wet bills on their antique dresser in descending denominations & turned
Inventive with his wife's blow dryer, aiming from a distance that seemed safe, but
The damp bills flew around the room like panicked birds trapped inside a house, on fire.

Tu Fu Visits Disneyland

I am humbled wearing this hat with circular black
Ears. I think I finally have enough photographs
That I no longer have any use for memory.

Each of us should take a cue from costumed
Chip & Dale: *never fall out of character—*
Confuse the world with which friend is which.

It is rude & dishonors our ancestors to nourish
Our bodies while walking—I sit on a curb & devour
A turkey leg straight from a *Flintstones* episode.

I am not Zen enough to be this happy. Nobody is.
When I slap & scream at my cranky child I **am**
But feel embarrassed when others do the same.

I was told in this public world secret underground
Tunnels exist so the creator of our amusement could spy
On our joy. We pretend each in our own way to be God.

Identity Crisis

When I walk in a crowd the crowd does not see me.
Drivers turn up conflicting radio-songs to drown each other out.

When a bottle of booze is emptied, what part of my life
Becomes full, is still hollow, thrown out a speeding car window?

In movie theaters everyone strategically permits only one leg to sleep.
Even in air-conditioned days I sweat. Who would agree to trade lives?

You should not be ashamed of torturing dolls but of bringing
Them back to life. When nobody is home a boy models his sister's

Panties but will not enter the world of lipstick. Kids have for
Centuries been disguising themselves as walking furniture.

The last thing I'd want to do is attend my high school reunion
And introduce myself to people I've known my whole life.

The child at the pageant playing the good angel dangles
From the ceiling, the cables not completely invisible.

Hypnotized at the blackjack table, the cards have no
Number-memory like Pi and are impersonal (wink-wink).

Is there pure chance or does the universe have intention?
If you tortured me I could not reveal my true self.

Each year it gets more difficult to bend over to tie my shoes.
If I sit up too fast I suffer dizziness. An old friend from a million

Eons ago phones and I am awash with ten thousand atoms of happy-sorrow
And surprise-panic like a man who wakes with fish swimming in his pockets.