

2011 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest
First Prize: Jessie Carr

Inspiration in Fragmentation

I lose a little bit of myself
in the telling of each story,
the thought bubble on the page
above my cartoon-self
growing bigger, wider, rounder,
with each word I let go,
let flow from the confines of my mind,
into black serif typeface
on the stark white page.

Until there's too many words and it bursts --
and the words all tumble down,
mixing in a tornado of sundry parts of speech:
pronoun verb adjective conjunction adverb
(they fall quiet and quickly.)
Having let my words go,
the stick-figure me gazes up
to the top of the page,
waits for inspiration to strike
in a big yellow comic-book lightning bolt
and fill me back up.

It will take my carefully drawn self years
to figure out that no lightning bolt will strike,
that that cyclone of words, words I thought were lost,
is just a whirlwind of new stories for new selves,
different constructions that are not mine but still mine --
that I have not, in fact, lost anything at all,
and that all the stories in the world
are told with the same words.

Insight

My truest self exists in the moments
between consciousness and sleep.
Those instants where the din of life,
the rushing of the ocean inside a shell,
fades to the calm swell of pure feeling.
And my clumsy thoughts, their awkward constructions,
arrange themselves with fitting lyrical grace
and I can understand.
But I cannot grasp this comprehension,
for to move, to even think something else
wrenches me out and wrecks that fragile connection.
There is something upon waking – harder to remember
than the dreams we can rarely, barely recall –
that can only make me ache for lost clarity,
like the memory of the happy freedom
and laughter of last night's drinks
as the pain throbs in your hungover temple.
I cannot find these moments, not by trying,
and they do not come every night –
sometimes sleep slips in too quickly,
or I lose myself in groggy half-dreams –
but I find my self
some nights.

Keys and Locks

The creases of the paper are worn
from too many foldings and un-foldings,
too many afternoons spent soaking up the paragraphs,
wearing out each sentence, exhausting each word.
Each time she reads it again,
the small tear on the fold growing ever so slightly larger,
obscuring the soft pencil writing just a bit more,
she feels as if she is discovering everything anew,
and she treasures this feeling
like an exotic peacock in its gilded cage
or a luminous sapphire, carefully set in its velvet-lined box.
And, as we do with all treasures,
she locks this feeling up,
hardening her heart to the certainties of the world,
carefully wrapping her love in envelopes and strings,
keeping herself deep inside.
And the creases on her face grow deeper,
the afternoons piling up against her tightly locked door
as she grows exhausted with obscurities and certainties.
Unfolding the paper she searches for lost discovery,
for youngness and quick grins and overwhelming enthusiasm,
but finds only torn folds and smudged lead.
For treasure, once buried deep, is not easily found again,
and she is too worn out to search.