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# Thoroughly Departmental

*Mark R. Christensen*

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During the course of the previous year, several members of the English department have been collaborating, however loosely, in the writing of poetry. This collaboration has taken several forms, including discussion of works in a weekly writing group; exchange of poems and responses via the departmental mailbox, discussions of poems over lunch, and guest presentations of poems in our classes. We have talked about our poems in homes, offices, classrooms, hallways, restaurants and, occasionally, while sitting on a stone bench on campus. All of us are aware that these interactions have affected our writing. The following poems have all, in some way, been influenced by our collaborators.

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*Mark R. Christensen was an assistant professor in the English Department where he taught literature, writing, and English methods courses before leaving to accept a position at Bemidji State University.*

## **The Bare Truth About Bernini's Baldacchino**

Professor Hunnewell asked us to write  
A freewrite on Bernini's Baldacchino.

My notes record his words, "Precious protected contents,  
the focal point of the great church."

Here is what I wrote, more or less as I wrote it:

No mystery or religion here.  
Power.

Gaudy, ornate, offensive.  
Do some Catholic critics feel free not to like this?

Ugly exquisite and hideous monstrosity

Wholly alien  
Can't be assimilated in any human scale.

A grotesque mistake.

(When I go to St. Peter's, I look at the Pieta and the old bronze statue  
of St. Peter.

The one where pilgrims have kissed his foot off.

But that's just the way of saying which statue I mean.

It's demeaning to a great work to talk like that.

Like reducing the Romanesque structure in Pisa to The Leaning  
Tower.

Sure, it leans, but it also glows.

But that's an aside.  
Back to the Baldacchino.)

Vast serpentine pillars.

Toilet paper tubes twisted and bronzed.  
Flapping flags draped from the lofty platform  
Grandly misshapen figures atop it all.

Loathesome golden toad.  
Signifying nothing to me but opulence and waste.

A waste, a waste, a waste, a waste.  
Bernini—great talent and energy  
Wasted wasted wasted.

Only an oxymoron will express my view of Bernini.  
Let's warm up to it: loathesome bronze idol  
Exquisitely hideous.  
Hideously exquisite  
Opulent waste

Ravishing decadence.

*Richard Chisholm*

## London: My Brother Describes Murder

Torso draped on the top  
bunk's edge, he explains  
*it really happens.* I look up.

He means it used  
to happen—the bloodied head  
of Anne Boleyn, the Tower

where Richard  
had the princes smothered.  
*It happens nowadays,* he says, his slick

white face back-lit  
by an oldest smile.  
I fit my head

to a wooden groove, I try to gasp  
through linen. *And Mom can't stop it  
and Dad can't stop it—*

I throw my hands  
against my ears to block  
his leaning down: *no one can.*

*Bonnie Auslander*

## spring dance

I saw a woman dancing with children  
like a maid in a minuet of poppets and scarves.

she smoothed through schools of  
child-voiced murmurs,  
humming her play-along laughter.

like minnows,  
children were coming together and  
splitting and coming together  
in a game of  
someone touches someone you're it.

they spilled over the walk,  
milling and scattering  
before me.

she skimmed near the walk,  
as though she thought  
to approach me,  
then danced away spinning,  
dancing and spinning,  
drawing the children  
around her.

she shimmered light  
footed to the littlest child,  
touching a gentle you're it.

he followed her graciously,  
sure of his welcome and of  
someone to touch.

he wrapped his arms around her legs,  
his face pressed firmly  
between her knees,  
holding his partner you're it.

she caressed the back of his suppliant head,  
with each hand welcoming  
someone to touch,  
and shivered  
in her  
grace.

why,  
since she is not mine,  
and the child is not mine,  
why, then,  
do they stay with me?

*Mark Christensen*

## **Taking the Course**

I go more often now  
to be a student. True,  
the lesson is always  
the same, more or  
less. I never quite  
get it. The expectations  
are so high; they  
make me feel more  
happens than just  
the learning talked  
about, the drama  
enacted. The way  
we interact always  
amazes us. Someone  
always brings a  
bite to eat, we  
break it into pieces  
and everyone always  
gets a little bit, just  
enough. And the whole  
thing is always  
like that, not just  
the sharing of food.  
When it is over you wake  
up sort of and feel tired,  
in a strange way, from  
boredom, or remembered  
pain; you've just been  
out of it and let down,  
sometimes hard, yet  
somehow, at some point,

you remember later,  
taken up. Do I want  
to go back again? you wonder.

*Robert Garlitz*



## **Good Friday - Afternoon**

I pecked beyond the  
curtain - a thread fell on me:  
oh, the pain of it!

## **Passion Saturday**

Must I sing and talk  
today, a grave day, when you  
demand soul silence?

## **Easter Morning**

Was it really  
Jesus Christ, Superstar? God,  
No! Super servant.

*Henry Vittum*