
Thoroughly Departmental

Mark R. Christensen

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.

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