

# Todd Colby

March 25, 2007



Puberty  
brought  
me to  
poetry.

**Please describe your favorite poem or kind of poetry.**

I like a poem that doesn't look or sound like a poem. I like a poem that's as unpredictable as it is musical. I like a poem that gives me that slightly breathless, panicky feeling.

**If you could spend a day with a living poet you admire, what would you do together? What might a passerby overhear?**

I would put my fingers through his hair and rub his shoulders. A passerby might overhear me telling him that it's okay to relax and not write poems for the entire afternoon.

**Which relationship is more important: a) poetry and politics or b) poetry and philosophy? Why?**

Poetry and philosophy are more important. When I read philosophy I get so jazzed up that I usually have to write a poem in response to it. When I get worked up or horrified about politics I usually write a letter to the editor or march or discuss it with my wife or friends. Political situations demand action whereas philosophy demands poetry.

**If you were able to place poetry in the world where it does not seem prominent, how would it behave there?**

You're soaking in it.

**Where will we see you and your work in five years?**

I've always liked the idea of the big poem. A book length opus like Alice Notley's "The Descent of Alette" or Charles Olson's "Maximus," William Carlos Williams's "Paterson," Louis Zukofsky's "A," Ezra Pound's "Cantos," and several of Leslie Scalapino's serial masterpieces. Those are great templates. Someday soon I shall enter that canon with a bright lycra suit on.

**Tell us a story: what drew you to poetry in the first place? Why did you start writing?**

Puberty brought me to poetry. Sigh.

## Uneasy Heaven

I never wanted to discourage  
you from coming home —  
my intentions were far from that.  
I invested in a chest trap  
and safety cones, nose water  
and a red light filter  
with some glazed meat  
for your concentration.  
I even purchased a crystal pedestrian  
warning bell, and some denim  
iron-on patches with wolverine logos  
for your flight jacket.  
I guess it never occurred  
to you that these things  
cost cash money  
and that eventually  
they'd all have to be  
returned in their original  
packaging with the proper  
receipts, of course.

## Morning Poem

I could have you, need you, break with you,  
I could spend hours with you eating pieces  
of you and making the world change  
with you, be humble with you  
and then cradle you whole, eating  
from you as the birds eat crusts of bread  
around us wanting to eat from you too.  
Early riser, mouth full of love,  
the sweet way the world burns —  
Oh nest of pureness —  
Oh love of the desire  
to be desired —  
The whole world is moving  
through your hips and palms  
while my carcass is numbed and slammed  
speaking with warm detergent air.  
The bleach decay of fabric —  
soothing as hair  
on the back  
of your cambered head.

Hello

She packs a baggy full of grape jelly in her purse — pulls it out  
at the right moment — puts it between herself and another person.  
“I’m just going to put this here while I ride this train.”

# The Ship is Not a Metaphor

A ship we all know about is still shipping or floating.  
The people work on it, or entertain themselves on it, or drink  
the milk of various animals on it. They have conversations  
about stuff and then they listen back to the tapes  
of what they just talked about so they're always  
catching up with what they just said.  
They scoot around on it and play these  
little games on it. I know a lot  
about it — so if you need to know  
more about it, feel free  
to ask me all about it.

Thank You.

## Naming the Animal

We gave the animal a name so we could refer to it,  
single it out, call for it. We thought long and hard about  
the name for it and then — when we stopped thinking about it —  
the name came to us, and we forgot about the animal.

Sometimes the animal has to give up his seat  
or his position so the others can be hemmed in  
by their pleasure in seeing the animal sit or stand.

I just called to make sure the animal was okay  
and everything. I saw what happened to you  
so I used my phone to call your work  
to tell you what happened to you — but not before  
I called the ambulance to drive you to work.  
It was the animal that did most of the damage  
to your body that day, not the medicine.

Think about that while I'm at work.

Todd Colby lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He was born in Austin, Minnesota, raised in Atlanta, Georgia and educated in Iowa City, Iowa. He enjoys riding his bike, running around, swimming from here to there, and living with his wife, the artist Elizabeth Zechel.

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