

FALL 2011 TowerLight



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# TowerLight

A publication of Hillsdale College

*A Valediction  
Forbidding Mourning*

BY JOHN DONNE

AS virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say,  
“Now his breath goes,” and some say, “No.”  
So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
‘Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.  
Moving of th’ earth brings harms and fears;  
Men reckon what it did, and meant;  
But trepidation of the spheres,  
Though greater far, is innocent.  
Dull sublunary lovers’ love  
Whose soul is sense cannot admit  
Of absence, ’cause it doth remove  
The thing which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined,  
 That ourselves know not what it is,  
 Inter-assurèd of the mind,  
 Care less, eyes, lips and hands to miss.  
 Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
 Though I must go, endure not yet  
 A breach, but an expansion,  
 Like gold to aery thinness beat.  
 If they be two, they are two so  
 As stiff twin compasses are two;  
 Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show  
 To move, but doth, if th' other do.  
 And though it in the centre sit,  
 Yet, when the other far doth roam,  
 It leans, and hearkens after it,  
 And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
 Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
 Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
 And makes me end where I begun.

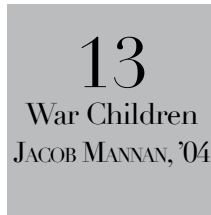
## In Memory of Wilmer Mills: 1969-2011

*Poet Wilmer Mills visited Hillsdale College in the fall of 2010. He was diagnosed with cancer this past spring, and when it took his life this summer, the world lost a man of remarkable depth and gentleness. We remember with great affection the time he spent with us on campus, teaching us to see truth with honest eyes and name it with grace and faithfulness. This poem by John Donne was dear to him and his wife Katherine, who offers it as a reminder of the hope of Christ.*



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LUCA D'ANSELMU



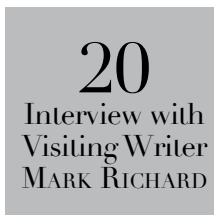
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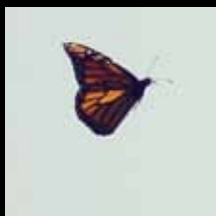
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*Fisherman at Sunset*



DANIEL TEAL

# *Yearning of an unmoored sailor*

A lighthouse stands across the sea  
where the ships all disappear.  
There you look into the brine  
and see your face as in a mirror.

How I'd like to moor my ship  
beyond the measureless sea's reach,  
and know myself as more than just  
a grain of sand upon the beach.

# *Rail-Fields*

The strange apparatus of the lights  
Stands tall and sullen through the day,  
About the dusty rail-fields; poles  
With floodbulbs prickle up  
Like rusted milkweeds shot to seed,  
As trains crawl by the river  
Warehouses, by dirty fish-white yachts  
That blink and flap with weary canvases.

Above the rail-fields lamplights  
Hang their heads like rotten flowers,  
And all around the ginkgo trees  
The living fossils still drop  
Their yellow leather leaves, spiraling  
In slow crescendos to the ground.

Long ago Olympus darkened every night  
And Prometheus brought fire  
From the crimson skies before his  
Arms were bound, but now the lamplit  
Cities never sleep, they say.  
How strange and how majestic  
To the eyes of gods would be these  
Evening trees around the rail-fields.

And when Olympus passed away  
The ginkgoes stood, and still they stand  
Each evening, lamplight on their leaves  
As trains pass by, pass bronze-dark riversides,  
Pass yachts with champagne shadows,  
Greenish eyes, pass palisades and  
Crouching bulwarks southwards,  
Seagulls crying for the water, and the sky  
Collapsing into crimson.

*Lines*



EMILY FISHER

# War Children

'Tis a cruel trick the god of war must play  
To turn the head of children his way;  
To give them such strong infantries of mind,  
The artillery of hope in humankind,  
A heart for the home and the world a-war  
To spill their blood on infirmary's floor,  
'Tis a ruthless plan their god wilt lay  
To give them so much to take away.

*Jacob Mannan graduated from Hillsdale College in 2004, and often refers to himself as an after-hours poet. He earned his degree in business as a non-traditional student with the extra challenges and blessings of marriage and children. He and his family now live in Spokane, Washington, where he works for Salesforce.com. He credits his liberal arts education at Hillsdale as the catalyst behind his poetry that fills the spaces between his greater passions: family, career, and music.*

# *Ulysses*

Whose call is shrieking in your memory  
As you start from Penelope's midnight side?  
Bee's wax can stave off no cries in the mind.  
Do you pace your mighty halls darkened  
By a call you should not answer,  
A summons you cannot ignore?  
Ulysses, on that homeward day upon the waves,  
Were you changed withal?  
No oracle can offer you comfort,  
For succor is married to experience,  
And none living has those self-same echoes  
Ringing through ruined nightfall slumber  
No one knows your ache.  
Twenty years' starving and rest still unreached  
Could the vengeful powers have conceived  
Of a punishment more torturous than that fatal song?

Perhaps the Parcae planned your  
Suffering, cruel, bitter, and incurable,  
One worse than wandering from your one wife.  
Ithica's waves crash a tune nearly as alluring  
As the cyanide strains that bend unreachable  
Down your fresh-washed halls,  
But can you still bear to see an oar,  
Crafty Ulysses? Can you scent  
That salt air without weeping bitter?  
A winnowing fan, a winnowing fan,  
A suffering less hard to bear  
Than that regretful song touching your ear  
Like some adulterous lover.  
Will you escape the Siren's song  
Even in Elysium, clever Ulysses?

# Sevilla

The evenings here are fragrant, warm and black.  
The fan's monotony on the stillness  
A dull lullaby that stirs, a dry breath.

In my mind, *mil pensamientos*  
and the struggle to quiet them all.  
Silent tears evaporate and cool,  
bringing a meager relief.  
Outside the thick heat blankets,  
hushing the leaves.

The quiet is broken, an instant now  
A soft thud the sole rebellious sound  
The tell-tale fragrance drifts through the window  
An orange has fallen down to the ground.

Its sweet, strong odor escaping the rind  
Filling moments that pass, marking the time.

*Le Café*



EMILY FISHER

# *For Stella*

How you awoke each morning inside your broken garden,  
Carrying a bucket from the well for your wilting beauties.  
How you snuck away to the shed as I lay in bed,  
And returned, smiling, with a glass for me.  
How you freely danced upon the prosperous land.

“Miss,” that day, was an understatement.  
The carriage: the first surprise without balloons.  
Carried with Christ was your favorite flower,  
The only star that in falling did not descend.  
As two parents took two shovels to the land.

## An interview with visiting writer

*Mark Richard*

*Mark Richard is an award-winning short story writer, novelist, and screenwriter. He has written two award-winning short story collections, *The Ice at the Bottom of the World* and *Charity*, as well as the novel *Fishboy*. His short stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The Oxford American*, and many others. Among the awards he has received are the PEN/Ernest Hemingway Award, a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, and a Whiting Foundation Writer's Award. Mr. Richard currently teaches in the Master of Professional Writing Program at the University of Southern California.*

## **Tower Light: How do you sit down to write a story?**

Mark Richard: Generally I start with a first sentence or an image. I'm always looking for descriptions. I can't even help talking to people and finding images. I'll just see something and I'll ask myself, what does that look like? How would you describe that? Especially for things that are kind of unusual. I like to go to the pier sometimes. It's just a nutty people-watching place. I'll see a man and a woman walking together, and I'll think, "what's up with them?" Maybe it's the way they talk or dress that catches my eye, and I just get playful and make up a story. All you have to do is scratch a little bit and so much is revealed — even [with] people who are already familiar. It's like Flannery O'Connor's work: she describes people so that they almost becomes caricatures, but if you were really honest about some of the people you meet, they would be caricatures, too.

## **TL: Is there anything you're always on the hunt for in descriptions?**

MR: Sometimes you get a description that seems to be contradictory, and that's interesting. In a Chekhov story, this guy describes a young lady, and he says that her looks are attractive and pathetic. And I think, "really, that's interesting — what does that mean? What would it be like for him to be in a relationship with someone that he found attractive and pathetic?" So therein a story might reside.

**TL:** So you've got a first sentence you like, but what about when a story's wrong when the structure or the plot doesn't work? What do you do then?

**MR:** Oh yeah, that happens all the time and you just put it aside because you're not approaching it at the right angle. I was reading a Eudora Welty piece two nights ago about writing that story of hers "No Room for You My Love," and the story was all wrong. So she put it down and went on a drive with a friend. She said she didn't realize it at the time, but that she was taking that drive for the story. When she got back she incorporated it into the story like a spine, and then it worked.

And sometimes I see a story, but I'm writing about the wrong person. Sometimes you have to get into the story to a certain point before you realize what you lack. There seems to be a missing person here; someone hasn't entered the picture yet. So you put it down. I have a couple stories published that I don't think are successful. I think it's because I wasn't telling the right story. I think "Ice at the Bottom of the World" is an unsuccessful short story, and that's why I keep playing with it in a screen play maybe I can correct it in a different form.

**TL:** Writers often talk about a story taking over, as if they're creating something that's not them. Does that happen for you?

**MR:** I think for most people it happens after a certain point. It starts to take off but there are things you have to put out there first, like feeding a fire. Once you get the kindling there and the little spark, what you have to do is maintain and pay attention to it. All you do is have the spark but it is hard to get it started sometimes.

Inspiration is a mystery. Life's a mystery, and sometimes you think you have an insight but you never do. You have a handheld clue, but you never have the key to it all. But you can't tell yourself that you don't, you must always think that the next story is going to be the big key to it all and you actually believe that sometimes: this story is actually going to be the story. But if it were always the story you wouldn't write another one. So its good you're always fooled, that you delude yourself, otherwise you wouldn't work again.

**TL:** Your stories often pivot around different kinds of suffering and your own life has been full of a lot of pain and loneliness and difficulties. So how do you understand the intersection between fiction and autobiography? How has your life shaped the stories you tell?

**MR:** I think it's probably true that you just rewrite your own history in your stories, or at least reinterpret it. Writing is a way to bring yourself in accordance with yourself. I didn't realize this when I started to write, though. I came to that realization late. My own experience of the world was a lot different than most people's on some levels because of the hospitals and all that—but in some ways it wasn't too different: everyone has pain and humiliation and fear. Maybe some of those ran a little deeper in my case, but generally when pain and humiliation and fear run deeper there's a capacity for the other emotions to also run deeper, and maybe higher. But everyone suffers. Part of why we suffer is that we need to gain knowledge and part is also that we need to be enlightened. So it's a package, and I'm happy with the package so far.

**TL:** How do you write about joy, then?

MR: I don't know a lot about joy. But I do know a lot about hoping for joy. And I think that when things are dark, and when people's hope is small, then that hope shines brighter, so that even when that story seems sad or grim it's because that small amount of hope is like a star at night. It's best seen when it's pitch black outside.



SHANNON ODELL

I dig out from musty drawers  
Old canvas shoes, battered by summers,  
Pants creased by hibernation cuff  
So easily knickered by lackadaisical habit.

The scent of spiced fried chicken  
And the cool press of a long, dark beer  
Sharpen my summer-slow appetite  
As I finish the works of Auden, a labor  
Begun in the harsh reaches of February.

And now, mid-March, I dwell upon  
The sun-brushed dun of reaching trunks  
And adore the seasons for their fickle natures.

# *Marvelous Major MacFenn*

On bright days in August, while London was bustling  
With wastrels and nobles, rags waving, skirts rustling,  
A curious sight brought a pause to their hustling  
Down under the shade of Big Ben.  
Both rascal and royal (it never did matter)  
Ignored, for a time, both the smog and the splatter  
And stared at a marvel as strange as a hatter  
This marvel was Major MacFenn.

Dressed mostly in black, with his stovepipe hat gleaming  
With streamers of satin or linen (so seeming)  
He looked out of place, like a man from a dreaming,  
Or some author's flourish of pen.  
Yet down here he stood, with his violin ready,  
Not looking about; no, his gaze stayed quite steady  
Since all that surrounded him must have seemed petty  
To that odd old Major MacFenn.

And so he'd perform, whether swelt'ring or pleasant,  
Not seeing his audience, posh man or peasant,  
But going right on as his loyal pet pheasant  
Collected the fivers and tens.  
For though London's streets harbored many musicians  
Who might deign to answer the rare inquisition  
Of "Where do you live?" or "What's your position?"  
That suited not Major MacFenn.

We know his name only because his pet parrot  
(Enchanting young creature, astride a black ferret)  
Would call to the crowd (or on certain days swear it):  
"By all Queen Victoria's men!  
Come closer, you people! Escape from life's chaos!  
Come, hear our good Major's sweet music beautaeous!  
Please! Don't be so shy! You need not even pay us  
Or pay our dear Major MacFenn!"

*Insight*



CAROLINE GREEN

# *Haiku*

Orange-blossoms, see:  
Not one will escape the stroke  
Of poet's pen.

*Sunlit Canna*



CHUCK GRIMMETT

Modern poetry  
will turn yesteryear's hoof-beats  
into turn signals.

*Poustinia on a Hill*



MARIA LAMS

When I used to ride with you in winter  
Up the red wounds the road cut in the hills  
And between the thin-fringed stand of cedar  
And cool wood rot we'd ride to feel  
The sear of the high-piled hills in our calves.  
We'd reach the ridges' crest and rest above  
The snow-gold grass, the misty thrush over the valley floor  
And once, back in those old-growth wintergreens,  
Sun breached the clouds in currents through the trees.  
Then through the sunlit winter snow, we'd wheel  
Against the ice-burn run of wind back home.

But now the winds all rasp this Eastern flat,  
And all these midland trees, they lose their leaves  
And stand in lacy streaks against the low-slung sky.  
But when the West flares, fires into evening,  
And flushes gabled-roofs and silo-rounds  
Then, often in the clouds which pile behind  
The cornfields and the trees, I seem to see  
The pine-rise, the mountain-spines, the scars of logging roads  
Where I used to ride with you.



BONNIE COFFER

# Chemistry

The diagram is clean and spare — the lines  
and dots exhibited, precisely drawn  
with conscientious chalk, then copied down,  
and noted as preliminaries are.

A careful student easily forgets  
the thundering clashing chaos, twelve-toned sound,  
the symphony exploding into light  
that is a molecule — the mystery

of elemental loss: the gut-wrenching gulf  
that yawns before completion — letting go  
of balance grasping at a steadier balance  
(attraction both the peril and the prize).

So you and I walk diagrammed, our hands  
clasped simply — and the mystery still stands.

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