# Overlooking THE Temperance

## Mike Finley

We spent three nights on the Superior shore. It was a low point for both of us, in different ways. These are notes I jotted at the time.

#### A Lot of Murders Don't Get Committed

A lot of murders don't get committed because a dog walks into a room

beating its tail in utter ignorance

If he can forbear with all that he's seen

What is there that we can't do

#### The Formula for Redemption

I figure it this way, if a train slams into you, nose to face and you don't die you must be very strong.

What did you feel like when you took the blow and knew you would absorb it and carry on, its wreckage in your ribs

A part of me said This is knowledge This is a terrible power Because we took the blow Now what do we have to live for

#### Springtime

When the floodwater rises it drapes the twigs and stems with the leaves and gunk stirred up.

Then when it recedes the muck clings to the branches in the shape of the water's drift.

The bushes seem populated with puppets and dolls with papier-machē blouses

and bunched up clothes. And when the breeze comes through it lifts up their skirts and they dance.

#### If You Like Poetry

There probably something wrong with you. You have an appetite for grandiosity, or inability to deal with everyday reality your sense of self has been splintered so you dwell in solipsistic space. Perhaps you are afraid of confrontation and so you seek retribution on the page. Or your anger at injustice has taken you to a place where you need to smolder by yourself, Or your attention span is not what it might be – isn't that a spider on your sweater?

#### **The Stream Within**

The brook is always babbling Going on and on About something Who knows what

You never finish A sentence or a thought Yet you listen to it As if to God

#### The Soul Could Cut a Better Deal

You could be running up the steps of heaven curled on a rug at the feet of the Lord

Everything would be perfect then And you would want for nothing

Still it is not so bad for you, a little grit mixed in with the meat.

The floor is warm but you had to warm it, the insects believe heaven is within you.

The soul could bound through heaven unleashed yet you choose to be attached to me

#### **Beating Bird**

There is a bird out there making a beating sound

Dum, bee de bee de bee de bee de de Don't you hear it?

I keep calling your attention to it There! Don't tell me you can't hear it!

Dum, bee de bee de bee de bee de de A paddleball dropped on a timpanum skin

The beats accelerate, then diminish, then are gone

I mean, I think it's a kind of a bird But it could be something else

A cicada fingering its lips on a stem, a seven-year locust, open for business

I wonder why I care if you've heard this fucking bird

Or whatever the hell it is out there I suspect that it's because we both

Have some degree of hearing loss but this much I can hear

#### **Cromwell Crossing**

In the bright of morning the whistle blasts a dozen times. It is hard to stop a hundred plus cars for a Ford Tempo straddling the tracks and a drunk dozing at the wheel.

The particular machine bearing down on us is loaded down with pellets from the range, it's the latest edition, with sensors and IPs and automatic pilots, and that electric signal carries.

Perhaps there was an accident here with a busload of kids, twenty years before, or perhaps rush hour, even in a tiny town of 127 folks, is a good time to be safe. Either way they have to blow that damn thing every morning now at 7 am, no matter who's still sleeping.

#### Anteater

He's a tough negotiator. He doesn't just eat you, he eats your wife and he eats your children and he eats your mother and he eats your cousins and he eats your cousins and he eats your insurance agent he eats everyone you know. He eats your whole city then tucks the last ant in the side of his maw and says I'm sorry, I can't help it I was made this way,

I require large numbers of ants to survive.

#### Knock on Wood

So a tree becomes a stump and the microbes burrow in until it is all lacework a filigree of matter.

The world that seems solid is full of holes, holes between pores and holes between cells, holes between the molecules, atoms and particles.

There are oceans of space within and between. You could say we live in space.

I'm not really here, I'm just saying I am.



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