

Five Poems

Bruce Weigl

Outside Quang Tri City, 1968

I'm watching out the window the cat stalk
the robin pulling up worms don't say a
word so I must be complicit when
you fire into the dark trees when you
fire round after round into the dark trees
without knowing who hides there until we stop

An Appraisal of Fear

"What a pity," someone said when the plans
were ruined, and the luncheon cancelled.

"What a pi-ty," separating the two
syllables the way some people do in Ha Noi,

while on the television,

in Hong Kong,

students are trapped by police.

They have written slogans

on the walls and on the pillars.

They have constructed bombs using chemicals

and gasoline, so that now

they are not allowed to go home.

A Simple Lesson

Resist being tangled in a sloppy void,
is how I translated
what the teacher said to me
over hot tea
that was waiting when I'd arrived,
unannounced,
at the temple on the mountain in Hue.
How could even the dusty paths
shine
where the teacher walked
in his long robe?
How could the trees seem so green
I could feel them
grow inside me?

He tried to teach me
how knowing
was not knowing
but my skills were weak
and I could only smile,
so he told me the story
of the monkey
who was chained

to a coconut tree
nearby
and who lived his life
on a small wooden platform
the teacher had built.
It was cruel to keep the monkey chained that way
the teacher said,
but the monkey had become
destructive
and clever enough
to get into the locked food bins,
so the teacher had carried him
for three days into the jungle,
and released him to his new world
and to the other wild monkeys
where he quickly disappeared.

But by the time the teacher
had made his way
back through the thick jungle
to the temple,
the monkey had already returned,
and was waiting for the teacher
to feed him. Resist
being tangled in a sloppy void.

Why I Love my Doctor

the way I love sweet Ohio peaches
come late summer
if they survive
the killer frost
I've seen happen
too many times

but when she asks me
to tell her what it is
that I'm afraid of
I have to say
that I'm afraid of her
for asking me that question.

Not every fucking thing
is reducible to words,
and why should it be?

There are some things that words
don't want anything to do with,
although I feel most safe
inside of words. Some people
I would forgive
practically anything.

Others
don't stand a chance,
even with the mercy
that pours out of me.

My Bill Evans

I hear the wren's call
come in through the window
over the jazz piano
the man plays

with all the pain of the lonely
until the two sounds
overlap

I don't know why
it should be so difficult
to feel

Bruce Weigl has published more than a dozen books of poetry, including *On the Shores of Welcome Home* (2019), winner of the Isabella Gardner Poetry Award. He recently finished co-translating a book of one thousand short poems from the Vietnamese written by the poet Tran Le Khanh. He and his co-translator are looking for an American publisher to bring out this collection.