Dec-2002

Poetry

Donald Johnson

East Tennessee State University

Recommended Citation

Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol21/iss2/13

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.
SCATOLOGY
(In Memory of John Maher)

Circles of matted grass in the orchard
tell me nine deer slept last night beneath the brown husks
of cider apples, uncurled after the hoar frost fell,
and tip-toed uphill into the yellowed hickories.
In each bed, scat gleams like oiled buckshot.

“Scatological.” The last time we talked, our first
conversation in thirty years, I said that word,
and you smiled, remarking how it came so naturally,
and how I’d changed since high school. You probably
knew what that word meant then. You, the most promising
of us all, eaten up with cancer at fifty-four.

Two days after last Christmas, I’d packed the car,
and was ready to leave when my father called me
into the cold garage to help him free the rusted knuckle
on the tractor’s stabilizer bar, confessing
as our hands curled around the pipe wrench
that in the last two years his body had turned to shit.

In the past two weeks, another friend, a colleague’s wife,
and a student who had dropped my Keats course
died. Still another friend called from Boston
three nights ago to say he had disconnected
his father’s life support after a heart attack and stroke.

I didn’t visit you, either, John, didn’t call or write,
though I knew you were dying in Atlanta. No words
seemed natural, and you were my age and promising.

Yesterday, the second morning in a row, while the deer
ghosted from the stiff grass in the orchard,
I rolled over in bed and awoke with the room turning around me,
not in dream, nor metaphor, but spinning, really spinning,
so that for the first five minutes after getting up I walked
around holding on to things. Holding on to things. Shit.
SCATOLOGY  
(In Memory of John Maher)

Circles of matted grass in the orchard  
tell me nine deer slept last night beneath the brown husks  
of cider apples, uncurled after the hoar frost fell,  
and tip-toed uphill into the yellowed hickories.  
In each bed, scat gleams like oiled buckshot.

"Scatological." The last time we talked, our first  
conversation in thirty years, I said that word,  
and you smiled, remarking how it came so naturally,  
and how I'd changed since high school. You probably  
 knew what that word meant then. You, the most promising  
of us all, eaten up with cancer at fifty-four.

Last night, watching the World Series, I thought  
of our playing a whole seven games between  
the Yankees and the Dodgers one night on your mother's  
kitchen table. I won. ... Hospital. They though  
they might die from liver disease. I lived two miles  
away and thought of visiting him, but didn't.

Two days after last Christmas, I'd packed the car,  
and was ready to leave when my father called me  
into the cold garage to help him free the rusted knuckle  
on the tractor's stabilizer bar, confessing  
as our hands curled around the pipe wrench  
that in the last two years his body had turned to shit.

In the past two weeks, another friend, a colleague's wife,  
and a student who had dropped my Keats course  
died. Still another friend called from Boston  
three nights ago to say he had disconnected  
his father's life support after a heart attack and stroke.

I didn't visit you, either, John, didn't call or write,  
though I knew you were dying in Atlanta. No words  
seemed natural, and you were my age and promising.

Yesterday, the second morning in a row, while the deer  
ghosted from the stiff grass in the orchard, I rolled over  
in bed and awoke with the room turning around me,  
not in dream, nor metaphor, but spinning, really spinning,  
so that for the first five minutes after getting up I walked  
around holding on to things. Holding on to things. Shit.
DECEMBER 2002

Why does a young woman choose to become an airplane pilot? Veronica Côté, Assistant Professor of Aviation Science, confesses that as a girl she had no special interest in flying. When she was a Brockton High School Junior, her father, the late Peter A. Buzinakauskas, who was at the time a professor of Elementary Education at BSC, told her that the College had started an Aviation Program and suggested that she might want to consider becoming a pilot. Something clicked: "I’d always had an interest in space exploration and in my wildest dreams I was an astronaut," says Professor Côté, who grew up watching the space shuttle Flights of the early 1980’s. Although she had never been inside an airplane, she applied to BSC, was accepted, and started flight training during her freshman year.

As soon as she began flying, Professor Côté was convinced that she had made the right decision. "Pushing up the throttle in my little Piper Tomahawk at the Norwood Airport, I was in full control. I could stop, start, and go around any wind. I could even land on the crosswind runway. I had found something I loved." After graduating from BSC, Professor Côté worked as a flight instructor and charter pilot and later for Brockway Airlines (a regional partner for Piedmont), flying a Beech kingair.

"I always had an interest in space exploration and in my wildest dreams I was an astronaut," says Professor Côté, who grew up watching the space shuttle Flights of the early 1980’s. Although she had never been inside an airplane, she applied to BSC, was accepted, and started flight training during her freshman year.

After a brief teaching stint at BSC, Professor Côté returned to Brockway, where she received a promotion: she now flew a larger aircraft, the SAB 340, "a revolutionary regional airliner at the time," which carried 34 passengers as well as a flight attendant. A year later, she was upgraded from First Officer and became the youngest Captain at Brockway Airlines.

Forced to re-think her future, Professor Côté remembered how much she had enjoyed teaching. Members of the BSC Aviation faculty, with whom she had maintained contact, urged her to work on a Masters degree, and the following year Professor Côté—now married to a fellow pilot—applied to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida. She was accepted and moved to Florida for a year. In 1995, on her daughter's first birthday, she defended her Master's thesis and was awarded the Master of Aeronautical Science degree. The following fall, she accepted a full-time position at BSC as Aviation Coordinator, and when the new School of Management and Aviation Science was founded a few years later, she became Chair of the Aviation Science Department. Teaching aviation, she discovered, was in its own way just as enjoyable as flying. "I loved to help students discover the joy of flight and to share my experiences and insight with them." Professor Côté strongly believes in the value of a liberal arts degree for aviation students. "The well rounded education offered by BSC’s liberal arts curriculum," she notes, "helps shape the students’ ideas and provides them with the opportunity to look inward to discover something about themselves and outward to discover something new about their world." She points out that...