

# Alec Soth's Archived Blog

November 2, 2006

## Friday Poems

Filed under: [poetry](#) — alecsothblog @ 11:29 pm

In preparation for next week's election, here are two poems about politics, sort of:

### **Happenings**

by Donald Rumsfeld (as printed in [Slate](#))

You're going to be told lots of things.

You get told things every day that don't happen.

It doesn't seem to bother people, they don't—

It's printed in the press.

The world thinks all these things happen.

They never happened.

Everyone's so eager to get the story

Before in fact the story's there

That the world is constantly being fed

Things that haven't happened.

All I can tell you is,

It hasn't happened.

It's going to happen.

—Feb. 28, 2003, Department of Defense briefing

### **Of Politics, & Art**

by [Norman Dubie](#)

Here, on the farthest point of the peninsula

The winter storm

Off the Atlantic shook the schoolhouse.  
Mrs. Whitmore, dying  
Of tuberculosis, said it would be after dark  
Before the snowplow and bus would reach us.

She read to us from Melville.

How in an almost calamitous moment  
Of sea hunting  
Some men in an open boat suddenly found themselves  
At the still and protected center  
Of a great herd of whales  
Where all the females floated on their sides  
While their young nursed there. The cold frightened whalers  
Just stared into what they allowed  
Was the ecstatic lapidary pond of a nursing cow's  
One visible eyeball.  
And they were at peace with themselves.

Today I listened to a woman say  
That Melville might  
Be taught in the next decade. Another woman asked, "And why not?"  
The first responded, "Because there are  
No women in his one novel."

And Mrs. Whitmore was now reading from the Psalms.  
Coughing into her handkerchief. Snow above the windows.  
There was a blue light on her face, breasts and arms.  
Sometimes a whole civilization can be dying  
Peacefully in one young woman, in a small heated room  
With thirty children  
Rapt, confident and listening to the pure  
God rendering voice of a storm.

## 2 Comments

1. Norman was my teacher. He is a great man, and this is one of his terrific poems. His work is entirely too infrequently read I think. Thanks for putting it here. There's a poem of his that makes me think of your photographs now that I have seen your photographs – *Ars Poetica*. You should look him up next time/if you are ever in Phoenix AZ where he teaches at ASU. He doesn't drive, so if you visit and you have a car, he may ask you to help him run some errands.

*Comment by [Jorn Ake](#) — November 13, 2006 @ [9:06 pm](#)*

2. Thanks so much Jorn. I found the poem. It is as good as it gets.

*Ars Poetica*  
by Norman Dubie

It is almost polio season. The girls

From the cigarette factories in Massachusetts  
Are still visiting the northern beaches.  
At midnight, the milky rubbers  
In the breakers are like a familiar invasion.

Of sea life.  
Sitting on the rocks we watch a runner:  
Weight shifted, some tick, tick,  
Almost of intelligence—  
The bone catching of balance...

From behind, a red-haired girl appears—  
Missing a thumb on her left hand,  
Breathless, she asks for a light:  
A crumpled pack of Lucky Strikes  
At the top of a nylon stocking;  
The other leg bare, her abdomen  
And breasts plastered with white sand.  
Drunk, she says, "He just swam out  
Past the jetty—that was twenty minutes  
Ago. You think I give a damn?"

We lit the cigarette for her. Her hands  
Shaking.

No moon, it took an hour  
To find all her clothing,  
Dropped as they ran  
Down the rock shelf through dunes...

He hadn't drowned. He swam around the jetty,  
Crawled to the grasses and over the granite shelf.  
Gathering his clothes, he left  
Her there as a joke.

Her hair was colored  
That second chaste coat of red on the pomegranate.  
We were eating sandwiches on the rocks.  
She frightened my mother and me. My little  
Sister just thought she was funny.  
In thirty years I have dremt of her twice, once  
With fear and once without. I've written  
This for her, and because

Twice is too often  
Considering how beautiful she was.

Norman Dubie

*Comment by [Alec Soth](#) — November 13, 2006 @ [10:20 pm](#)*