

Roger Craik

### FALL IN ASHTABULA

When Toby leaves for China, takes the plane  
over the globe for sixteen hours  
of reading, dozing, look out at clouds,  
Hairs, Terse, and I stay on  
at the leprous-green concession stand,  
a bathhouse giving out upon the lake.  
It won't be open much longer.  
Terse, the former dean, suggests  
a week or two at best, but certainly  
not after Labor Day.

Year after year  
we carry out the quiet shift,  
Macdonald's in the Harbor where the coffee's good  
supposedly, rehearse the customary mix:  
the current dean's incompetence,  
the schedule loused-up more than usual,  
Mondrian, the Cleveland Browns, a passing  
nurse's tits in uniform. It's

Fall. Sunshine weakens on the license plates.  
I sense the verdigris begin to form  
of things again not done,  
and overhear a voice intoning  
thoughts in words that used to be my own.

BLACKBERRY *ET AL*

Dark screen. The tiny  
red light winking.

Morning's  
ritual compulsion.

A bell clangs nine.

In the tail of my eye,  
against the slanting window there's a  
peering agitatedness, and it's  
one of those great big bumblebees, sunbristling and—  
dammit it's inside and  
suddenly everywhere at once immediately  
boring its vibrating resonance  
along the humming corridors of air and  
the room amazingly itself is  
greatening to the zooming frictionless  
compression—past-close my cheek and  
gone.

Meanwhile, on the shelf  
of wedged encyclopedias *Britannica*,  
hell's black tablet flashes on and on.

RECLUSE  
(after Syd Barrett, 1946-2006)

I

At times some plainclothes journalist  
(you chuckle at the term you thought to coin and keep  
on chuckling)  
will come walking down your street or the street  
the house you own is on – you've seen him from  
far off: false nonchalant, you'd say, jobbing at his trade,  
nerves frayed to a shine.  
But you're upstairs where the curtains stay drawn  
by when he

thumbs the bell

and you can hear him standing listening  
wondering  
if he's

under observation and by whom (accusative  
case: you've known the proper use  
since you were almost twelve years old).

Fantasticalness gives a start, eggs you go  
on go on  
have sent down to him a note in copper plate,  
*“le foufou au fond d'un temps  
irrevocablement . . .”* instead of his taking  
shape, voice,  
in the very room you paint in –  
his pad at hand in the cheap check pocket,  
the ballpen with its dark straight vein and brassy cone  
of a point to gouge the doorstep scoop  
into print, and scatter – detonate -- you  
grapeshot across the land. . .

Another silence goes off in your head,  
reverberates.

II

For thirty altered years or more, you muse,  
still they come prying, trying to pry out  
of you your story, once for all, to set the record straight.  
But you are living different days.  
Perhaps you don't remember how it was  
the small sane kernel in your brain said no, said  
walk away from all of it, so walk away you did, this time for good,  
and stayed away, changing your name  
back to the names your parents loved you with  
when you were born. What of consequence was it to you  
that in the conurbations burgeoning  
away from your walled medieval city, even in  
the quieter market towns, word spread from mouth to mouth  
although you undertook no words, or few, or if you did,  
you'd speak of "him" as someone else,  
disbanded from the days you've made your own?  
Over the years your little brother's gun  
still goes off pop you're dead  
again in the garden where the willow, rather good for climbing,  
stood, and sometimes tremored,  
cornered by the fence with planks with knots in them you saw  
earlier. You are of many minds you know  
or otherwise, and time's a flight of stairs with you upon it  
neither down nor up, but even to yourself,  
and even as the land you bicycle along  
at twilight or at dusk,  
indifferent to what was or if or is,  
your watch face-down upon your wrist.

IN HIS PARENTS' OLD AGE

In the abrupt dark  
I reach to fingernail the ringer switch  
to "Off," as if an afterthought.

This cannot of course  
be that which stands above, beyond belief.  
I am without belief.

Still, every night insists  
upon the tiny catch and click  
to hold the darkness safe.