

Robert Lietz

## OLD LINE BARBECUE

Here's context then, and, here, these eight degrees  
across Ohio, a weekend of snow ahead,

and these poems I'm looking for, these photographs  
I mean to find along the route,

however the market's acting up, a sell-off's tempering  
corrections, as if a course, I think,

on a prodigious instrument, with recoveries forecast,  
a predicate light, let's say, let pique,

as prayerfulness and preparation, in changes already  
evident, on the Rorschach ponds

still sound enough to glide on, in an administration,  
charged, promoting a civility

a party on the outs can find no mind for, salaried  
by constituents

to work about as little as they're able, and  
slathering the slabs,

passing the wipes, or stoking  
an old line  
barbecue.

## WHAT SUMMER MEANT

### I

A kitchen scented with chops, chopped greens,  
becomes a reference for seasons,  
for the events revealed, subject still to influence,  
which you'll declare, if asked, to say  
where this might light, or to announce the time  
of their returning, so  
we could wait there comfortably, assuming an ease  
with the fizzed drinks, the instructions  
meant to check or temper the least impulse, such  
as the dreams had been,  
of catapults, of the views from the high rails, down  
to the Pollacked drive below  
and back to her expressions at the screen door,  
to hear all the words you knew  
as that brush pin-wheeled toward impact, whatever  
the summer meant, with  
every adventure sabotaged, walking the railings  
painting eaves,  
transformed by her amusement, with no regard for  
time, for the spoiled jokes, or  
the jokes we missed in unrepeatabe successions,  
even as stars joined in,  
drawn -- "in cahoots," we might have said -- from  
some under-populated  
and unpropitious galaxies, not even the least,  
I think, moved by her inviting,  
turning, as no hostess would, from her screen door,  
having caught your eye  
and confused what you should feel, traipsing  
the whole way down,  
while she, not even the least bit curious,  
returned to her programs,  
recipes, and to her own fears then,  
for her children,  
government.

Here's what this comes to, what it looks like  
now, whatever the impact  
might have been, the pleasures under-done  
if nonetheless surprising, that  
this storyline endures, some *once* compelled  
by stakes or by upheavals,  
some *once* reprised, since we'll be getting back  
to that, when  
the purchased revelry, or the dessert, in silence  
shared, and since revalued,  
sets the tone and steps and angles of behavior,  
the disburdened light  
we followed into niches, where the oldest snow  
survived, no matter what the season  
or the modes of light, packed light for traveling.  
Who needs this anyway,  
the shoulder or sling bag, stuffed with favors  
you've included,  
bringing yourself so far, from the first checked  
square, to the reviews, sequels,  
and the need for explanation, into the nights  
around, secured and set and scaled,  
attending the works installed, intended  
to float, like some  
kid's skiff, swallowed by surviving,  
prescience, by  
the whispering, ahead, of  
seasons,  
or of deluge.

## KNOWING THE COSTS

What's there to tell, or to sense from photographs,  
except for the hues

and humors breaking through, the performance nuns  
had always been expecting,

beheld and recognized, preserved in the documents  
of our undoing, as they saw it,

and arranged just so, to concur with preparations. So  
difficult, I think, to calculate the speed,

torque, the positions we were to occupy forever, this  
obliging say, and viable discipline,

establishing traction, if you will, re-framing the formulae  
we thought would make more sense

to partners, even less inclined, and keeping ourselves  
on task by prompts

or acts of our composing, by this little stillness, without  
a name or need for it, as

the afternoon gets on, when you are yourself alone  
and swearing off the property,

pleased by the day's bright regimen, and it's Syracuse  
maybe, or, more likely, Cincinnati,

persuading by perspective, your great-grandfather's  
sprawling dead, and your parents,

unmarried yet, are not yet out of high school,  
not conscripted yet

to family shops or temperament, knowing  
the costs for two

and two in love, with that to  
work through.

## ONLY THE SEEDS

Only the seeds, you think,  
and enter them all  
on that charged tablet, a man  
your age  
stopped dead, the work  
of a summer day  
proposed as explanation, all  
you had thought  
discredited, even the change  
of clothes  
and the beverage poured  
where he's discovered,  
as the hours advance, and  
the moon, on  
other errands even then, ducks  
in and out of vision,  
over a smeared topography,  
over these two,  
adapting themselves to serve  
the many ends  
of schooling, perfecting  
themselves,  
in the months and years  
ahead,  
to leave you  
orphaned.