NFSPS Workshop Poetic Diction Examples

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Author credits will be given after the discussion of the poems

**The Fly**

*O hideous little bat, the size of snot
With polyhedral eye and shabby clothes,
To populate the stinking cat you walk
The promontory of the dead man's nose.*

*Climb with the fine leg of a Duncan-Phyfe
The smoking mountains of my food
And in a comic mood
In mid-air take to bed a wife.

Riding and riding with your filth of hair
On gluey foot or wing, forever coy,
Hot from the compost and green sweet decay,
Sounding your buzzer like an urchin toy--
You dot all whiteness with diminutive stool,
In the tight belly of the dead
Burrow with hungry head
And inlay maggots like a jewel.*

*At your approach the great horse stomps and paws
Bringing the hurricane of his heavy tail;
Shod in disease you dare to kiss my hand
Which sweeps against you like an angry flail;*

*Still you return, return, trusting your wing
To draw you from the hunter’s reach
That learns to kill to teach
Disorder to the tiniest thing.*

(The Fly, continued,p.2, stanza break)

My peace is your disaster. For your death
Children like spiders cup their pretty hands
And wives resort to chemistry of war.
In fens of sticky paper and quicksands
You glue yourself to death. Where you are stuck
You struggle hideously and beg
You amputate your leg
Imbedded in the amber muck.

But I, a man, must swat you with my hate,
Slap you across the air and crush your flight,
Must mangle with my shoe and smear your blood,
Expose your little guts pasty and white,
Knock your head sideways like a drunkard's hat,
Pin your wings under like a crow's,
Tear off your flimsy clothes
And beat you as one beats a rat.

Then like Gargantua\* I stride among
The corpses strewn like raisins in the dust,
The broken bodies of the narrow dead
That catch the throat with fingers of disgust.
I sweep. One gyrates like a top and falls
And stunned, stone blind, and deaf
Buzzes its frightful F
And dies between three cannibals.

\*a legendary giant

Interlude III 

Writing, I crushed an insect with my nail

And thought nothing at all. A bit of wing

Caught my eye then, so gossamer, so frail

And exquisite, I saw in it a thing

That scorned the grossness of the thing I wrote.

It hung upon my finger like a sting.

A leg I noticed next, fine as a mote,

“And on this frail eyelash he walked,” I said,

“And climbed and walked like any mountain goat.”

And in this mood I sought the little head,

But it was lost; then in my heart a fear

Cried out, “A life—why beautiful, why dead!”

It was a mite that held itself most dear,

So small I could have drowned it with a tear.

My Mother’s Hands

Such beautiful, beautiful hands!

They’re neither white nor small;

and you, I know, would scarcely think

 That they were fair at all.

I’ve looked on hands whose form and hue

 A sculptor’s dream might be;

Yet are those wrinkled, aged hands

 Most beautiful to me.

Such beautiful, beautiful hands!

 Though heart were weary and sad,

These patient hands kept toiling on,

 That children might be glad;

I always weep, as looking back

 To childhood’s distant day,

I think how those hands rested not

 When mine were at their play.

Such beautiful, beautiful hands!

 They’re growing feeble now,

For time and pain have left their mark

On hands, and heart, and brow

Alas! alas! the nearing time,

And the sad, sad day to me,

When ‘neath the daisies, out of sight,

 Those hands will folded be.

But oh, beyond this shadow land

 Where all is bright and fair,

I know full well these dear old hands

 Will palms of victory bear;

Where crystal streams through endless years

Flow over golden sands,

And where the old grow young again,

I’ll clasp my mother’s hands

*Anonymous (nineteenth century)*

To My Mother

Most near, most dear, most loved and most far,

Under the window where I often found her

Sitting as huge as Asia, seismic with laughter,

Gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand,

Irresistible as Rabelais, but most tender for

The lame dogs and hurt birds that surround her,

She is a procession that no one can follow after

But be like a little dog following a brass band.

She will not glance up at the bomber, or condescend

To drop her gin and scuttle to a cellar,

But lean on the mahogany table like a mountain

Whom only faith can move, and so I send

O all my faith and all my love to tell her

That she will move from mourning into morning.

 George Barker (1913

Shaving

 *by Charles Simic*

Child of sorrow.

Old snot nose.

Stray scrap from the table of the gods.

Toothless monkey.

Workhorse,

Wheezing there.

Coughing, too.

The trouble with you is,

your body and soul

Dont get along well together.

Pigsty for a brain,

Stop them from making faces at each other

In the mirror!

Then remove the silly angel wings

From your gorilla suit.