

Hummingbird Review Spring 2013

While Preparing To Interview Billy Collins

By Dean Nelson

The stack of books came two, three at a time from Amazon,
Creating an online clamor from other poets
Who said, "People who buy Billy Collins poems also like me
And often buy us together."

But I am monogamous for the time being
And read about details of his life
Where he is swinging from a hammock,
Lighting a cigarette,
Listening to Thelonious Monk, and I wonder
Why my life details seem so dull.
But they are like his details,
Which are profound.

The faint tapping from the crockpot, like a heartbeat
Reminds me that my daughter is coming over
For dinner tonight
So my wife can help her with her taxes.

I walk to the closet to get my vitamins –
Seven each morning
To ward off the deadly sins of heart disease, cancer,
Prostate enlargement, muscle loss, bone loss, the common cold
And all other maladies not yet discovered.

My hand hovers over other jars –
The hemlock, the arsenic, the anthrax,
And I decide to swallow those later
If the interview with Billy goes badly.

Preparing for Billy Collins has me reading poems all of the time
Instead of only when I grieve.
I lie in bed and think about the Big Dipper
Spilling ink into the sky, and taking off Emily Dickinson's clothes,
And a three-year-old reciting Litany.

I descend into deep water below Earth's surface,
Past the fracking, into the core,
Where I crawl out of the ooze, amoeba-like,

Then wriggle like a tadpole, grow short legs, then arms
That pull me onto land, then longer legs strong enough to hold me
upright.

Then I'm running, then flying
Suspended in the updraft of his next stanza,
Where the poetry creates lift
And I can see into the light.