

OSCAR MANDEL

## Four Poems

### Eleven Fifty-Nine in the Morning

Two foals are galloping in Normandy.  
The grass is all perfume and God's asleep.  
A caterpillar millimetres on a stone.  
The road, fondling a tractor in its lap,  
Bows as the hills go by. A rooster solos.  
A wall loses a sliver. Nothing dies.

Noon noon, cry the churchbells, noon noon.

God moves.

A wasp and I exchange an ugly look.

### A Visit to the Zoo

I'll never see a camel in his orange desert,  
Nor a parrot in a proper Amazon.  
This tigress knows it. I'm not worth her snarl.  
I deserve that hugely unmomentous yawn.

## Three Beasts

Lying on their flanks in our sweet garden—  
 hugging each other—two putrid rats—  
 “partners in life, united in death”  
 after they swallowed my green poison,  
 and already the flies, worms and other midget hyenas  
 are at work making omelettes of them.

Somebody has to lift them into the bin.  
 I try with a shovel. No good. Damn damn.  
 They keep slithering off pell-mell.  
 I shove and dig and almost puke  
 knowing I'll have to use my hands.  
 It's their small revenge. Hate answers hate.

## Crow

To be sure you are as black as black is black.  
 So, soft in hand, are my lady's tresses.

You do not sing at all like an angel.  
 Ugly Socrates harrumphed his lectures.

You are, I understand, carnivorous.  
 So very much am I.

Certain poets do not care for you.  
 I do not care for certain poets.

Come, you and your colleagues, come to my garden  
 Any time for a bicker and a yarn.

I like smart company.

HEATHER D. YANDA

## Fear of Water

She wouldn't be there if it weren't  
for the children playing fearlessly  
near the deep end. When they shout  
for her to come in, she slips into the water  
slowly, her suit colours more deeply  
up to her breasts. *I want to get out. They  
are not even my children*

But she steps, anyway, toward  
someone else's bobbing daughter, the son  
about to dive. When he does, she shuts her eyes,  
turns, flinches at the swat of water  
behind her.

While floating on her back, a mild trust  
builds as she watches the trees at the far  
end of the pool. Her ears fill, water slaps  
loudly against eardrum. The son  
tugs at her shoulder, insists she follow.  
And she does, but he leads her

into darker water; she hopes he'll  
hesitate, turn back.

Hands blade the surface. She tilts her head  
upward, slips more into the depths, gasps for air.  
*If I shut my eyes, I won't be here anymore.*

Falls under, surrounded,  
 engulfed in blue. She opens her eyes  
 in one wild effort to grasp anything.

*Save me.* Bubbles rise, touch  
 her face, mock her  
 for opening her mouth  
 underwater. Teeth of a savage  
 drain grin upward. She grabs  
 at the surface, as if it were a table top, tries  
 to hoist herself up—

nothing assists her. In the corner, past  
 swimmers in a lesson learning backstroke, a flood  
 light flickers on. *It is late, we must get home  
 for dinner.* She focuses on its beam. Notices  
 the children have disappeared. No ripples. No  
 bubbles. Her shadow undulates  
 on the pool floor. Again she grasps  
 the surface, gulps for air. The light ahead  
 is foggy, as if she sees it through cataract  
 eyes. She moves  
 toward it, each stroke jerky  
 and unsuccessful. The light becomes  
 momentarily God, until

*no help at all*, she realizes  
 its futility—like the light  
 left on everyday so she does not  
 come home to a dark  
 and empty house.