

Two Poems by Philip Fried

Celestial, Inc.

I regret to inform you that, in the purview of immutable discretion, it has now become necessary to downsize the elect.

It may seem strange that of the great body of humankind some like yourself, predestined to salvation, should be laid off.

But please bear in mind that the Boss does not guarantee for all an eternal position, and even those initially receiving the wages of grace may be let go.

It must be plain how greatly ignorance of this principle detracts from his glory and impairs true humility.

In your pre-termination meeting, you will be briefed on re-salvation options. You may come as a grievant or a supplicant.

Now, quickly step away from your papers, even those with only stray marks and doodles, and a guard will escort you from the Office.

If you have any question about how your severance reveals the obscurity of the Boss's say-so, don't hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for the services you have rendered, and I wish you every success in your post-salvation existence.

Getting Dressed

Naked I dream of clothing's prehistory,
The hats that were given by gods to show
Mastery, a numinous aura, with plumes
Or crowns that were horns, and the long sleeves
Devised by the mountain folk who carried
The lofty cold so close to their skin.
Some say that clothing came before

Bodies or even matter when Earth
Was formless, was barely chiaroscuro—
I remember this as I start to slip
My right hand into the sleeve of the day
So everything can begin and a bird
That flashes by my window was once
Pure air that feathered into rachis

Vane and barbule as the tree
Whose shadow grazes my shade is a kind
Of tunic with too many sleeves where light
Can slip in instead of arms and now
A person—is it me?—stands up
In the tree, is leaves or light, green flame,
And stuttering testifies, clothes himself.

No matter, epiphanies drift away
Like dust. I'm ready: With shoes I'm putting
On hide, which is the toughness and speed
Of beasts blinded by thongs through eyeholes
So fastened feet can stalk the earth,
The heel that boosts me an afterthought,
But the cape that soared as a falcon's wing

Has shrunk to a jacket, I'll button it up
With discs that were gold that were vanities;
The handkerchief I stuff in my pocket
Once the *mappa* that signaled the start
Of the games. I'm well beyond the ruff
(Which served up the head on a platter) but not
The soft trousers of warlike peoples.

Finally that river of transformations,
Little river, the cravat,
That arose on the chest of martial Croatians
And flowed as the tie to the businessman's breast.
O middling strip of incognito.
I cuff my wrist to the minuscule clock,
Fasten my neck with the noose and the knot.

Bio:

Philip Fried has published six books of poetry, the most recent being his book of poems about the national security state, *Interrogating Water* (Salmon, 2014). He has recently published work in *Poetry*, *Poet Lore*, *The Warwick Review*, and *The Poetry Review*, and has poems forthcoming in *Plume* and *The Notre Dame Review*. In addition to writing poetry, he is the founding editor of *The Manhattan Review* (1980-present), an international poetry journal.

In "Intercepted Texts," his review of *Interrogating Water* in the July/August, 2014, issue of *The American Book Review*, Fred Muratori writes as follows:

"... Should a real apocalypse happen—and each day CNN offers evidence that it's well on the way—a lucky survivor might find a tattered copy of Philip Fried's *Interrogating Water* to be a ruefully illuminating discovery ... In a time of instantaneously transmitted social and news media, we may no longer need artists to be the 'antennae of the race' as they were for Ezra Pound in 1934, but Fried's poems demonstrate that a poet's acute receptivity to language in all its cultural and political manifestations can isolate and amplify the often unintended messages it conveys, no trivial skill in the rushed, roiling miasma of talking points and reflexive opinionating that constitutes what we call information...

Publishers Weekly called his fifth book, *Early/Late: New and Selected Poems*, "skillful and memorable," Tim Liardet writing in *The Warwick Review* called it "deeply subversive," and Renee Ashley in *The Literary Review* declared, "In realms between and including the Almighty and actuarial tables, Fried speaks every language faithfully and eloquently. Rejoice! Read!"

Philip Fried's Web site is www.philiphfried.com