

BILL ZAVATSKY

Poem for a Marriage

1.

We don't need very much poetry—
some words in a song we remember,
a few lines we learned at school.
Yet all of us know that a few words
strategically placed
can hurl the Earth from its axis:
For example, "Kill them all"
or "I love you." We know enough
to know that we need this poetry
every once in a while, at least,
to lift us, to comfort us, to make us
understand or feel something
we wouldn't have felt without
it whispering in our ear
or standing over us, screaming.
In poetry is the other voice, that
half of who we are: listen to it.
That voice we're married to
forever, come what may, who may.

2.

Poetry is your voice, the only voice
I ever want to hear, telling me
what I am, what I can be
because of the miracle

that you are speaking to me,
because the words you say to me
come from the same mouth
you use to kiss me.
My other half, the half that makes me
sing, to whom I sing in turn
in my own unpoetic, awkward way,
thrilled (nevertheless) in saying
what only I can say. And so,
fellow users of the word,
I come before you today
to say: Repeat after me:
I intend to love you forever.
I intend to love you until
there is nothing left of me
but what I have become in you,
and through you, and for you.
Until what I thought was me
is burned away in your light.
Repeat after me:
I am no longer I. I am
what I see in your eye,
in your face, in your smile,
in what is sad in you
and cannot be repaired
except as you can help me
to repair it, as we stand here,
hand in hand, before the altar
of the universe, the stars
and the planets that light the sky
whose name is poetry.
In the name of the air
that we have just begun
to breathe by saying yes,
we are not you, or I,
but us.

In 2008 **Bill Zavatsky** won the Guggenheim award for poetry. He's been published in the *New York Times* and *Rolling Stone* and was the winner of the International PEN Translation Prize. He has published three collections of poetry and two books of French translations.

CHIP SCHEUER

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