

Plenitude

When you get to be this age you wonder  
if the calm inside your chest  
is wisdom or the onslaught of decrepitude,  
or no more than a chance alignment  
of yourself with the tide,  
the promise of a quiet summer at the beach.  
Whatever: I will enjoy it while it lasts.

There's bounty here still  
on this northwest edge of America.  
We've not yet learned to parcel out  
the moon or sun or stars,  
and the seagulls, for now, look healthy.

And then there's you  
walking beside the water,  
my old friend.

You look as natural on this shore  
as in my bed, and I know you  
know it too -- your smile:  
as big as the sun above your head.

When love grows up it doesn't ask  
for more than what it has, or why.  
There is plenty here inside the sea,  
beneath the sand, and behind the sky.

Bill Clunie

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Hiding from America

I.

Hiding from you, America, here beside the sea  
is not the bravest thing I've ever done but then  
I'm not feeling very brave right now.  
I'm feeling more like a cartoon character  
that's seen a monster, with its hair  
sticking straight up, and terror  
like a cream pie all over its face.  
The ocean and the sky even frightened me  
last night when I walked down to the water,  
two dark elements grinding my courage  
between them, a pair of angry gods. They're pissed,  
I felt it, and the sand was soft and wet,  
and I knew that it could open up and swallow me,  
and it would be fully justified, the sand would.  
And the sea. They have rights too, America.  
If they demand my life in partial retribution,  
do I really have a gripe?

II.

But like I say I'm trying to get away from you,  
America: It's tough. Eliminated the TV  
and the telephone. Got rid of the car. Been reading  
Basho and Brecht beside the sea (in daylight  
it seems more complacent), but I cannot escape you fully.  
I don't think I can, not anywhere  
on this planet. America, you're exporting your sins  
faster than I can finger them.  
Your cigarette merchants open markets overseas  
quicker than the spread of a malignant lung tumor.  
Fecal burger consumption is up worldwide.  
Ban food dyes here -- so what.  
They'll sell well there.  
America, you won't be happy until you've screwed  
with the cells of everyone in the world.

III.

Bugs Bunny is experiencing a resurgence in popularity.  
This bothers me.

IV.

I tried to find respite from you,  
America, in the university (and I might try again,  
when I give out, crawling to suck at its teat)  
but like an unwanted party guest  
you are as present there as anywhere.  
I learned a lot, though -- this: Knowledge is a club.  
It is used to bludgeon the competition.  
Cooperation, too, is also engendered  
at the university, via the fraternity system.  
Those with tiny clubs band together  
to bludgeon the competition.  
I know I still sound sophomoric, America,  
here in the dotage of my thirties,  
and long after passing the exams,  
but this is what I really thought: I really thought  
knowledge should lead to wisdom,  
and if wisdom did not lead to love  
it was of no value.

V.

America, your day is done, your  
night is come. Dum-de-dum,  
dum-de-dum,  
done done done.  
You're tapped out, America.

VI.

You are everywhere, America, you are a seltzer bottle  
in the kisser when I least expect it.

You are an oily tern on the shore.

You are the world's pratfall, America  
and you are so proud of it.  
It is enough, America, it is enough  
to drive one looney.

---- Bill Clunie

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