Three Ways of Looking at a Poet

Thomas Lavoie
Three Ways

1
I left pleased, my faith in words
restored

Until I saw you laughing, drunk
some unknown girl under your arm
Smiling, telling me of your expected
midnight rendezvous in Buffalo
And I cleared the snow from my window
in anger that night
Scraped hard at ice and tried
to write a poem about it all
And failed
in spite
The ride home long, cursed with a double
sense of remorse
You interrupted your introduction
spilled bravura all over
The floor as you
fumbled for the lectern
laughed at your balance
The slur, poems
trickling from the sides
Of your mouth like so much
spittle
And fumed at academics
at poetry built like airplanes
piecemeal
An image here, a word there
and tried to convince us
With your poems
like stilettos
Shooting out
slowly, embedding themselves
Not in the heart or brain
but in the nerves, grown
Taut with embarrassment
as you stopped in the middle
Removed it suddenly
laughed and called it quits—
I guess that’s enough—
Probably stumbled home in the
dark singing Irish drinking songs so
Drunk on yourself on your poems and perhaps
fell
Upon one its sharp edge
running through you like a
Now forgotten song

He resigns: January 7, 1972
You were the one who had it all
the name which retained our
Glimpses of genius
Standing there like some aged
bookseller, glasses
Tottering on the edge of your nose
The books worn and bent
hanging barely from the crumpled
Armpit of a coat too large
You tried so hard
but couldn’t
Everything getting in the way
your life, your speech
The drink so easily visible
in your empty eyes
The shaking waving hands
You drawled, ran on
garbled and coughed
Standing there almost
falling reading your poem to your
dead friend the words
Lost
dying before us
The terror of it all
the fear, the awful anguish
Coming out in bits and pieces
a poet reeking of life
lived perhaps too long
And hard an object now paying
the price for having
Loved too often, too deeply
too much
Carrying your poems on your back
like some burdened ancient ship
Screaming insults at the dark and
waiting
Still waiting for some answer almost
anxious to sail
Home free at
last

—Thomas Lavoie