

ROBERT HAHN

New Poems

Robert Hahn, a resident of Brookline, Mass., came rather late to poetry. *All Clear* appeared in 1996, when he was in his fifties, and was followed by *No Messages* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2001). He is also an essayist who in recent years has done work on Tintoretto and on Italian translations of American poetry. (See "Louise Gluck in Italian," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 43 (2004): 422-37.) His poems have something of the essay: they are reflective, slow-paced, and often compare various landscapes and moments of history, classic and modern. In *No Messages* a long sequence, "No One There: In Memoriam James Merrill," can be read as a coming to terms with one of the masters of late 20th century American poetry, who also wrote sweepingly of historical periods and aesthetics, and whom Robert Hahn admires — with reservations. The idea that poetry is a way of reasoning out one's position and emotions is refreshing and is after all not so remote from what many earlier New Englanders understood by poetry.

We are thankful to Robert Hahn for granting us first publication of three new poems, that (as is usual with him) cover a long stretch of time — from Eleusis to jogging in Boston. Americans have always been eclectic and have felt free to take their bearings as they please. They are full of curiosity, and while aware of tension and drama, are tireless in the endeavor to make sense of a multifarious and often threatening reality. Robert tells me that he has recently bought a minuscule plot at Mt. Auburn Cemetery for himself and his wife Nicole Rafter, a student and translator of Cesare Lombroso, where he will be laid to rest in a truly American pantheon. The short second poem refers to this, and to the vagaries of fame. We must give Hahn credit for the streak of humor apparent in this "posthumous" epigram. (He has written a poem about — among other things — Gregory Corso's grave in the English Cemetery in Rome.)

Robert Hahn is also engaged in translating into English some modern Italian poets and has picked up enough Italian to be at home in our country. Meeting him, listening to him discuss translations, reading his carefully yet freely constructed poetic arguments, is an enriching experience.

Massimo Bacigalupo