**Extraordinary Ordinary Poems**

*John Weir takes ordinary word and write a song of praise to it. Pick a word you love and begin “The Beautiful American Word “…”.*

The Beautiful American Word "Guy"

The beautiful American word "guy." It always gets me. For one thing, a guy is never alone. What if your name were Guy? Then you'd think that all the men behind all the deli counters on Ninth Avenue were talking to you. "What'll it be, Guy?" "Mayo, Guy?" "We're outta sesame, Guy, how about onion?" Guy is friendly. whereas "man" is hostile and competitive. "I hear you, man," actually means, "Back off Dickhead, I'm in charge here."

"Dude" is useful, but thanks to Bart Simpson it's never sincere. "Buddy," "buster" and "pal" are sturdy but tainted by camp, like dialogue from old Hollywood movies. "Boss” scares me, and "chief" sounds undemocratic and maybe politically incorrect

I like "brother" sometimes. "Brother, you gotta be kidding," a truck driver yelled at me once on Eight Avenue, because I was reading a book and crossing the street against the light. He twisted the word around to mean, "Die, motherfucker," but I'm a romantic, and I heard him saying, "Cling to me as we plunge together manfully into the abyss."

Still, guy is the most inclusive and universally tender, taking the back of your neck in its creased palm and saying, "I’m counting on you." It's a promise and a threat, a stroke, a supplication, and a plea. If there were an epic poem of America in muscular four -beat Old English lines, its first word would not be "Hwaet," but "Guy."

John Weir

*In August Kleinzahler’s “Poetics,” he describes the particulars of an ordinary world, and in doing so, honors those details and that world. The opening stanza presents a specific assertion of values.*

*Write your own poem starting with your own version of Kleinzahler’s opening stanza, comparing particular details of an ordinary place in a way that suggests something that you value.*

Poetics

I have loved the air outside Shop-Rite liquor

on summer evenings

better than the Marin hills at dusk

lavender and gold

stretching miles to the sea.

At the junction, up from the synagogue

a weeknight, necessarily

and with my father—

*Bill McCarthy takes an ordinary phrase “He suffers fools gladly” and turns it on its head. Begin with an ordinary phrase and imagine a new meaning.*

I Suffer Fools Gladly

They can sense that about me and are drawn to me

in numbers larger than is usual. At cocktail parties

they cluster at my end of the living room, telling

long stories with many details, many details

that go the usual places or nowhere at all. They

mistake me for a good listener, which I’m not.

Just a skillful nodder. My mind’s elsewhere

an essential truth about me: my mind’s always

elsewhere. I’ve hardly ever known it to be in the

right place at the right time. Thus the art of finding just

how little attention one can deploy and still seem

connected to the conversation, to the world at large.

Fools often come upon me lost in thought. Invariably

they suspect profundity, which I smile away, deceiving

them more. If truth be told, they catch me in the act of

telling myself long stories with many details, many details

that go the usual places or nowhere at all. And when the

fools cluster at my end of the living room, the contest becomes

which stories, theirs or mine, will take the field. This is where

the art of taking the lowly place, of using their strength

against them, comes into play. I always win. I nod, smile

pay the appropriate obeisance to the story at hand, all the

while nattering volubly to myself, even better than they at

ignoring enigma and the darkness around and beyond us.

Bill McCarthy

a sale on German beer.

Air full of living dust:

bus exhaust, air-borne grains of pizza crust

wounded crystals

appearing, disappearing

among streetlights and unsuccessful neon.

August Kleinzahler