

3 Poems by Bill Berkowitz

At Jim Morrison's Grave” (Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris, April 2012)

I'm not sure you'd care
but they're still coming Jimmy.

Forty years after your death,
young and old, couples holding hands, groups of guided tourists,
troop to your grave.

Few are somber,
most are happy to find your simple unadorned headstone
after blocks and blocks of cobblestoned paths at Père Lachaise Cemetery.

You're still outdrawing
Moliere, Chopin, Bizet, Proust, Oscar Wilde,
Edith Piaf, Maria Callas.

Some visitors bring you flowers,
some scrawl messages on the walls of surrounding graves.

And I will tell you this:
Not 100 feet from your tombstone,
is Mur des Fédérés, The Communards' Wall,
a memorial to the 147 last defenders of the workers' district of Belleville,
shot dead on 28 May 1871.

Grief Is For The Living

Grief is not predictable.
It has its own timetable.
It comes when it chooses.
Grief let's you know you are alive.
Sometimes, like a meandering snake, grief strikes
and slowly slithers away.
You may pretend it doesn't exist.
There is little you can do to stop it.

Grief takes on unexpected forms.
Sometimes, it's not always about death.
Emily Dickinson measured her grief against the grief of others.
Have "they felt sad as long as I have felt sad?" she wrote.
Grief will dance with you and hum old songs in your ears.
Grief may punch you in the gut while walking down the street.
Grief rides BART, takes the bus, squeezes in next to you in a taxi;
will hitchhike to the airport if it has to.
Grief comes to visit on the most hectic of days,
and the most silent of nights.
Grief let's you know you are alive.
Grief is for the living.

When I Awake In The Middle Of The Night

When I awake in the middle of the night,
Barnacles of dreams are attached to my brain.
Streets of dreams mingle, exiled and unexplained.
Corn fields in the Bronx.
Kansans stalking the Oakland Hills.
My Mom's salad paintings;
my Dad's barroom conversations.
My dreams are treading water halfway up my ankles, overtaking my mid-calf
hummingbird/sunflower tattoo.
My dreams shout "get up you fool. Write this shit down. Record something on your
phone. Get up you fool."
My dreams tell me nothing about myself; they tell me everything.
My dreams have a PHD in the history of the Fugs song; Monday nothing, Tuesday
nothing, Wednesday nothing.