

ALICE BOLSTRIDGE

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LETTERS TO A LOVER

1.

All this letter crossing,  
reading you to me on my way to you,  
makes me dizzy, like whirling  
when we were kids until disoriented  
and staggering.

Meaning slips. What the poem meant  
when I observed its source, is not the same thing  
I meant when I wrote it (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th drafts;  
then I lost count as I stopped keeping new drafts),  
is not what I meant when I wrote of it  
in a snit to a critical reader,  
is not what I mean as I write this letter,  
will not be what I mean when I read it  
tomorrow, etc. Meaning  
dissolves before the message arrives.

2.

Life is in the shifts and transformations. A totally new and different body every seven years, cellular decay and renewal. Which is why I define all the time, everything. Did I say I'm dizzy?

Worshippers of Saraswati, Hindu Goddess of knowledge and creativity, ritually throw exquisitely modeled, unfired clay images of her into the river to dissolve back into the elements.

3.

At a workshop in silent meditation,  
our clowning teacher gives us a ball of clay,  
tells us to fully express our whole *selves*  
in an image. Half way through he tells us  
to ball it all up and start over.  
I say *ouch* aloud, breaking the rules again.  
But I destroy it anyway.

Now, I don't even remember  
what the first image was that pained me so  
to let go. And then I cheated again,  
kept the second image, a hand  
reaching out of a whirlpool,  
until, in one of my moves, it got lost or broken.

4.

With their slow, sure power, tugboats  
on the Ohio River haul or push  
huge barges while many small speedboats zoom  
up and down and across the river.

I'm caught in a whirling current more powerful  
than desire. I stepped in, thinking  
I could swim a bit with it.  
But then it takes over,  
and I fear for my power of any choice.

I reach out to a speedboat, but I'm too slow.  
It zooms right on by, and a tugboat  
way down the river comes toward me  
making such a racket with its bass rumble,  
it drowns out the sound of speedboats  
near by and mutes my own soundings.

There's a beached hulk just ahead; maybe  
I could reach it, latch on and hold.  
The tugboat has turned away  
leaving a wake of phantom pain.

5.

Cincinnati is lovely today in the rain,  
only three days of sunshine in May.  
The heat has not arrived, and it is green all over,  
hundreds of shades of green  
in all the parks and wooded areas.  
Tulips, jonquils, and lilac are mostly gone,  
A small purple flower smells sweet,  
and our letters still veer back and forth  
between “to be continued” and “the end.”