

Poetry Porch: Poetry

Phrasing the End

By Richard Fein

1

If you live long enough you *will* fall down,
and if you live long enough you will eventually
lose your balance, fall down and hit your head.
This happens to most old people, sometimes with dire results,
even to famous actors and poets and former athletes—
no matter what grip bars, railings or banisters are reached for.
It is one of the great fears you have when you are old.
There are tricks to learn in how to fall, or not to,
and they may help, or may not, when, unexpectedly,
you fall down—that insult gravity plays on you.
And even if those tricks help, the fear stays
and then like it or not you'll have to take the risk again, say,
just as a child is drawn to test the mazy ways of a graveyard.

2

I know a woman in her mid-eighties, though I am even
older than she is. We correspond. We first met each other
when I was married and she was married, which is why
we did not marry one another, and continued living apart.
She recently fell down backwards on a flight of stairs,
and hit her head. Luckily she survived to tell the tale,
as she put it. “Shaken, but none the worse for wear,”
and then immediately swung into “Wear?” “Where?” “Ware?” “We’re?”
her way of confirming how easily her sense could have shifted to nonsense.
And then she went on to talk about problems in translating poetry,
asking me if I really preferred Pope’s Homer to anybody else’s version.
Well, she fell, and then deftly swung over to Pope’s feet and rhymes.
And then she reminded me of how we fell for one another.