

Purveyors of Leeches

by Bill Yarrow

I.

In "Resolution and Independence"
Wordsworth admired the firm mind
of the old leech gatherer on the moor.

To me, he's the emblem of the writer
walking into the scummy pond of life
waiting for the vile leeches of heartache,
the stinging leeches of heartbreak,
the slimy leeches of broken hope
to attach themselves, like dust to a
mirror, to his torso, legs, and arms.

At home, he'll pick the sticky pieces
off him and put them in a water jug
to sell to all those suppurating souls
desperate for relief from bleakness
of spirit, or illness of body, or torpor
of mind. "Who'll buy my leeches?"
cries the poet with several squirming
in his hand. "Who'll buy my leeches?"
cries the novelist, bending under
the weight of hundreds in a sack.

"Leeches for sale! Leeches for sale!"

II.

I am a purveyor of leeches. All my
friends are purveyors of leeches.
We meet weekly to compare our wares.
She buys my leeches, and I buy his leeches,
and he buys her leeches, and we attach
them to each other, and they suck out

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all the vileness of living alone, of living
in groups, of living in pairs, in short,
of living, and, for a while, we are healthy
and happy until someone comes along
and explodes our hopes or extinguishes our
hearts and then we ache and bleat for sticky
leeches, for where else can succor be found?

