

Perils of Poetry in a Pandemic

by Mathew Paust

Even the plethora of potential titles is dangerous--
alliteration obviously, for example,
sign of an amateur, except, of course
as an example.

Then again, all poets are amateurs,
all with day jobs
yet among the poets our elite must respect
those with hoi polloi celebration
are deigned the eyebrow arched in class distinction.

Yet it would seem if art's true value
is sublime surprise, and a lifting of spirit
across the species, both eyebrows
should salute those who do so,
salute them with unfeigned delight of friends.

And yet the elite and those aspiring to such height
can't seem to resist writing mainly for one another
baring inner whimsies and contradictions
with the cleverness of mystery writers
constructing puzzles only they expect to solve.

But back to perils of pandemic poetics,
in truth no different than others--
which words, which arrangements—No--start over
keep at it until something clicks, surprises,
brings something from deep within to life.

A friend today said, "I hate Emily Dickinson," after posting one of her poems on his Facebook page.

"Stream of consciousness, bah," he went on.

Frankly, I, too, had trouble with "A Light Exists in Spring" until, with a second reading, something clicked, surprised me, brought something from deep within to life:

"A quality of loss
Affecting our Content
As Trade had suddenly encroached
Upon a Sacrament."

And I murmured, I think
"Holy shit!"

