

Dear Stevie

Tara Mokhtari

For Stevie Smith, the subject of my PhD, who slit her wrists at work on July 1st 1953 and lived to write more death poems than any other poet I know.

I know how you felt
That Wednesday at work
When you wanted out
So badly
You tried to cut your way
With a knife behind your secretarial desk
And all the blood screamed out of you
And they took you away
Said you're a nervous wreck
And anemic too
And they kept an eye on you
And you wrote your friend Kay
A jovial note to say
Work would be a thing of the past
The doctors gave you leave for life
And you took it.
I feel that way every Wednesday
And every Thursday, for that matter
I want out
So badly
When I stand and look at classrooms full of dull eyes,
Laptops and mobile phones

(Those awful kinds of portable computers
You'd hate them if you saw them)
Teaching greedy, materialist
Crude ideas of an industry designed
To sell cigarettes to children
And shit all over the television . . .
I want to take a knife
And make the long incision
And show them
How dark red a poet's blood can be
How thick and fast it spills
How death is one truth
Those bastards can never spin
(No matter how good they get).
I want someone to take me away
Say it's ok, I don't ever have to go back
Not just because I couldn't hack it
But because it's inhumane
To make a poet pimp her brain and body
(I cry constantly and
the sciatica's a pain in the ass)
For such debase banality.
I got my certificate in the mail,
I'm a doctor now too,
In fact, I'm a doctor of you.
I can't look at it though,
It makes me ill
I get chills thinking how
It should have been the last thing I ever did
I should have left it at that
The Wednesday in July when I
Packaged up all your deaths
And submitted them to be judged
Knowing full well all your deaths
Were perfect,
And only one of mine
Could ever be.