

Of Course

by Valerie Polichar

We were the ones
in black turtlenecks and leather jeans
chains running from nose to ear
books jammed into our back pockets
We etched German poems into our arms
with razor blades, grew serpentine tattoos
along our scalp; our hair was the color
of grass, or wine, or Baudelaire's spleen —

Skin was our friend then and we embraced it;
now it weighs us down. Flesh hangs
in folds, rhinoceri tenant our jaws.
We have shaved our balding heads,
our eyes slender communication tubes
through which we strain
to slip beyond the heaviness of face.

Now we know Rilke cannot save us.
Everyday life has caught us at last,
and it is real, bills paid and cars driven,
wives babbling and husbands slumped and fat,
tattoos faded. We leave off our niobium
and holes grow shut.

Don't mistake us. You're not safe yet, world.
We look ponderous and slow. Our hair is short.
Our neighborly smiles and comfortable clothes deceive you.
Each night we millions sing our angry dreams to sleep.

Did you never wonder why we pressed the limits
of our bodies to feel,
rubbed ash in our cuts, dreamed of sharing blood?

We are still within, we are still here,
we have taken our chains beneath our flesh.
It puckers and bulges with our anger and our old frightened youth.
We shudder with potency beneath our masking hide.

Our ribs are scarred with pentagrams.
We look out through hawk-eyes
on the staggered mountain of our years,
but the music can still reach us. The poetry is
still ours. Death is still distant. Of course.