

1981

De Arte Honestae Amicitiae

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Recommended Citation

Gregerson, Linda. "De Arte Honestae Amicitiae." *The Iowa Review* 12.2 (1981): 134-136. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.2711>

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De Arte Honeste Amandi · Linda Gregerson

I What Love Is

Fred Kessler, of the East and West of Castro Street Improvement Club, is willing to roll with the times. For the drought, he's added Tips to his flyer: Catch the water that's still too cold, your garden will be green on it.

You want to recycle? For next week's flyer, leave this rubber band here on your doorknob. On alternate Sundays for seven years, he's picked up dog shit from Noe to Church and back again. Don't talk about heart.

You can see what becomes of a neighborhood: kids half the time, and nobody visibly off to a job. Curtains like his mother had, the lace with the squares, for a joke he doesn't quite get.

His mother went to garage sales too. *Save water. Shower with a friend.*

I'm no prude, Fred Kessler says. What kind of people would put up the sign and the curtains too?

II Between What Persons Love May Exist

I don't want feelings, his wife said more than once, especially where family's concerned. So he didn't say boo when Agnes took the old man's watch. I'll stick to my own back yard, he thought,

the breeze isn't bad, it's a wonder it gets around. If he sits with the bottlebrush tree on his right, and the Murphys aren't back from church, he can look in turn at the full four sides of wooden stairs, and can nurse an idea he's had. It's the breeze.

I could harness this thing for a job or two, if once I got the patterns down. And has started to save small pieces of paper, the blues in a bag, the reds in a bag, for the purpose of experiments to be devised. Later he'll ask the different tenants to open

or shut their windows in teams. Sunday,
safest to have the Murphys shut. *Back to Ireland*, he roars
while she cooks, the notion that starts with communion wine
and moves through a lonelier bottle to be slept off. The young ones
swing from the fire escape, pretending to be lost.

III How Love, When It Has Been Acquired, May Be Kept

That was when the war was on, the one we felt good
to hate, so of course I thought he'd come from there.
It was June. The light grown long again.
She'd roll his chair to the window

and back. But no, you said, it was love.
They were getting it wrong.
A leg. A leg. An arm to the elbow.
Like the man who burned his daughter to get

good winds. The sea for days had been flat
as the sky. He'd walk while the light went down
and could only tell the water from the air by the drag
below his knees. So this is what it's like

to have no body. A perfect benevolent temperature.
The wheels of the chariots grind
in the hulls of the ships. He lay so still he honeycombed,
may he be safe, may we be sound. The time
they bargained for came piece by piece.

IV The Love of Nuns

This one I won't tell you about, since you ought not to know
how it's done. Instead I'll tell you about a way my grandmother had
of closing her mouth, conspicuously, while we displayed the gaps
in our bringing up. Fresh milk made me sick,

for example, and hay made me wheeze. I liked the landscape best
shut down, the white that made a field and a road one thing.
You can't get there from here, but the windows are good
for writing on. Good frost. Good steam. We'd sleep in a bed
that was theirs before, when both of them could make the stairs.
The light had a string that was tied to a post
above my head. If I reached for the light, the cold
came in. You must cover up the children to their chins.

v Indications That One's Love Has Returned

There's an illness, of the sort that's named for a man
who first imagines that disparate threads might be threads
on a loom, that is called his syndrome, and frightens
the weaver, who cannot unravel by night
what she sees in the day. Their table had the sun for hours.
The piazza was white. They talked
about physicians at home, whose stories were longer, if less
in accord. And about the morning, months ago,
when the color first spread beneath her eyes.
From cheekbone to cheekbone, the smallest vessels had burst
in a pattern called *butterfly*, they'd named that too,
as tour guides name rocks till you can't see the sandstone plain
anymore, but Witch's Cauldron and Hornet's Nest.
The wings went away. The course of the river that carved the rock
is air now, and baffles intent. She'd been used to a different notion
of course, the kind you might follow for love of the thing,
or of knowledge, the wings in the glass.