

GEORGE HIGGINS

Body Surfing

Today I had one of those utterly irony-free conversations and wondered afterward what had happened. Because, what happens when you start saying things without any irony is that an hour later you think: *I don't know if I really meant that, or, did I miss something* and then you're stuck making a retraction, and looking like a complete fool.

This often happens in matters of faith and love and I remember at fifteen being susceptible to both.

Faith in God can't be proven, though I've read Saint Augustine's *City of God*, which eventually caused a severe headache with its desperate thoroughness.

God is often being exposed, for well, being a big mistake and this happened when I was fifteen, a Jesus freak, believing in tongues, but not really speaking in tongues, but, yes, now that I think about it I admit I believed in speaking in tongues and spoke in tongues a little. When you take a stance like that, that that is the right way, well, you're bound to reach a point where you're going to have to back track.

And, but still I didn't like the smugness of the middle-aged white man who talked to me in the coffee shop. What was I doing, Afroed in 1971, fifteen years old, in the cult, so to speak, for the last time, in this, really—an appendage to a coffee shop in Brentwood, California, not yet O. J.'s town? And this man who must've been going through a midlife crisis himself or doing anthropological field work said to the fifteen-year-old me that there is a little truth in all religions.

And he must've known I was a Jesus freak given the pile of stapled pamphlets he eyed at my table before I could cover them up. But neither of us could come out and say it.

I heard him but also heard the smugness with which he was saying it, and the possible rightness of what he was saying as if I were submerged in a tank of water and he were speaking to me without the aid of a microphone and on the spot I vowed never to say that to anyone (you know, say there was a little bit of truth in all religions, just on principle from this smug, phony I'm-going-to-help-you-middle-aged-guy perspective).

And so I listened and muttered something unintelligible to my shoelaces.

And weeks later, I backed off from the cliff of true believer status, probably some time after coming in close proximity to Bethany, observing her blonde hair and the aura, the living shampoo commercial sheen, that emanated from her body.

I gave into endorphins again, converted to another kind of faith, so to speak, took up running with tow-haired surfers at five a.m., dreaming of bodies. Still I did not yet enter the water where they surfed and where they spoke of the dangers in hushed tones.

George Higgins is an Oakland poet. His first book *There, There* was published by White Violet Press. His poems have appeared in *Best American Poetry*, *Pleiades*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry Flash*, *Salamander and Fugue*, among others. He has an MFA from Warren Wilson College where he was a Holden Fellow. He is also a Cave Canem Fellow.

ALAN FELTUS

The Poet's Dream, 2002
oil on canvas, 43 1/4 x 31 1/2 in.



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