

August 6

Marden J. Clark

“Go get dressed. You’re no man for this army!”
I went, thanking for the first time that crook
In my spine that had stopped me buck naked
From buck privacy, taken me back to you
After a three-hour, not a three-year, separation.

Together we heard the celebration:
Hiroshima Wiped Out! With one bomb!
With one bomb! Now the war will have to end!
We celebrated with the rest. Celebrated the bomb,
Celebrated rejection, celebrated your birthday, my love.

For forty years now, to celebrate your birthday
We’ve had to celebrate the bomb, but on
A sliding scale: from first exuberance
To slow knowing to terror now. Your poor birthday,
Growing on an opposing scale, tonight
Gets only a bad movie as celebration.

The spine that bought my rejection
Has cost me plenty since in pain, but none
Like that of the bomb I failed to feel as pain.

“The crowning savagery of war,” J. Reuben Clark
Called those bombs. But we dismissed him:
Old and embittered. I’m old and bitter now.
I call him back to witness—against me,
Against all who would not hear, who do not hear.

The speed of light squared! That bomb still lives,
Mushrooming in our memories, a ghost in the galaxy
A thousand times alive in its sleek rude brood
Begotten of that equation
On technology, the mushroom prefiguring
And portending, Cassandra-like, the progeny
Expanding at the square of the speed of light.

Ah, love, let us be true . . . The ebb and flow
Are sucking and swelling to a tidal wave!
Our leaders run like children
Down the sand in the deep ebb sucked out
By the coming wave, like children down the sand
To pluck for their crowns the shining baubles
Bared before the wave.

We love. That may be all we do or have
When the wave bursts over us.
And if the voice of apocalypse be not heard
We must at least let the silent waves of our love
Be known: We love.

MARDEN J. CLARK, who taught English at Brigham Young University until his retirement (1981), worked into this poem a story he heard in a Sunday School lesson while traveling in southern Utah. The teacher, from Hawaii, told how people would risk their lives running far down the beach for baubles as the tide was coming back in. Among his publications are *Modern and Classic: The Wooing Both Ways* (Merrill Monograph Series, BYU, May 1972), *About Language: Contexts for College Composition*, with Soren Cox and Marshall Craig (New York: Scribners, 1970), *Morgan Triumphs* (novel) (Salt Lake City: Orion Books, 1984), two collections of poems—*Moods: Of Late* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1979) and *Christmas Voices* (Orem, United Order Books, 1988)—and *Liberating Form: Mormon Essays on Religion and Literature* (Salt Lake City, Aspen Books, 1992). He and his wife, Bessie Soderborg Clark, taught at the University of Qing Dao, China (1989–90), and traveled to every continent. He also wrote a column, “Matter Unorganized” for the Provo Daily Herald (1994–2002). He died May 15, 2003.