

The Family Archive

~ Robert Thomas ~

With moldy hand through tender shards I graze
In boxes, old and dusty, some collapsed,
And gently now curate chaotic stuff,
Gathered in the decades, and forgot.

These pictures, letters, postcards, angry notes,
Odd scribbles, artwork, essays, bank receipts,
School notebooks, essays, report cards, scrapbooks...
Accumulated, stuffed away, consigned.

Shifted house to house and time to time,
Age to age and place to place and thus
To me, reluctant keeper, holder now,
By circumstance, of this unsightly mass.

By diligently working I'll preserve
The meaningful, and cull and organize,
And relegate the great amounts of chaff,
Careful to distinguish all the lives.

I'll save these chancy documents of life,
By seven children carelessly compiled,
By this reluctant keeper now imbued
With strange officious weightiness at last.

But may the keeper easily set out?
Who saw and heard, or learnt, or knows the tales?
In spirit, part of everything evoked,
Who shared the stage, the sadness, and the joys.

For those to whom discarded things belong
May yet in turn discard them on receipt,
But I who plucked these things and pass them on
Can scarce avoid the buffeting they bring.

It's not the quaintness of recovered things –
Forgotten words or fading photographs –
So much as that they stir a time or place,
Whole periods of life and all their scenes.

These roughly float disturbed through musty air,
To settle disconcerting in the soul,
And stay the keeper briefly in his work,
Perhaps to cause a smile, a shrug, a sigh.

And room is made for yet another age,
From stacks of paper organized and piled
In shining boxes, for my siblings tagged,
From culled-out bags of rubbish for the curb.

Let's clear some room for yet another age,
An age whose leavings might not be so thick,
An age of many pages without form,
In ether born and kept – they don't impose:

No physical reminder, and as such,
No keeper, then, to linger over them,
Not any one, in dour solitude,
In time to sort through time and think it real.

And so, a proclamation and a tear,
The proud reluctant keeper's done his work,
His duty, lonely taken up, discharged,
Long to work on his reluctant mind,
Till things evoked and images aroused,
In dusty mental boxes be consigned.