

## At the Cecil Hotel

I am writing  
I am writing another goddam poem  
about drinking beer  
and it's clearly obvious that I'm an artist  
And I figure that the bartender is an artist as well  
so I show him my beer poem draft  
mainly the part about the draft  
he poured me that tastes a lot  
like a Milton Acorn poem  
But it seems that the bartender  
is more into nonfiction prose  
the way he turns his back  
and lets out an anapestic fart  
Across the semidark room  
two women with large arms  
and large tattoos on their arms  
are drinking ale and writing poems  
They pay no attention  
to the two bony guys slugging each other  
with grimy fists. "Pat Lane  
couldn't carry Newlove's jockstrap!"  
says one bony guy as he slips  
in the beer and blood on the floor  
and the other guy kicks him in the ear  
After a while the guy picks himself up  
and staggers over to his table  
and sits down with a beer and a book of poems  
Now the beer in my belly  
is looking for a way out

but I have to pass the other bony guy  
on my way to the dimly lit pisser  
I can't help myself  
being an artist and all  
I told him "Dorothy Livesay could wipe the floor  
with Newlove and Lane and Alden Nowlan!"  
"Wanna come outside and say that?" he says  
so I go outside and say it again  
He takes a wild swing and falls down  
and I sit on his head  
which is face down in the parking lot  
"Out here in Vancouver the poets  
make love, not war!" I instruct him  
He lifts his hand in a peace sign  
and I let him up because I'm an artist  
When we get back inside  
there's a guy with a big bony nose  
and a bag full of mimeographed poems  
"A dollar a poem," he says  
"or I will read you five pages for a beer!"  
I ask him what kind of poems they are  
and he says "Immutable, inscrutable, marsupial!"  
I buy five of them and hand him a beer  
because I've heard of this guy  
He rides a bicycle all over town  
and jams mimeographed poems in mail slots  
He has recorded every poetry reading  
ever given in this town  
"Welcome to the Cecil!" he says to me  
"I can tell that you are an artist  
writing poems in a beer parlour—  
you are contumacious, salubrious, bituminous!"

And he was out the door and off on his bike  
before I could show him  
my latest occasional poem  
with him in it, him and beer and blood  
Now I am a poet without a dime  
an artist without a beer.

*Translation of "At the Quinte Hotel"*  
*by Al Purdy*