

# Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

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Volume 8 | Issue 1

Article 17

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June 2008

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### Recommended Citation

Duhamel, Denise (2008) "A Poem On My Forty-Sixth Birthday," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 17.

Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol8/iss1/17>

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# Duhamel: A Poem On My Forty-Sixth Birthday

## A POEM ON MY FORTY-SIXTH BIRTHDAY

Denise Duhamel

Four score and seven years ago  
my mother brought me forth, losing continence—  
a new moon nativity, conceived in my father's libido,  
and dedicated to the prophetess who told her  
that all menstrual blood stains the crèche on the equinox.

For a time we were engaged in a great civil war,  
testing whether that nativity, or any nativity,  
so conceived and so deep-seated, could long endure.  
We meet at the greasy spoon of that war.  
*We have come to dedicate the large portions of fried fish*

as a final resting place for those grievances  
that naturally made us livid. It is altogether fitting  
and proper that we should do this.  
But, in a larger sense, we cannot decrescendo—  
we cannot conciliate—we cannot act holier-than-thou—

at this Ground Round. The brave women, living  
and dead, who struggled like Herefords,  
have conciliated for us, far above our powder blush  
and power suits, our addictive personalities or delusions.  
The world will little note, nor long remember

what we ate here, but it can never forget  
the décor. It is for us the living, rather,  
to be dedicated to our unfinished works of art  
which the waitress who fouled up our order here  
has thus far so noted as avant-garde.

It is rather for us to be here, dedicated  
to the great tasteless pile of fries remaining before us—

that from these honored spuds we increase our insulin—  
that cause for which our mothers and grandmothers  
gave their last full measure of devotion—

that we resolve our issues so that that these dead  
shall not have fought with each other in vain—  
that this family, full of governesses and go-go dancers,  
gout and grace periods, shall eat at a new bistro,  
free of free-floating anxiety—and that a grab bag

of the weeping, by the weeping, for the weeping,  
shall not persist in this earth mother's purse.