

## In the Workshop after I Read My Poem Aloud · *Don Colburn*

All at once everyone in the room says  
nothing. They continue doing this and I begin to know  
it is not because they are dumb. Finally

the guy from the Bay Area who wears his chapbook  
on his sleeve says he likes the poem a lot  
but can't really say why and silence

starts all over until someone says she only has  
a couple of teeny suggestions such as taking out  
the first three stanzas along with

all modifiers except "slippery" and "delicious"  
in the remaining four lines. A guy who  
hasn't said a word in three days says

he too likes the poem but wonders why  
it was written and since I don't know either  
and don't even know if I should

I'm grateful there's a rule  
I can't say anything now. Somebody  
I think it's the shrink from Seattle

says the emotion is not earned and I wonder  
when is it ever. The woman on my left  
who just had a prose poem in *Green Thumbs & Geoducks*

says the opening stanza is unbelievable  
and vindication comes for a sweet moment  
until I realize she means unbelievable.

But I have my defenders too and the MFA from Iowa  
the one who thinks the you is an I  
and the they a we and the then a now

wants to praise the way the essential nihilism  
of the poem's occasion serves to undermine  
the formality of its diction. Just like your comment

I say to myself. Another admires the zenlike polarity  
of the final image despite the mildly bathetic  
symbolism of sheep droppings and he loves how

the three clichés in the penultimate stanza  
are rescued by the brazen self-exploiting risk.  
The teacher asks what about the last line

and the guy with the chapbook volunteers it suits  
the poem's unambitious purpose though he has to admit  
it could be worded somewhat differently.