

DE-PAR-T-UR__E & other poemS

__By Jack D. Harve y

WHY I LIKE IT: Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...

Jack D. Harvey is a yowling, comical caution—you know that light everyone speeds up at before they see red? ...well, it is time to slow down and intersect with greening genius. He is the new playground in my mind. He is light-hearted, diverting and erudite, wise, witty and waggish—but he does go on... Nor is there shame in that, his words ‘Sing [as] Heav’nly Muse’ in a paradise all his own. I can only imagine his “rictus” facade with tongue firm to cheek—and what a cheeky, twisted tongue ‘tis. If wordplay were a Pro-Sport he’d be deluged by recruits, picked first in a draft, made millions, declared bankruptcy, commentated in techno color and inducted on-the-walk before his time: No quotes here, he is the ‘Whatever’ in what is sure to float your boat—Oops, can’t resist, the man’s a feast: “peace, rest, surcease from ceaseless movement;” And on the ribald side, “the doves eat luscious / Daisy Mae alive; / I wouldn’t mind a bite,...” He leaves me contented to be conflicted, covetous and contrite—but mostly green with envy. Spread your jalousie blinds and take a peep at Jack—(To maintain poet’s spacing each poem is on its own page. Please scroll down.)

Departure

Drowned palaces,
faery imaginings of yore,
flights of fancy
brewed up in a posset,
but he will not drink
from that cup.

Suffering from his own doom,
one way or another
he will not live entombed;
the willing earth,
Antaeus' myth of
mother strength
not sustained for him;
in his despair
he needed to get free of it,
scale the heights and plummet
down like a rock.

The only mountains at hand
in this Goliath of a city
the Chrysler Building,
the Empire State Building
and such like; there he is
on one of them,
a man standing on the edge
of a parapet, teetering,
buffeted by the wind;
couldn't carry the weight anymore,
the hardships of his life,
the daily frustration and heartache,
the particulate of
boredom and disorder
wore him down;
life's a stage or Samson's agony
made no difference to him,
the difference unconsidered and
known only at some remote
pole of his universe,
long lost and forgotten.

Far above, above the crowd,
above the city,
in the steel girders, concrete heights,
he seemed to be in another world;
Olympus below,
below the city,
below hell,
below pity,
shadowless he stood,
looking beyond
the beck and call of life;
his face not noble, not fearful,
but gentle in repose,
no anger of defeat,
no rictus of terror,
sadly he looks down
at the gathering crowd;
a moment gone,
sudden his fall,
swift and heavy,
like a ball
with no life in it.

And we down below
who control nothing,
who have no vantage point,
who weep for ourselves,
who scuttle and grub about
in the daily clutter, in turn
nervous and content with our lot,
observe his smashed body,
his protoplasm
plastered on the sidewalk
and somehow consoled
that we are not him,
go our separate ways.

No end to this kind of despair,
his and ours,
no end to sorrow that maims and kills.
Like ducks we paddle in it,
forced to dive to its
pernicious beckoning depths
for a morsel of god knows what,
peace, rest, surcease from ceaseless movement;

mostly popping up again
on the world still there,
serene and benign;
sometimes in the weeds
stuck down below forever.

Even the witnesses of this sidewalk wreck
walking away, in their waking and dreaming
sometimes sense the talons of
some terrible bird of prey
swooping down, filling
the peaceful empty daylight,
the quiet obscure night,
with a terror they already know,
the horror of a pattern they
can never know, alone and afraid
in an armed and indifferent universe
unfolding, expanding,
ever mercilessly appropriating,
taking all and giving nothing;
its Janus gates always open,
by no morality or human love suborned.

Playing With Fire

In the hills and dales
of some southern state
the doves eat luscious
Daisy Mae alive;
I wouldn't mind a bite,
but I'm not there.

The gorgeous belles,
attentive at Sunday church,
later in downtown hotels
develop tremulous leaks of sound
getting poked by their beaux;
the pampered fairways of Heaven
lapse back to brambles,
closed for the duration,
but I don't care.

I'm bored as hell,
looking for something to do,
something to kill the time.

In the midst of discovery
I crouch over an ant hill,
magnifying glass in hand,
watching the orderly hysteria
of the ants.

Science, my eye,
I want to kill.

Magnified out of proportion
by my thick round lens
the ants move on their correct paths,
oblivious to impending doom
focused in a deadly point of light.

Unalterable law, my foot,
under the ranging roaming needle
of searing heat, random as Roderick,
they burst out of instinct and
blind against the fates,
spread out against me
in black perimeters;

unconcerned as a Lucretian god
I burn legions of them to a crisp.

Unafraid and afraid
of divine vengeance
I walk on.

What a heartless
sadistic story this is,
telling on myself a nasty tale;
the grasshopper, the ant
and the *tertium quid*.
A timeworn fable becomes
destructive and horrible;
pharisaical morality
against the grain transmuted
and to the ants' sudden dismay
the grasshopper's fiddle
sounds a fearful woebegone note.

If winter comes,
and it will,
it comes too late
for ants untimely dead
to get off a line
at the grasshopper's expense;
lost forever the cruel retort
in the sun's concentrated rage
brought to bear
by a bored colossus.

Sometimes that's how it goes
and best to go along with it
and rightly so; learning
what we really are from
the bare bones
of a tale unadorned
with humanity or compassion.

=====

The Ancient Builders

Too much style in architecture
c'est la môme,
said Frank Lloyd
and he was right.
The ancient builders,
with some success
before there was
an England, a France,
a Middle Kingdom
and all the rest,
tried to stay away from it;
they did their business quietly,
building to a brightness,
a fullness of simple design,
beyond the spired beauty
of the Taj Mahal.

In the hinterlands
of human history
and beyond, from Giza,
Machu Picchu, Stonehenge,
Shi Huangdi's Great Wall,
they built simply,
finely, in stone,
in baked brick, close-fitting,
trued to the thinnest of lines,
stone against stone,
brick to brick,
not a fingernail's width.

Towers and walls of grace,
mocking today's overblown
rhodomontade of skyscrapers,
the crazy miscellany of edifices
angled exquisitely equine
to catch the frenzied
contemporary pace;
not one refinement of style
in that armory of bad architecture
flowering all over the place.

And the incipient horror of
a city hardly started,

Hitler's Germania,
a maniac's massive nightmare,
dreamt to turn a city
to a monstrosity of horrible order;
a harbinger of things to come.

But back before all that,
back then, in the dim ages,
dedicated to some god
the simple temple
on the foreshore, astounding
labor of love and patience,
clean and sharp
the chisel shaped the marble
and there it stood,
a lovely shape made against
the sea and mountains.

The ancient builders,
with spool and line,
caliper and compass,
sifting and measuring
the rows of stone at Carnac,
the heights of Babylon;
we see them still,
frozen forever in time
these ancient builders,
caught in poses
stiff as sticks
on the walls of tombs,
stiff as sticks
on the temple walls,
trapped forever in the city ruins,
forming an almanac of an art,
a memory of the first order,
lifting us and along with us
human structure upright
above the natural horizon
the natural limits
of the indifferent permanent earth.

And now, these ancient builders,
their messages
propaganda of the past,
long-forgotten and no more.

THE POPET SPEAKS: *What inspired these poems? In the first place most writers, including poets, find it difficult to talk about their work and the generation or creation of their work because it is such a dippy process, (with a bow to Richard Feynman) involving as it does, the gnostic, cryptic, ambiguous, incantatory, discontinuous, oracular and accidental nature of creation of language, the putting together of words. There is no question that some of what I write is not some conscious creation, like putting Legos together, but involves the muse itself in some form, coming in from outside and I am not talking here about "automatic writing", taught and pursued by William James, Hugo Münsterberg and Gertrude Stein or some kind of reductive Freudian id-scape. The first lines of both the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" invoke the muse -- "muse, tell through me the rage of Achilles" (Il. 1) and "tell to me muse, of the wily [may also be translated as "of many wanderings"] man" (Od 1). The first poetry (including the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey") was recited from memory by the poet or rhapsode and constituted a kind of compendium of societal and cultural practices, carrying and preserving information vital to the existence and continuance of the society. Hence all the fixed expressions in early Greek poetry and the kennings in Anglo-Saxon [now referred to as Old English] poetry, used, inter alia, as mnemonics. Any poet who claims to be an authentic poet is a Parryist at heart. I use all forms and wear as many masks or personae as I need to to do what I have to do. If you strip away the masks to the bare face of the poet, you will find that his own face is nothing more than a mask and that is as it should be. If you have any competence in your craft, your voice is always there, no matter what persona you assume. "Cleave the rock and I am there." The simple answer to what inspired these poems is that I have no answer.*

Regarding the creative process itself, I don't know if I can add anything more to what I have already said. I have no established means of luring the muse and, as I said earlier, the process of writing creative prose or poetry is a dippy process. I have no idea how it works, but, in my case, there is no question that the creative process takes place, at least in part, at some lower level of the conscious or comes from outside- maybe there is really some sort of Jungian kollektives Unbewusstes, "collective uncounscious." Or maybe poets are all lunatics, despite what Freud said. According to Horace, Democritus would only admit crazy poets to Helicon- excludit sanos Helicone poetas Democritus.

As far as the importance of content vis-à-vis music, you need both and you need balance with both, but when it comes to "needs must when the devil drives," I would choose music every time. That is the heart and soul of poetry. In the two simple Anglo-Saxon words from Beowulf, "wordum wrixlan," word-braiding or word-twisting is, to my mind, the core concept of poetry. This is something that is lacking in most of today's poetry, which is too focused on "relevancy" and the passing fads or injustices in society and not enough on language and music. There was a big flap a while back about some poem that was published in The Nation and aroused the ire of the PC police and the black community because it was written by a white man who used some version of what he thought was black patois to write about how a poor black woman should beg for money on the street. Tout court, the poem is a piece of crap, but there was no discussion of this obvious fact and in the end, the two young female editors had to issue an abject apology for publishing the poem. Disgusting weak behavior on their part.

As far as influences, back in the fifties, when I was in my teens, I spent summers in Gloucester, Mass, where my parents had a summer cottage. I had the good fortune to meet a poet called Vincent Ferrini and his friend, the better-known poet, Charles Olson. Vincent lived with his wife and kids up the street from our place, in the house in which Rudyard Kipling wrote Captains Courageous. I remember many a night at his house with Vincent and Charles and their wives (Peg Duffy, Vincent's first wife, was a very intelligent, highly educated woman) and others, talking about everything from poetry to politics to the local fishing industry, to cabbages and kings, and it was through Olson's suggestion that some years later I eventually met Achilles Fang, the polymath and polyglot, when I was in college. At that time, he was teaching and studying at Harvard. Vincent encouraged me to write poetry and was both supportive and critical. Alas, Vincent, Charles and Achilles are long dead. In any event, that was how I started and I have been writing poetry ever since.

As far as stylistic influences, I would say Ezra Pound, Dante and Horace were major influences on my poetry, but there were many others, developed over a lifetime of reading poetry in a number of different languages.

Pound, whatever his pretensions to such, was no philosopher or economist, but his ear was unerring. As he said somewhere, poetry has to be closely tied to music -- when it isn't, it degenerates and, in turn, music has to be closely tied to dance (he meant tribal, ritual or communal dance) or it degenerates. Too many "poets" these days chop prose into lines and call it poetry, based on some kind of expectation that sentences chopped into lines will yield/deserve some kind of special pleasure and significance. I try to avoid that and follow Pound's advice.

As far as I am concerned, poetasters like Amanda Gorman and Cleo Wade should be indicted for crimes against the English language and for causing irreparable harm to the craft of poetry. A few brave souls have pointed out the utter atrociousness of their writing, but these critics have been buried under the weight of the "awakened," always quick to jump on any bandwagon. These girls' cause and subject matter may be timely and just, but shitty writing is shitty writing. Gorman's inaugural poem was an embarrassment, a Schande. Jill Biden, who doesn't know any better, likes her and her work and Gorman is the right color these days and so she gets an undeserved push and an undeserved platform for her chazerei. Still, "performance poetry" ain't echt poetry and depends on the performer's presence and presentation as much as the words. If the poetry can't live flat on the page it is not real poetry.

The real problem is that people don't read any more. Most of what they absorb comes from TV and the talking heads on cable TV. And, again, as Harold Bloom said, there has been and continues to be a dumbing-down of the culture. The latest studies from leading universities indicate that the cultural level of the average "man or woman in the street" here in America is equivalent to that of a five year old chimpanzee. This is a huge problem for the serious writer; there are no or few serious readers. As a matter of fact, there are few readers of books. The few books that are read by the lumpen are junky "young adult" books like Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Behind or Strictly From Hunger Games.

Why does poetry matter and why do I read and write poetry? Poetry matters in this age of iron where language and especially the spoken word are degenerating at a rapid pace. Poetry makes mythology and mythology is the third eye for all of us, opening our minds to possibilities beyond the daily bread of our lives. This is important.

*Nevertheless, poets these days serve at a ruinous shrine and we know it. Yet, I do not despair. At my age it is unbecoming. If I were a reductive Freudian, I would say that my writing harnesses or displaces some deep-seated neurosis in a positive way. As Freud said, "Artists, like neurotics, flee a reality that is hardly satisfactory to them and take refuge in a fantasy world, but- unlike the mentally ill- are able to find their way back." So I say I persist writing poetry because writing poetry to me is like breathing- I can't survive without it. And perhaps for some of the reasons Orwell sets forth in *Why I Write*.*

AUTHOR BIO: Jack D. Harvey's poetry has appeared in *Scrivener, The Comstock Review, Valparaiso Poetry Review, Typishly Literary Magazine, The Antioch Review, The Piedmont Poetry Journal* and elsewhere. The author has been a Pushcart nominee and over the years has been published in a few anthologies. So what.

The author has been writing poetry since he was sixteen and lives in a small town near Albany, New York. He is retired from doing whatever he was doing before he retired. He once owned a cat who could whistle "Sweet Adeline," use a knife and fork and killed a postman.

His book, *Mark the Dwarf* is available on Kindle.

<https://www.amazon.com/Mark-Dwarf-Jack-D-Harvey-ebook/dp/B019KGW0F2>