

Scherzo + 3 Others + THREE

By

Frederick Pollack

WHY I LIKE IT: Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes..."Her scent lingered; / the soft voice left no echo but a thought." Such an evocative sense memory: Sight reflect, taste and scents linger, sound echo and touch, the duplicitous one, heals or harms. Frederick Pollack's 'Scherzo' appears more gest than jest however melodic, "...royal blue, and clouds without contours." Does the conquest take on revolutionary proportions, jealous revelations? "A realm without an anthem; / the arms of each successive emperor" "Tanks and investors sweep / at will across the land" "who remains the king of an afternoon / however the regime changed in the night." Nothing craved is not worth overindulging. Here are more snippets and shorter sips. 'Just Say No' "Don't do drugs. The pharmacopoeia / of the unaided mind is more / effective" "forgiveness and a stable apathy / will be easier." "Live for others, / not out of moral fervor but for / the high." 'Know What I Mean?' "It's less and less likely / that I have anything to say / to the young." "Hope for me was an impossible / meditative marching crowd, / for them something glimpsed" I'm way passed my word-count. 'Cigarette,' "perhaps attracted / by an aura of grudge." Cameo, "I explore exotic deserts, / having found at last my flying chair." Now I'm in overtime, to be so bold as to quote the man, 'Poetry, like every art, is a kind of enzyme, breaking down material that is conceptually indigestible.' (To maintain poet's spacing each poem is on its own page. Please scroll down.) HS

Five Stars!

Scherzo

Her scent lingered;
the soft voice left no echo but a thought.

Steps receded in a hallway
and in the tunnels of my ears.
It would be the moment,
I thought, for distant bells across rooftops
but it isn't that kind of place.
Outside, some blue remained –
royal blue, and clouds without contours.
I lay unmoving, relaxed, awake,
a trillion tiny symbiotes,
my inheritance from a billion years,
companionship working, death distracted,
until I wished her back.

A realm without an anthem;
the arms of each successive emperor
(who might as well be,
for all the good it did him, modern,
a dictator) is a musical phrase.
Which may be martial, boastful, furtive, choral,
it doesn't matter: he has no territory.
Tanks and investors sweep
at will across the land, at most
delayed awhile without maps or highways.
He likes, however, to confer
that which is his by right:
a moment – more for the most favored,
who remains the king of an afternoon
however the regime changed in the night.

Just Say No

Don't do drugs. The pharmacopoeia
of the unaided mind is more
effective and, in the short run at least,
less expensive. Decide that the people
you more or less work with are robots, or that
you are. Either way,
forgiveness and a stable apathy
will be easier. Wherever you are, see
a long and well-lit hallway
of benign and interested offices
lead out of there. Live for others,
not out of moral fervor but for
the high. Till your self is a heap of clothes
it's someone else's business to remove
from the alley beside a mission.
Conversely, gaze from a great height
and silently, blandly smiling
at brutalized wretches.

Abandon and become the internet.

Know What I Mean?

It's less and less likely
that I have anything to say
to the young. For me the Obstruction
is a wall, with checkpoints,
guard-towers and, behind them,
a command structure
I spend my days interpreting.
For them it's a trickster, a dark harlequin
or nameless abstraction,
defining which makes them tired;
fatigue is its weapon.
Hope for me was an impossible
meditative marching crowd,
for them something glimpsed
among innumerable items glimpsed.
Should we meet, we would helplessly
waste time, put on masks
to speak the old lines about our true faces.

Cigarette

For a long time no one has come to sweep
or clean. Butts crunch underfoot,
you kick them away. The smell instantly
suffuses clothing (even the hero's
bemedaled jacket) and hair; dully you think
you add to, deserve it.
The corridor has no light of its own.
Light enters from doorless door-shaped voids
through which the smokers come,
and what's behind them. There *could*,
you think, have been lights. And windows
in the opposite wall. And are not the first to wonder
where this passage leads. But the smell,
and that scalding sense of toying with,
hurrying, death keeps
most smokers near their doors. How wise,
you reflect, was the sculptor Tony Smith
to give the title *Cigarette*
to a looming black steel grid
in three dimensions, dominating all.

The hero looks disgustedly
but often through the door
he exited. He has a good tactical sense
of the mayhem back there, the explosions
inaudible here. A woman, middle-aged,
well-kept (but the smoke has ruined
her vintage dress), who has stood here forever
eyes him, perhaps attracted
by an aura of grudge. He expects her to ask
about a war three wars ago,
inflict genteel or sullen blame,
but she's well-informed and dispassionate.
There are limits to what he can say.
Of course, she agrees, perhaps recalling
some private turmoil and circumspection.
And they gracefully enter that other ancient
passageway, behind language –
kids, travels, houses (safe for the moment,
he assures her, from bombs);
you notice they smoke the same brand.

Up ahead, a light fails; there may

be screams reduced by distance
to concern. One should help, but how?
They're *up ahead* (though not very far), and
one can't neglect the pull of one's own door.
So you find yourself thinking, Survivors
may not represent or dream of rebuilding
the best of what has gone. May be
as random as smokers, unappreciative
for the most part of the austere retreats
society gives them. So few smoke –
you don't, probably your
two friends in the passage don't, normally ...
Regarding whom: the hero has received
a call or noticed something
and, disappointed, says he has to go.
They'd been getting on so well, were almost an item;
she was asking about his medals. This one,
he says without much hope,
was awarded for this moment. Goes back in.

THE POET SPEAKS: *My guiding idea in poetry is that the microcosm of the individual, even in zones mysterious to itself, reflects and is reflected in the macrocosm. For me the latter is history; though history of course is part of nature, it's the part that interests me most. Fantasy is powerful at both levels; it obstructs as well as creates desires; and fantasy in my work, though never allegorical, is in the service of realism. Though an atheist, I often make use of an afterlife, and transpose political struggles into figures of Gnostic myth. A source of "Cameo" was a recurrent dream of my late mother's. "Cigarette" elevates a smoking area – probably gone now – at Dallas airport.*

From the start I've felt that telling stories is more poetically useful than dissecting moods, most attempts at "timelessness," or poststructuralist word-games. I loved Jeffers, Reznikoff, and E. A. Robinson; my first two published books were long narrative poems. Most of my work now consists of short lyric-narrative hybrids. Influences accrued over years include HD, Milosz, Ekelöf, Oppen, Zbigniew Herbert, Montale, Auden, Roy Fuller and Gottfried Benn. Currently I'm enthusiastic about Karen Solie, Sasha Dugdale and Nathaniel Mackey. My main man has always been Shelley.

Hegel said that "reality, divided by reason, always leaves a remainder." Poetry for me is that remainder; the need for it, for both reader and writer, is corollary to that of reason. A novelist might say something similar, and I admire many novels – learned, years ago, that I had no talent for prose. If I may use a military analogy: my mind requires daily harrying attacks on different fronts, not one big push.

AUTHOR BIO: Author of two book-length narrative poems, THE ADVENTURE and HAPPINESS, both Story Line Press; the former reissued 2022 by Red Hen Press. Two collections of shorter poems, A POVERTY OF WORDS, (Prolific Press, 2015) and LANDSCAPE WITH MUTANT (Smokestack Books, UK, 2018). Pollack has appeared in *Salmagundi*, Poetry Salzburg Review, The Fish Anthology (Ireland), Magma (UK), Bateau, Fulcrum, Chiron Review, Chicago Quarterly Review, etc. Online, poems have appeared in Big Bridge, Hamilton Stone Review, BlazeVox, The New Hampshire Review, Mudlark, Rat's Ass Review, Faircloth Review, Triggerfish, etc.

Cameo

Her interests and interactions there
were much as I recalled but slowed
and fewer. To complete a meal, a phone call,
conversation, checkup, chapter, day
was satisfaction. Most loved her;

those to whom articulateness and thought
are snobbery didn't, but she could contain them.
Even had, as far as he was concerned,
a boy friend – gazed across tables at her
at meals, or in the common room, said nothing.

She was pleased when I visited, older now
than she. The softness of her smile
and voice as she said, This is all about guilt
on your part. *I'm* fine. I explore exotic deserts,
having found at last my flying chair.