

No Place like Home

By James W. Gaynor

***Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes:** Here is another good one. (Not that I haven't passed on many during this Poetic Pandemic; please don't be discouraged and keep sending them, circumspection is my most vulnerable trait. I am belied and loath, yet never loathed to edit in my however short tenure.) Jim, I hope you didn't mind me using you as a platform. There are so many wonderful works not listed, still "toast / can be made from many grains." Forgive me Mr. Gaynor for stealing a wonderful, unpublished line. Here is a fantastical little ditty I couldn't resist. I won't recite another word, but it begins and ends in black and white "and kills two old women of color" So I lied... Your frequently passed over Poetry Editor who spends much of his time and most of his money asking his therapist "Am I real? I mean, really?" [a line I absconded from a certain nameless senior editor who may or may not speak Italian.])*

No Place like Home

American stories begin and end
in black and white
Dorothy's is no different

she visits a place not in Kansas
makes new friends
and kills two old women of color

after which she returns
to live once more
in black and white

THE POET SPEAKS: I've always been fascinated by untold stories of the minor characters in famous fiction, such as the first Mrs. Rochester, Rosenkranz and Guildenstern, the unnamed French governess in *War and Peace*—and I still wonder whatever became of Mrs. Danvers.

Recently, I watched the *Wizard of Oz* again, which I hadn't seen in at least 25 years. I was fascinated by the dramatic change from B&W into color. But this time, as Dorothy left monochromatic Kansas for Technicolor and multicultural Oz, I started thinking about the movie as an appropriate metaphor for the current racial division in the US. Not unlike today, white Dorothy gets away with killing two old green women. She can simply click her way back to segregated America, where she and the audience will live happily ever after. The subtext called out for a poem.

This awareness of things happening beneath the surface began when I was in 7th grade and read (and memorized) Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." I knew then that I wanted to be a poet. So, I started what was to become my shadow career, and by the age of 18 had accumulated both a collection of 22 rejection slips from *The New Yorker* and a resultant thick skin about rejection that has served me well in the intervening years.

My stylistic influences include Emily Dickinson (bespoke punctuation and seductive rhythm) and Gerard Manley Hopkins (invented/inverted words and meaning) — and poets whose voices I can actually hear when I read their work, e.g., Gwendolyn Brooks, Basho, Rumi, Tony Hoagland, Frank O'Hara, Apollinaire, David Bergman, Sharon Olds, and Dorothy Parker (to mention a few).

I'm particularly attracted to works that draw me in with a story or images I can easily understand at first reading, poems that elicit a smile of recognition and then give me time to think about what other dimensions the poet may have in mind. When I read a poem that has that effect on me, I can hear Dickinson, who knew it was poetry if she physically felt as if the top of her head were taken off.

And I really like having the top of my head taken off.

AUTHOR'S BIO: I've been writing poetry since I was 12 — somehow, and I have no idea how, I'm still here, post- Stonewall, the Vietnam war and the AIDS epidemic --- we'll see how I do with the current viral tsunami --- and still writing. And still examining what it means to observe, to record my experience of the world from my evolving, now 71-year-old, queer perspective.

I'm the author of *Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice in 61 Haiku*, and have published articles, book reviews, poems and essays in *The New York Observer*, *OTVmagazine.com*, *Peeking Cat Poetry Magazine*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review / Worldwide*, *Down in the Dirt*, *Rust + Moth*, *Little Rose Magazine*, and *The Good Men Project*.