

Nine (9) Poems (poems poems poems)

By Bob Carlton

Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes:

So I have heard everything is big in Texas. But these are short and sweet. Alliteration is nothing without assonance and all the imagery belongs: Deserts, moonlight and misgivings. If I could strum a guitar, I would steal these in song ... 'surrendering trust to the darkness.' They pack as good a punch as Carmen Basilio. The rhythms both float and sting. For me, many of the lines are reminiscent of 'The muttering retreats / Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels.' Of course I am not quoting Mr. Carlton here, but his verse is effuse with such cadence. It makes me wish I could gallop or at least canter when all I do is trot... 'Every trembling, random bit of trash, / the loose paper, broken plastic, or shattered glass.' Here he is, and I am ashamed to take liberties with his line-breaks. Or: 'I would glide along / through an underworld / of urban underbrush and rust': 'Let us go then, you and I [Eliot]. If I acted on my instincts I'd be dead by now. HS (Each poem is on a separate page. Spacing is the author's own.) HS

At Liberty

Whorl of the windward ear
catches dust devil dirt.
Eyes crust with the day's debris.
Sight, by necessity, narrows
focus to the one approach,
danger's only way in
to such broken country.

Scratch a match on rock,
light up a stubby smoke.
Crack knuckles, swivel neck,
stretch legs, wiggle fingers.
Sand gathers in joint folds,
saddle bags, and tin cups.
The red sun howls through
the lone, bare mesquite
perched atop the western ridge.

No living sound
but the whirr of insects,
no taste
but the scorched sand.

A horse's sudden nod and snort
snaps attention back
to this single arroyo.
Nothing there.
Not yet.
Maybe never will be.
How can the fugitive, outlaw, deserter
know when the last pursuer
has quit the field?

Another pot of coffee
to wash away grit and fatigue.
Sourdough, pemmican,
one swig from the canteen.

Maybe, as the fire
dies away in the night,

a nip from the flask,
a quick communion
with the god of agave,
before surrendering trust to the darkness.

Burlesque

By the end,
the routine
becomes so complex,

the plates spin-
ning, dogs
tumbling through
hoops of fire,
little guy in
an old fedora
juggling chopsticks
and beachballs,

the schtick comes
crashing
to a chaotic halt,

beer and dancing girls
slopped across
the stage

in odd, sin-
ful salutes
to human dexterity.

"Carmen Basilio..."

Carmen Basilio
was no poet

his movements
metric and rhythm
left for
others to
art-
icu-
late

the punch having
already landed.

Defrocked

Biretta gone,
his bald pate sweating
in shame beneath
the unforgiving sun,

he swears
an oath to no god
he has ever
known before.

down the boulevard

past pawn shops
dead dreams
held in hock
brothels
and the bodies
fucking without affection
barest of touches
absence of kisses

Eve

You come to me
 out of a low crouch
 in the wild grasses
of an ancient rift,

across wind-swept steppes,
 forests thick with life;

you have waded the vast
 inland seas,
 warm saline rapture
beneath a drumming sun;

you have trudged
 the desert and jungle
 extremes

to come to me,
 a distant man,
 unworthy,
and unprepared.

Mission Accomplished

I had always thrilled
to the secret city places:

forgotten alleys
too small for adult intrigue,
or the abandoned building,
with a beaten path along
the outside wall, hidden
behind dense shrubs.

The litter of modern artifacts--
crushed cans,
cigarette butts,
fast food wrappers,

or the sudden mystery
and forbidden thrill
of the used condom
or naked needle--

Hollywood-worthy plots
waited in every
trembling, random
bit of trash,
the loose paper,
broken plastic,
or shattered glass,
final refuse
of secret lives,
slipping away
in the blurring ink
and fading pencil scratchings
on lost receipts,
half-used
books of matches,
the lingering traces

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"Mission..."
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same stanza

of lust deduced,
 suffering inferred,
past agonies transformed
into my present
 exultation.

I would glide along
 through an underworld
 of urban underbrush and rust,
a shadowy spy
for an unknown agency
 (shrouded even
 from evening shadows,
 it is all there,
 the key to the whole
 Vast Conspiracy,

 if I could only read
 the language of garbage,
 the neglected code
 of cold brick wall).

Beneath the slick surface
 of the official city
lies the hidden grid-work,
 disguised trap doors,
 secret passageways,
concealed escape routes,
 culverts and creek beds,
 spillways and alleys,
 vacant lots, decaying parks,
gaps in slats and cut chain-link,
 ivy asylum by empty warehouses,
 all the covert friends
of the dreaming fugitive.

R&D evolution

Machines make
better slaves
anyway

leak nothing
but oil
slap on

another
gasket good
as new

Song for an Old-Fashioned Christmas

So come on, boys,
let's wassail in the old sense,
beat down the doors
of the filthy rich,
cleanse their souls
with outlandish demands
for food, booze, and money.
Out of arrogance or fear
they'll all give in to us,
the drunken Saturnalian slaves
in the land of the free.

THE POET SPEAKS: *I am afraid that when it comes to talking about poetry, I have no grand pronouncements to make or theories to espouse. The necessity of the activity is evident by its ubiquity and continuity. I believe the uses of poetry to be much more varied than a short note can express. The Iliad and 'This Is Just to Say' are both valid as poetry, though wildly divergent in aims and means, the best reductionist efforts of literary Theory of Everything critics notwithstanding. For me, the poem begins with language; a word, a phrase, an image embodied in words. Often it ends there, with a sort of navel gazing self-reflectiveness. Sometimes, in what appears to happen in some of these poems, the gaze stays inward but is reflective of a subject (perhaps only apparently) external to the poem, a subject that often stands apart, isolated and separate. Apart, isolated, separate, A L O N E: we all feel this way sometimes. We know the allure of false gods in our despair. We feel resentment at the good fortune of those unworthy and unaware. We know the ache of waiting for love and the pain of its departure. We know that freedom is not always what we want and seldom what we get. We even know that art is not always the answer. Poetry is a way to see our common plight anew, transfigured and objectified through language, to be taken as needed.*

BIO: *Bob Carlton lives and works in Leander, TX. The externally verifiable facts concerning his life are thoroughly uninteresting. That is why he writes.*

