

Gary Beck/Motifs

A.I.-V & other pOems... ..

By **G**ary Beck

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes...On a clear night, if you travel far enough north, you can see all the stars in the firmament. If you go even further you are treated to the Aurora Borealis. I believe Galileo coined the phrase back in the early sixteen hundreds. (Good friend of mine but a bit of a late-sleeper.) Here is a constellation of poems that burst into colour like a magnetic midnight. Beck's poetry is present, yet speaks to The Ages. The man is a light pillar in the night sky...coming to Sudbury soon. Any critique of mine would appear obsequious and remain sycophantic—get your own licks in. (Spacing & format are poet's own.)*

A.I. - V

Automated cars
will take the drinkers home
from restaurants and bars
without killing anyone,
a welcome change
from DUI, DWI,
hit and runs,
when drivers need protection
to get home safely.

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Ravages

The fabulously wealthy
in their insidious way
are almost as dangerous
as the horde of Atilla
that looted, raped, burned,
totally destroyed
everything in their path,
while the lords of profit
indulge the middle class
with privileges,
until indulgence
is inconvenient,
then cherished comforts
are abruptly removed,
recession, burst bubble,
economic adjustments
that crush the vulnerable,
while the protected 1%
continue their excesses
like aristos of old,
confident that we the people
are not revolutionaries.

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Christmas

There is little peace on Earth
less goodwill to man
in a ritual celebration
in less than half the world,
so materialistic
the biggest activity
shopping, gift giving,
while those with insufficient means
to participate in spending sprees
fester with frustration,
as tv and the internet
show the prosperous
buying, buying, buying,
alluring goods, delectable foods,
none of them recognizing
the decadent signs
of the end of empire.

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Corroding America

My poor country
beleaguered by enemies
at home and abroad,
all cooperating
in the cruel destruction
of the American Dream,
once proclaimed
the light of the world
with the unique promise
of liberty and justice...
opportunity regardless...
And for a short while
many flourished like never before,
couldn't imagine how easy it was
for the lords of profit
to take it all away,
leaving ravaged lives
consigned to the underclass,
who they never noticed
until they joined them in poverty.

The Anti-President

Elected in a tainted contest
that fooled the frightened
into thinking they'd get jobs,
get rid of dirty immigrants,
do away with healthcare for millions,
break down the international order,
cancel plans to address climate change,
triumphantly cut taxes on the rich,
in short, do everything
to fracture democracy
and injure the country
with a tapestry of lies, lies,
and more lies.

The caretaker of the nation
abused responsibility for the people,
only concerned with his swollen ego
and blaming the past administration
for everything that went wrong,
but braggingly took credit
for everything they did right.

If he wasn't dangerous for our future
President Trump would just be
an offensive buffoon,
braying loudly to his followers.
But he's too ignorant to understand
the complexities of the world
making the old Know Nothing party
look intelligent.

Despite his injuring us,
we have to hope he lasts four years,
considering the line of succession.

If there's any future left
after his depredations
we'll get someone new in 2020,
hopefully a little better.

THE POET SPEAKS: *More than fifty years ago, at the age of sixteen, I began writing poetry. My first efforts were imitations of the Romantics; Shelley, Keats, Byron, my favorite, who brought order and structure into my chaotic life. School so far had been depressingly sterile, offering me little in the way of knowledge that I could not glean on my own, even less exciting was the pathetically sterile challenge of learning. So without a guide to direct my efforts, I plunged into the English Classical poets, having already read diversely in English drama and*

American fiction. I had memorized large chunks of Byron, Grey's Elegy and many others who delighted me, which was consoling as I struggled to find my path. After careful reading and evaluation of my poems, I found that I appreciated the developmental process, but concluded that they were wanting in originality. I burned them ceremoniously and reassuringly, this did not launch a career of book-burning. I did not regret their destruction and never looked back and said: 'If only I had saved them'!

I moved on to reading the American poets and devoured Eliot, Pound, Cummings, many others, who I found more timely than their English predecessors, sometimes almost as elegant, but never as beautiful. Beauty seems to be less compatible in the torment of the industrial age. Then, at the age of seventeen, I hitchhiked to California. I lived in San Francisco and discovered the Beat poets, who were just erupting in the formerly more tranquil landscapes of literature. I admired their vitality, but was turned off by their colossal naiveté. One of their loudest voices proclaimed that he saw the best minds of his generation destroyed by madness. I knew the best minds of my generation were preparing to send men to the moon. An immense and irreconcilable difference of opinion. Their movement offered me no safe harbour.

For the next few years I kept the semi-noiseless tenor of my ways, finding college almost as drab intellectually as high school, with virtually everyone focused on career. Whatever happened to the love of learning? Several slightly compatible companions helped keep me anchored, which let me endure in the wilderness of poetry. I, an emperor of impracticality, wanted to be a poet. I dreamed of tasting the immortal fire. I was ill-equipped for the academic environment, the protected haven of many poets, so I wandered aimlessly in an unknown land. One of the few benefits of my education was enough mastery of french to read the symbolist poets, then the more moderns, particularly Mallarmée and Apollinaire, from whom I rediscovered the invention of free verse. (French also allowed me in later years to translate Moliere for my theater work.) I read more and more of the younger American poets, looking for kinship. At the same time, I read the Russian, Japanese and Chinese poets, always feeling that the language barrier mandated translations, which altered the fabric of the writing. I began a search for my natural voice, an aspiration that imposed strenuous difficulties, since I was on my own and had to reinvent the wheel daily, a complicated task when working without blueprints.

The more American poets I read, the less connected I felt to their concept of poetry, however much I admired their artistic accomplishments. I saw a world aflame with constant upheavals, disasters man-made or natural, and progressively more destructive violence. Yet I found poets increasingly seeking esoteric metaphors, cherishing style above substance, placing form above content. Suddenly, all the poets were college graduates, many with advanced degrees in the field of poetry. I definitely did not belong in that company. I was the classic loner, but was sufficiently self-sustaining, or ego-driven not to seek entry into the networks of poetry. There was a corresponding classic irony. I, the consummate outsider, had been a theater director for most of my adult life. I had started in theater at the age of seventeen in San Francisco, plunging into an arts discipline that mandated group involvement! I found a curious symbiosis to the world of poetry, since I translated and directed the classics, as well as writing and directing new plays that dealt more and more with political and social issues. My poetry began to reflect the broader range of world problems, with the subject being my primary concern, not the expression thereof. This further distanced me from the practitioners of the art of poetry.

As the years went by, I found myself more concerned with the message, rather than the 'poetic' quality of poetry. I saw the arts begin to turn progressively inward, not in the nature of profound meditation, or seeking deeper understanding, but more in the aspect of flaunting

personal agonies and confessions. This is what our culture has wrought. It satiates the consciousness with an endless stream of pictorial imagery that stupefies the visual sense and degrades the uniqueness of verbal description. So poets, increasingly shunted aside by a growing public preference for non-stop tv, turned to baring their guts in anguished revelations of childhood abuse, or indignation for their neglected feelings. This type of indulgence and I are incompatible. To me, poetry is greater than my personal sufferings. I feel there should be room in the chambers of poetry for alternatives to academic products and disclosures of angst. I have chosen my own direction and have evolved to expressing thoughts and feelings about issues. And if I may have abandoned metaphor and simile, it is not that I despise them, but I must deliver what I believe to be a necessary blunt message. In an age of increasing insecurity and danger, we must still cherish poetry. But the guardians of the gates of poetry should allow examination of the problems of the world, with direct communication, in order to extend the diminishing influence of poetry on the events of our times.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Gary Beck has spent most of his adult life as a theater director and worked as an art dealer when he couldn't earn a living in the theater. He has also been a tennis pro, a ditch digger and a salvage diver. His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines and his published books include 28 poetry collections, 11 novels, 3 short story collections, 1 collection of essays and 2 books of plays. Published poetry books include: Dawn in Cities, Assault on Nature, Songs of a Clerk, Civilized Ways, Displays, Perceptions, Fault Lines, Tremors, Perturbations, Rude Awakenings, The Remission of Order, Contusions and Desperate Seeker (Winter Goose Publishing. Forthcoming: Learning Curve and Ignition Point). Earth Links, Too Harsh For Pastels, Severance, Redemption Value and Fractional Disorder (Cyberwit Publishing). His novels include Extreme Change (Winter Goose Publishing). and Wavelength (Cyberwit Publishing). His short story collections include: A Glimpse of Youth (Sweatshoppe Publications). Now I Accuse and other stories (Winter Goose Publishing) and Dogs Don't Send Flowers and other stories (Wordcatcher Publishing). Collected Essays of Gary Beck (Cyberwit Publishing). The Big Match and other one act plays (Wordcatcher Publishing). Collected Plays of Gary Beck Volume 1 and Three Comedies by Aristophanes translated, then directed by Gary Beck (Cyberwit Publishing). Gary lives in New York City