

crapbook et al

By

Frank William Finney

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... Frank William Finney is a gem, an absolute caution, a rascal of the first order. He has such a light hand and delightful take. In 'Scrapbook,' "Wow! Look at you there, / with all that hair—" and "we're smiling here / in this one. Frankly, I just feel not smiling for a camera unconscionable. How important can you propose to look up at the lake with streaks and stains of smudged noodle and Jello fruit salad splatters soiling the front of your shirt? So this strikes me as seriously ironic. 'The Witch of Winnepesaukee' "She cursed / the Ladies of the Lake / and turned their men / to swine." That's a given, not even a parlor trick in my neighborhood. And, apparently a Haruspex is a religious official who interprets omens by inspecting the entrails of sacrificial animals--when in Rome. Finney is simply appropriated, approbated, unabridged good fun . . . (Spacing is poet's own.)*

Scrapbook

Wow! Look at you there,
with all that hair—

And not a shot's
been photoshopped:

Hard to believe
we looked like that:

we're smiling here
in this one.

The Witch of Winnepesaukee

She cursed
the Ladies of the Lake
and turned their men
to swine.

Her breath still stains
her windowpanes
as she watches through
through the pines.

We've seen her
near the abattoir:
She loves
to watch the slaughter.

And those who've wept
to scape her wrath
have found their way
to water.

A Football Talks of Heartache

The signs on my back since I was young:
Kick me, I'm a Pisces—Very funny.

Some clever feet cut up the pitch.
I'm never in the air for long.

Some hold their hearts
before each match starts.

Others ignore
the sponsors' signs.

When the Haruspex Dined

With the Paupers

He always called
a scythe a scythe:

He dug his own
dirt with a shovel.

They thanked him
for his honesty

and invited him
home to their hovel.

They humbly served
him what they had:

which wasn't very much.

He ate his fill

and thanked them too,
and said he'd keep in touch.

Passing an Old School

I knew your cousin years ago
when ghouls taught gym
behind these walls.

We used to walk through
these same iron gates

where they stood
under floodlights

sucking on whistles
and clutching their
balls.

THE POET SPEAKS:

***‘Scrapbook’** – I was thinking about the kinds of photo albums and scrapbooks I remembered from my childhood days and how they differ from the kinds of digital ‘scrapbooks’ available to people nowadays. A reminder of happier times in a mental screenshot.*

***‘A Football Talks of Heartaches’**—for this piece I imagined a football airing its grievances, even though being kicked around is just part of the game. The signs that appear on the boards around a stadium and the warning signs of a heart attack are conflated. The football itself is inflated.*

***‘When the Haruspex Dined with the Paupers’** - A meditation on hypocrisy with a lemon twist.*

*Sometimes my poems are sparked from some recurrent itch that needs scratching. Such is the case with **‘Passing an Old School.’** In my schooldays I wasn’t exactly the favourite of the coaches once I reached high school. I didn’t care much for them either.*

‘The Witch of Winnepesaukee’

I have been writing poems (which I thought of as songs which would later be set to music) since I was quite young. Rock music played a huge part in my life, and I listened intently to the lyrics of all kinds of songs from an early age. I remember asking one of the ‘big kids’ on the school bus to jot down the lyrics of Beatle songs for me. Little treasures torn from a notebook. In middle school I spent most of my study hall time writing lyrics to imaginary songs much to the amusement of my classmates who wondered how I could fill up so many pages in the course of the ‘study’ hour without doing any homework.

By the time I got to high school I was rocking with my first bands and although we mostly played cover songs in order to land our first gigs (i.e. school dances and parties), I also began to collaborate with my bandmates in writing songs. I was the designated lyricist. My first “published” poems appeared in a high school literary magazine. I’m still able to recite one of them – a rather dark and pretentious little rhyming number that impressed my English teacher enough to read them to the class in his Dylan Thomas voice.

*After seven years of trying to ‘make it’ in the New England music scene (and alas, not making it very far) I realized I’d better find something else to fall back on, and so I decided to try my luck at university. I earned a BA in English and a Certificate in Creative Writing (under the tutelage of Martha Collins and Lloyd Schwartz) from the University of Massachusetts at Boston where had a poem published in *Howth Castle*, the university’s literary magazine. Around this time I started to send my poems out to other literary magazines and journals. I guess I’ll keep at till the muse or the candle burns out.*

Stylist Influences

I have eclectic tastes both in music and in poetry. I’ve been influenced by the works of such a wide range of lyricists and poets over the years. What? Do you really want me to name names? Well, I’ve been moved, amused, and enthused by the lyrics of songwriters such as Bob Dylan, Ian Anderson, Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, Neil Young, Bob Marley, David Bowie, Elvis Costello, Frank Zappa, Roger Waters . . . I could go on.

From the literary canon, there are the heavyweights such as Yeats, Wallace Stevens, Philip Larkin, Seamus Heaney, and so many others. I enjoy reading the poems of contemporary poets such as Mary Karr, Billy Collins, Roger McGough, Ted Kooser, Charles Simic, Hannah Lowe . . . I also relish reading translations of poems from different countries, various historical periods and cultures. The lists are long and continue to grow, but they always seem woefully incomplete and inadequate to me.

I’m just as apt to read from a chapbook by a relatively unknown contemporary poet as I am to reread old favourites from a bulky anthology containing classic pieces from the various poetic genres and movements that span the centuries.

I almost always keep a book of poems on my nightstand to keep me company on any given night. Part of my bedtime ritual involves reading at least one poem (sometimes a dozen or more) before dousing the lights out.

Why is poetry important to me?

‘Well . . . for God’s sake, it’s the only thing that matters’ --E.E. Cumming

Such a notion might be stretching things a bit, but I can’t really imagine my life without it. And I’m not just joshing about that.

AUTHOR BIO: Frank William Finney is a poet and former lecturer from Massachusetts. He lived in Thailand from 1995 until 2020, where he taught literature at Thammasat University. His work has recently appeared in *The Raven’s Perch*, *The Thieving Magpie*,

Tofu Ink Arts Press, and other places. His chapbook *The Folding of the Wings* is forthcoming from *Finishing Line Press*.