

# 9 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 (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

Carlton  
"Mission..."  
page 2  
same stanza



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.*

