

CORTISOL and other poems...

By Robert Beveridge

Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes: There is something quite exquisite in these writings. Poets appear to me to be people who do not put up walls or shield themselves from others; they remain forever open, letting the world reflect straight into their souls un-refracted, which makes them both courageous and most vulnerable. Beveridge invites us to do this, his use of language and themes are fascinating to me. I think my favourites here are CORTISOL and POETRY TWO, but it is hard to choose—who hasn't lamented that scrap of paper misplaced or the perfect lines accidentally deleted. Find yours, read and be inspired to write '...the pencil your enemy.' (Spacing is poet's own.) HS

CORTISOL

The sleeper metabolizes citrus,
sprouts, the motif of stucco
in Luchino Visconti's mid-period
filmography. The IV keeps him
hydrated, dulls the worst
of the pain, but the fog rolled
in this morning and isn't like
to burn off until the clouds
unleash their payload over a world
that could be just the same
as yesterday's, or could be
tomorrow's zombie apocalypse
today. Where were you when
the Great Coma of 2016 fell upon us?
Asleep in your easy chair, lost
in dreams of what used to be,
unable to remember breakfast
but with perfect recall of the 1979
Windies? You're not alone. We all
watched *Sullivan's Travels* too many
times for our own good, relied
on Poverty Row to give us
the promised happy ending.

JORNADA

A single boat
passes as you sit on the bridge.
Another two days
and it might all have worked.
You can't remember
the last time you had a cigarette
or tore the sky
with pincers.
A cat leaps onto your knee,
then bounds off the way it came.

LEXICON

The redwoods are thick, impenetrable
on their own, but the thorns burst
from the ground, slithered up trunks
like buttered tendrils of blueberry
waffle. Turned an entire forest
into a hedge that brooks neither
error nor erasure. The letters little
more than lines in occult formations
to your eyes, the pencil your enemy.
And the only tree with a tunnel
through its bole hit the ground
last weekend in a storm.

A MINUTE TO PRAY

Trencher holds as many coal biscuits as they think you can swallow. Even the sun has turned its back on you, wretch, though your keepers have not yet seen fit to divulge your transgression, or even whether one exists. Another few days and it's possible the green-screen prophecy will come true: you will die of dysentery. You can feel it well in the deepest recesses of your bowels, as immanent and sure and the knowledge that you've forgotten your girlfriend's birthday, or whether she prefers McDonald's fries to Burger King's. What can you do, other than look out the window and reflect upon the canned hams that block your view of a sunless sky?

In the dream the boat carries
us to the correct destination
but I cannot remember
what that destination is

In the dream the man
in the funeral suit and black
top hat orates while he stands
in front of us in line turned
around to look straight at you

In the dream the toucan pecks
at your head and we hear
the sound carry across the endless
water but what it bounces off
to feed its echoes we cannot see

In the dream we are whole, our
bodies are not broken, when we
listen we hear, when we walk
we move across the deck
and do not fall against the mast

In the dream we take turns
with the spyglass while we mop
the deck and we tell each other
that when the deck gets cleaner
we will see a promontory
and it will welcome us

In the dream it is beans and rice
again and a squeeze of lime
in the whiskey jug to keep
our teeth in our mouths

In the dream the sun never
rises, never sets, is always
just at the point where the clouds
are either black or red
as if they have never been white

In the dream I never thing
to ask if you remember when
we boarded or where we come from

PERCH

The bark of the heart tree
under our palms is rough,
hand- and footholds hidden only
to those who would not climb.
The branches above do not offer
comfort, shelter to just anyone.
From the highest, it is said,
those who sit hand in hand
can see eternity, what is beyond
the horizon, or maybe just
their own desires reflected.

I have discovered the secret:
to love the climb as much
as the promise of destination.
And so it is that, tangled in your limbs,
I see all those things
in the salt-slick twining of our fingers.

POETRY TWO

I write this poem
in a notebook
called *Poetry II*
because the first
one got stolen
along with a hundred fifty
bucks' worth of books
and my favorite pipe.

There were two original
poems in that notebook
that I hadn't put on
the computer yet.
They were worth
more than the books to me,
and even though the pipe
wasn't meerschaum,
it was a sentimental
favorite, but the poems
were still worth more.

So I bought another notebook
six months ago,
and I've been trying to rewrite
those two poems
again ever since

ROCK SALT

The crack in the wall
of the universe lets out
the entropy, the matter,
the spilled cheese
on the floor of the movie
theater. Sweat collects
behind your knees, the secret
ingredient in your world-
famous tortellini. A few
words in an ancient tongue
as it goes into the oven
and it never comes out wrong,
and your clay bakeware
has yet to fail you.

SAWFISH 3AM

Most people don't know
that the the collective
of sawfish is the confederacy

like larks come in exaltations
or soldiers in bodybags

There's an aquarium
full of confederate sawfish
in front of my hand

that holds the glass
with the muddled mint,
the ice, the bourbon

with just a drop of filter water

and in the model of the burnt
house amidst the gravel I think
I see the bones of our soldiers

STUCK

I whisper the names
of the things around me
wish I could
reach out to grasp them
one by one

but my arms are bound
my hands can touch nothing
save one another

these things manifest
in stone, in tarmac

lamp
in a pile of asphalt

desk
in a hunk of concrete

greeting card
in a vault of slag

forbidden desire in a beehive

but I cannot reach out

THE POET SPEAKS: *My inspirations for these pieces were all over the map—unsurprising, given that the oldest of them (“Poetry Two”) is from somewhere in 1987-88 and the most recent (“167”) is from earlier this year. The common theme that runs through them is pop culture, or at least the weird way I define pop culture (most, I hope, would pick up the Flesheaters riff in the title for “A Minute to Pray”, and almost as many would pick up the Svankmajer nod in the opening lines, but “Sawfish 3AM” is entirely down to my friendship with Philly poet Stan Heleva in the early nineties, and specifically his poem “McClellan”). “Jornada” riffs on John M. Bennett’s piece of the same title from his 1992 chap Was Ah, “Poetry Two” from Bukowski (I was keeping up pretty steadily with him at the time, so it had to be something from You Get So Alone...). Most of the rest... oh, no. “Cortisol” is the title of a compilation cassette released on ZNS Tapes in the late eighties, that I didn’t discover until decades later, but ZNS were one of the hubs of European industrial music, which has been as pervasive an influence on my work as damn near anything else.*

The only thing missing from that flood of influence is the dada/surreal bent that comes out in nearly everything I do (poetry, music, media criticism, cooking, you name it). I cut my teeth on Michael Benedikt’s The Poetry of Surrealism anthology in the early eighties; Michael Hamburger’s translation of Apollinaire’s “Zone”, and Benedikt’s own translations of Daumal, are still some of the things in this world I love best. They helped me see, as an outcast-by-choice high school student, that in order to find

meaning in the world, you have to look at it perhaps a few degrees from true and see if you could dig up something interesting in the innards. I've been doing it ever since.

BIO: Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *Collective Unrest*, *Cough Syrup*, and *Blood & Bourbon*, among others.