

UU Montgomery, Alabama's Poetry Café Chapbook 2008



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To Have it Happen Again

I can imagine how fast
his followers gathered when
they heard the man was coming
to the place where Lazarus lay.
They had not marveled at this
new miracle before. They knew
to expect something spectacular
since there had never been any
dulled moment where he was.

This day would be no different.
Forget the people; imagine the
man who had already crossed
over; riddled with disgust to find
himself redefined by flesh, living
to soothe his mourners for
the sake of their sadness;

When, possibly, all he
could think of then was
of death's pain, the bliss
of having gone beyond it,

only to be brought back,
to have it happen again.

Willie James King

The Fallen

A fragile robin's egg lay in my path, unbroken
about forty-five feet below it's mother's nest.
Stepping over the unseen fetus, the first
rays of dawn reflected it's tranquil blue, cooler
than the required mother's 104 degree feathered belly.
No more than fourteen short days before escape
from that hollow inside to inevitable blue skies.
Then, there must be feedings every fifteen minutes.
Impossible to even contemplate.
Now late for my classroom full of disabled
children, also demanding attention, slowly learning
their way out, I hurry along surprised
to find my palm cradling a tiny blue shell.

Cheryl Lynn Moyer

Untitled

The soul within me longs to be a part of you.
It chafes at its chains
And stretches out its bindings.
Foolish child!
It will not know
That I have bound it
Only
To preserve it.
As it cries out to me, I punish it -
Reduce it to tears
And small,
Keening
Wimpers
Of longing.

Teri Sweeney

For Maisie

If ever I had taken pains to look
I might have seen the dark behind the smile,
Have read the sadness in your face's book
And stopped, to sit and chat a little while.
I might have seen the shadow o'er the sun
Of bright delight that filled those deep blue eyes
Upon my coming - stayed instead of gone
And listened to the fond and endless stories
Of triumphs past, of bygone, halcyon days
When every crown was yours! You basked in praise,
But scorned to meet your sister's envious eye
Till all the clapping hands were quiet, still,
And you were left - alone, and old, and ill.

Teri Sweeney

Alabama Heat

Lo, lo the hot winds blew
And the clouds were wont to fade.
Save us from this devil's breath
The village elders prayed.

The crops that stood in measured rows
Like soldiers on parade,
Wait brown and parched upon the ground
For a furrowed common grave.

The daisies and the goldenrod
That graced the county way,
Laid bent and wilted upon the banks,
Victims of the devil's sway.

Gone was the beauty of the humming bird
And the call of the whippoorwill
And gone was the chorus of the cicada choir
From the trees along the hill.

The preacher stood before the people,
Raised his arms and swore,
He had seen a pale horse gallop fast
Along the valley floor.

He threw the church doors open
And invited the people in.
He guided them to the altar
To purge their souls of sin.

They knelt before the crucifix
Their knees upon the floor,
And promised God Almighty
They would go and sin no more.

Black clouds and rolling thunder
Scaled the mountain wall.
Lightning pierced the laden clouds
And freed the rain to fall.

Quiet rivers and babbling brooks
Green fields sprayed with dew.
Flowers and bouncing butterflies
Life had begun anew!

The lonely preacher bows his head
He knows where his people are.
Where pent-up spirits and passions flow
At Paddy O'Riley's bar.

F.J. Gough

We Shall See

There is no place, perhaps
Where you and I
Can both see love the same
But then, the light and shadows
Play their different games
Across the garden
Yet share their father sun
And when the moon
Ducks now beneath a cloud....
Or is seen through the upstairs window
Rather than with branches laced
As in the quiet yard
It's safe to say
There is but *one* soft silvery orb.

Kevin A. Shuey

We Dance

We dance in unbridled joy
Then try to draw the steps
Upon the floor

Pointing with zeal
At painted feet on stone
We extol the virtue of such steps

But where is the joy?
From whence has *it* come?

While walking on a certain road
The light of perfect love
Dawns in our heart.

We note the spot, the day, the time
And of that place would make a shrine

Does His love shine on this road only?

When the light, the order, the clarity...
When the joy of Truth shines forth
We cling to the shadows it casts.

Listen to Rumi.
His new rule is:
“Break the wine glass, and fall toward the glassblower’s breath.”

Kevin A. Shuey

That Old Feelin'

Sixteen old farts playing 40's charts—
Miller, Basie, the Dorseys, Goodman, Shaw—
strictly recreation,
beenthere/donethat a thousand times,
a bit worn now and not so hot, and yet
nostalgia is not lost on them.

In
walks
chick vocalist,
damn, the niftiest fifty you ever saw,
oozing & bluesing premenopausal charisma,
yeah very hot yet somehow very cool,
and then, a tension arises, attention arises
like an old pecker gone suddenly stiff,
and eyes go flashing, cymbals crashing
hormones kindling harmony,
band swinging out above all clefs,
They find in the music/
the music finds in them
a re-creation,
some new *it*, or some old feeling
that's never old, and will not ever be—
It's what the music sings about
when music is set free.

Charles Suhor

Comes the Duke

What do I know of these things?
I'm five years old and working a hand-cranked Victrola
with some brittle records sent over by Nannainne.
What I know is a Ninth Ward shotgun double
and swampy August air that settles on New Orleans
like roux-rich gumbo heaped on rice.
Everything is fresh and baby-bald to me.
Here's "Lombardo" with a languid song of Indian braves and squaws.
Here's a limping something from "Boyd Senter and his Senterpedes"
Here's a Bluebird side that asks, with some appeal,
Why don't we do this more often?
Just what we're doing tonight?
(Nannainne calls that one "zippy.")
Here's Sharkey Bonano, more like it, with High Society
and on the flipside someone plays a penny-whistle blues.
And then, exotic and luminous a visit from robed royalty
bursting through a louvered door,
comes the Duke: I Can't Give You Anything But Love.

To sort it out in kid-mind isn't easy.
Hey, the saxes there are moving in a different sort of way.
A singer who sounds a lot like Morton Downey
is floating atop a dance-me rhythm.
And then, what's this? It's hard to say—
a muted trumpet, maybe, or gravel-voiced scatman—
some happy guttural thing that wants to jump the grooves, for sure,
and new parts of my body holler, Yes,
You can leap free with this jazz,
This swingout, bounceback man called Duke.
Decades later, stacks of 78s and 45s and LPs and CDs later,
after how many gigs and reads and writes
and all-night jams and conversations later,
after all that and this morning, too, what do I know of these things?

Only that nothing is more true or joyful than lessons learned
with the first coming of the Duke:
Leap free, mes amis, with love and swing,
with the saxes and singers and growling things of jazz.

Charlie Suhor

Published in Brilliant Corners: A Journal of Jazz and Literature (Winter 2002)

Carolyn by the Numbers

In ten days she will reach seventy-nine.
She's not ready for it,
Still thinks of herself as the sixteen-year-old girl
Who cut short her childhood to marry Paul, twenty-one,
Her first sweetheart.
Now she is widowed from her third husband,
Happy with a younger man of sixty-nine.
She loves Frank, but will not marry.
She'd lose the pension from Manny.

Her only son died of terrible wounds at twenty-two In 1968.
Quang Tri, Viet Nam. Tet. She is so proud to be a gold-star mother.
Her daughter turns sixty this year and is grandmother to seven.

She wears layers of self-designed clothes,
Awful as the handmade sweaters her three grandsons laughed at,
Were forced to wear once for her, then threw away.
She wishes she had lived in New York City,
Dreams she would have been discovered there, been famous.
Crocheted dresses, now at last the height of fashion!
She has worn them for so many years she can't remember
When she made the first one.

She has sent nice things to all three sisters.
Never saw them wearing any.
But then she seldom sees these younger women,
Seventy-seven, seventy-two, sixty-three.
Thinks of them as less mature, even childish.

How could she, who feels so young, know so much?
More than most. They never seem to catch on.
Never agree with her, at least not completely.
Being older, feeling younger, days pass.
Thirty or so each month.
She waits it out.
Expecting in time to meet a ratifying God.

Ester H. L. Prudlo

The Children of Summer

“We write to taste life twice.” - Anais Nin

White banks of clover
draw them like bees.
A welter of scratches
and skinned knees, children
know the bliss of running.
choosing sides, choosing friends,
making a chain of flowers,
patting out mud pies.

Dirt-smeared and sweaty,
they taste sour grass,
split maypops and hold
on their tongues the fleshy seeds,
pick passionflowers
that wind along the fence,
sip nectar from honeysuckle.

Making pacts, telling secrets,
they climb trees,
bombard their enemies
with pawpaws and chinaberries,
take prisoners, make treaties,
tumble and get up again,
cry and sing until the sun sets
and fireflies appear;

then heavy-limbed and sleepy,
children watch the moon,
a silver quarter they're too tired to spend
instead, they tuck it away
like a coin tied in a handkerchief
kept for ice cream.

Sue Scaf

Reprinted from What the Moon Knows

HAIKU

A bird suspended
overhead in midst of flight
seemingly stops time.

A child without love
is a flower without soil
It withers and dies.

Born into this world
with bald heads and round bellies,
leaving the same way.

I stood behind you.
While I stood in your shadow
You stood in my light.

Loretta Bacon

Haiku Yearly Cycle

Steel blue winter dawn,
Freezes twigs in crystal grip.
Far off smoke won't rise.

Crocus bold erupts.
Robin hops, stops and broods, as
Spring, and all things end.

White blue sea dances.
Gail blown sail flings clouds of foam,
Then flies – No a Gull!

Look! Phoenix Maple
Burns bright once more at dusk - Yes!
We live forever.

George Demuth

The Summer That Stunted The Growth of the Kudzu

Branches and other windblown
Debris littered the lawn;
The storm never came
Bringin the rain. It passed
Over the westward rim
Of our summer world,
As dust settled, and
Doves gathered in twos,
Their coos sounded like woe and,
When cars sped up or down the graveled road,
Grinding rocks, the dust was drawn skyward,
Rosy as ever, offering up its powdery
Resemblance of fire.
I never thought
A time would come
I would be crying:
O No! Not the sun.

Willie James King

Haiku # 10

A wounded dove sings
Of life and death in the same
Song without weeping.

Willie James King

Secret of Old Age -
(One week in Greene County, AL 2004)

In worn overalls as patched
and thin as his shoes and
with a rusty bucket in hand,
he walked along the side of the
road. He was 74 years old
and carrying fresh cut collard
greens to his daughter's house
13 miles away.

Minnie who was 69 was
running off to work to take
care of an 'old woman' of 91.

Sarah was 82 and her mom 99.
They sewed quilts for a living
and were preparing for the
mother's 100th birthday party
soon to come.

I stopped to ask directions
from Georgia who was hanging
clothes on the line, she said
she was 105. She had cleaned
houses all her life.

So I asked her the Alabama
secret of old age:

Was it the slow living in the warm sun?
Was it the clean air or pure water?
Was it good food prepared by loving hands?

She smiled and said 'Yes, it's all that'

'But mostly..... it's the hard work'.

Then she hung another faded shirt
up on the line.

Cheryl Lynn Moyer
(Published in *Alabama Anthology* 2007)

You Are Welcome

On the first night of your life I loved you
Having loved you since your first stirring
Not knowing who you would be.
My pain (soon forgotten) brought you
Bloody and screaming
Into too bright light
As I called you by your name.
You can't possibly remember that night.
I will never forget.

Ester H. L. Prudlo

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scars *noopyeggnid*

Editor@scars.tv

<http://scars.tv>

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