

POETRY *for the* MASSES

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"Poetry cannot be defined, only experienced." - Christopher Logue

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SUMMERTIME, 1943

—after Edward Hopper

Although I don't detect the slightest breeze by looking at you
I can see the wide outline of your right thigh (even the faint hue of flesh mixing with the almost-blue of your dress)
As you stand on the cement steps and wait ... for whom?
Screenless and open over your right shoulder, the shade half-drawn on the lives inside

Like the brim of your hat dimming your eyes, the first floor window looks out onto
A sidewalk, with no treebelt, that reflects the noontime sun in such a way
It reminds me of Main Street and Liberty, in Springfield, Massachusetts,
And of a tale I heard too many times as a child, about my *pepée*, François, who,

When living across from the bus station, used to urinate out of his first floor
Living room window while the pigeons pecked at rotten chicken and exhaust clung to
tenement awnings;
And once, deep into an afternoon drunk, the neighbors left their rain-slicked rubbers
Out on the sidewalk to dry, and François filled them up. For some reason,

The sidewalk around you is completely clean, calling attention to the fact that this is only a
painting,

And not Springfield. Though you do stand perfectly composed in your isolation,

The fan on inside that window promises an occupant within. And though your hat may suggest otherwise,
I notice no slip beneath your cotton day dress, telling me you may be waiting on a man
like Frank.

Craig Blais
Seoul, South Korea

Poem for Display in an Abandoned Factory

Why is there no battlefield memorial
here, where generations of workers
ground down their lives?
Why no place for the veterans to return,
pride mingling with grief,
clutching made-in-China flags
& mumbling about sacrifice?
Why doesn't the county historical society
raise money to preserve this site just as it was,
before the pink slips came—
a mass unmanning—
& the great steel taskmasters were unbolted
from the shop floor & sold for scrap?
Why doesn't anyone except us trespassers,
sneaking in like the weeds & sparrows,
want to remember which parts
were assembled here
& where they fit?

Dave Bonta
Tyrone, PA

Snow in a Gdansk Courtyard

On a kitchen window's slate ledge,
a swallow, white chest dusted orange
from the moth in its beak. Across
the courtyard, a black dog perched
atop its house, one ear pricked
to the wind. A rusty nail
sticks up from a sodden
half-buried plank, shocking the snow
with its faint russet pulse. And a child's
distant croup-cough seems to stir
snow from frost-glazed branches.
Here is the cloud-helmeted sun, and here
is the world smoothed and close to the eyes,
like the gleam of cupped hands bathing a face
above a sink's darkening basin.

Adam Day
Lexington, KY

Naming the Animals

for Billy Collins

Every few months I haul Rascal to the kennel
I'm struck by the poverty of my imagination.
Here is no Spot. There's no Fido. No Pluto or Spike.

One pen might read "Cobalt" instead of Blue.
In another, a pair of Beagles, Calvin and Luther.
There might be a Sapo, squatting like a toad.

Then a Poodle called Dolly. A Great Dane, Ham.
You think you know when a dog's been named by an adult.
And then you come upon—no lie—Pinocchio. Hershey. Icarus.

You hear with your eye Woolf. Tundra. Big Ben.
With what ease you match the word to the breed!
The sentiment to the inner longings of the master!

Driving home, the impossible is no longer possible.
You're the one chosen to christen new species
the way the wealthy name thoroughbreds:

Mamma's Bank Account, Gerund Phase, Hopscotch.
Robert's Rule Of Anarchy, Gone Fishing, Threestrikes.
Well Like A Reservoir, Anna Maze, Habitation.

Pleas Pleas Pleas, Ticket To Ride, WCW's Wife,
The Jersey Turnpike, Sweet Hot It's on a day like this
you suckle one of the myriad of the muse's breasts,

knowing the Ark as the flagship in an endless line of craft.

Karl, Elder
Sheboygan, WI

The Children's Crusade II

The body is a gate,
a test. The body
is the iron worker's toy
that makes you believe
its two pieces
can never come apart,
until you see how they do.
And when you hold
each piece separate,
as though you were God,
you will know
which piece to bury.

Jason Scnehneiderman
Brooklyn, NY

Chinatown Blues

Flat-footed, I walk the trick-bricks of Chinatown,
Their cobblestones dusted with faux gold,
Into that bailiwick suspended by time.
Past tassel-caps and Confucian faces, into the purple whorl of mist,
Past monkey-men with cream-faces who long to be kissed,
I wander forwards, remembering the ghosts of yore in the viridian light,
Where those glazed duck heads hung by the windows, tongue-tied, loathe
To say the truth of this Chinamen's paradise.
Where jade-faced crones remembered my name and offered me incense
Burning like a topaz light, and octogenarians paraded around on bamboo canes
Cooing to their cockatoos who enjoyed the pomp and ruckus.
With bok choy boisterousness and dim sum frivolity we laid down
Our oriental carpets, riding the dragon, till it was tipsy in the night.
And the sun sank like a molten egg into the sea-born hills,
And the young women in chongsams ate up all the frills,
The wizened dragon ladies breathing fire till the end of the day,
Jade rings on their fingers, a haze of opium covering the city
Like a silver stream of fog. The pipa played on,
while rice in buckets were devoured,
No matter how many times they heard the music,
Their tawny faces never soured. And so,
Amidst pagodas painted pagan green like the color
Of the grass, the Chinese built their temple,

Carrie Chang
New York, New York