

POETRY FOR THE MASSES

“Poetry cannot be defined, only experienced.”—Christopher Logue

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JUNCTION

There is no el train in Auburn, no steady rumble
like thunder on a summer afternoon. Suburbans
honk and veer behind my neighbor’s combine,

pass, speed up to the light, line up at four-ways
for permission to turn. The Cleveland and Eastern
Interurban used to pass through here,

the Maple Leaf Route curving slow through Newbury
to Amish country, carrying produce and passengers
in to the big city to see a show at the Hippodrome.

Today, the maples shiver along the upraised curve
as if a train has just passed through, but it is only me
or the wind. I do not hear the click-clack on the raised track,

the crowd of travelers standing in the woods waiting
for the junction’s switch to take them north or further west.
Now the forest and road are silent; last season’s leaves

crunch beneath my feet. Syrup drips from its spile
into cold, steel buckets. A car swings south down
Munn Road, wondering at the steady slope in the woods

and then the thought is gone. The sun rolls steady on its track
across the blue, though I’m the one who’s moving—I
and the farmer and the Suburban and the earth composting

beneath my feet, faster than these fleeting minutes.
How slow the shift in shadows; how soon
I’m surprised to be chilled in the late afternoon.

Sarah M. Wells
Ashland, OH

SUBURBAN PARANOIA

Just once, I want to walk
down the block,
slide the bottom
of my shoes across the newly paved, hot
concrete, browse the neighbor’s
flower beds, zucchini garden,
ant piles wet from the sprinkler system,
instead of spotting holes in fences,
half-open garages,
rotting tree houses—
any place to crawl into
in case the man easing up slow
in his old Ford pick-up
stops, and stuffs
my body into the other side
of his tinted windows—
so dark, not even sunlight
could break through.

Amanda Kimmerly
Austin, TX

THIS POEM

This poem,
mass-produced
by East Asian child poets
working for water and rice
arrives packaged and priced
under the bright shiny lights
of Wal-Mart and Target,
from where it’s taken home,
read once,
and thrown away,
just like the paper plates
on aisle six.

Chuck Augello
Randolph, NJ

THE LONGEST TIME

After the game,
we went to the local pizza joint
and ordered hard-plastic pitchers
of frothy root beer to celebrate.

We peeled the wrappers off our straws,
wadded them into spitballs,
and shot them at each other.

We played Ms. Pac Man and Donkey Kong,
inhaling their acid trip
storylines and sound effects.

We fed quarters into the jukebox
and crooned the lyrics of
“For the Longest Time”
along with Billy Joel.

Because even though
we were only 11 years old,
we had just won
the Little League championship,
and singing a love song to a woman
just seemed like
the next logical step.

Bob Cengr
Los Angeles, CA

UNEMPLOYMENT

At least at the end of the day
there is chocolate.

Thick, dark, wet cake
a slinky, sliding-off-the-sides
kind of frosting, ooh

to carve a spoon in, to roll
and savor between the teeth
and the tongue,

chocolate: hand-made,
tongue-kissed.

One thing done well.

Erica Romkema
Boulder, CO

SYMBOLISM

I realized some years ago
that I didn’t need to stand
before the burial ground
of the dead to be close to them,

but that they existed in corridors
of thought, and anywhere, be it
earth or concrete, pulpit or leaf,
I could be enveloped by their spirits:

spirits kept alive by human feeling.

And so, markers upon the earth
or urns sitting quietly on their mantles,
ashes scattered in the wind or dissolved
by water, they are, simply but importantly

symbols
calming our fear
that we may forget.

James Eric Watkins
Bedford, KY