Three Poems

Jack Troy
Reading co-sponsored by Kvasir and Aughwick Poets and Writers

March 8th, 2008

What wind! In torrents this afternoon, thrusting out of the west through the venturi of Jack’s Narrows.

Approaching Mt. Union from the south, under hundreds of vultures circling river and town, how could I not pull over, quitting human traffic to marvel at theirs – so open to whim. No acre of sky was empty of them, buoyed on millions of pinions, glissading thermals, miming in cocky antics those slipstream tides surging them afloat.

The highest hung motionless as kites, while those quartering over the river, giddily off kilter, corrected for gusts, their heads steady, fronting visceral machinery of wing-sockets. Had it not been for their dozens of dozens I’d have been blind to the wind, but they figured it, swooping down slopes they’d found, only to hang rocking, bored by their own miracles.
For the Standing Stone Coffee Company

We are more than a polite gaggle, clustered uncommonly close in this clean, well-lighted place where steam rises from our cups and we face the reader, fully present. We are luring glances of voyeur pedestrians, nearly successful at not looking into our poetry terrarium. The driver of the pickemup truck eases up to the STOP sign, asks his passenger, “Whatehy really doin in there?” A tall dog straining to cop its first good look at a poet’s back through the window has its leash jerked by the woman it is taking for a walk.

We are the ones rejected from cheerleading tryouts because our attention-spans were too long. Now we sit expectantly in the presence of someone else’s dreams, alert to any overlapping with our own. We are cheerleading for poetry, awaiting the Hail Mary stanza, the verbal dunk with or without the slam, or simple evidence that, against all odds, one of us made something from nothing with words – an original thing we didn’t know we were waiting to hear.

We have excommunicated ourselves from the Church of Traumatic Haste, with its instant coffee communion, seeking solace here, where the owner-priest uses the espresso machine’s asthmatic gargle to edit botched similes and despondent spondees. His gasping steam-clouds redolent of fair-trade beans can only mean

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some stanzas just don’t make the cut.

Poetry, history, geology, metaphysics, and numerology convene on this southeast corner of the county seat, with its invisible, faith-based Standing Stone from the Devonian Time Zone, where a 1-way street named for an 18th century governor intersects a 2-way at 13th, marked by a 3-way STOP, while in the back room someone’s undies whirl on the hot cycle, humping socks and towels for quarters, their exothermic vapors wafting to the alley like a gateway drug, luring robotic urchins from their Game Boys, Cokes, and Twinkies.

Listen. The poetry choir is chanting its ambiguous mantra, “Go, poet, go!”

**Ice Fishing at Mountain Lake An Hour Past Dawn**

Bill Glenn and I trundle our gear out of his Jeep, loading the sled, heading offshore a hundred yards past the lodge’s dock, above springs where trout winter twenty one feet down. The ice-auger brupps once, catches, then his feet are lost in backlit chips. His bit trepans the crystal skull. As if relieved of something deep, the lake heaves itself out the eight inch hole, puddling in a silent sigh.

Four lines in, salmon eggs on tandem hooks, we wait the good wait, layered in wool, in fleece, and the down of geese like those puckering Mountain Lake that August
midnight when the moon floated
beside our canoe, round as the dark hole
we hover over.