



buffaloFOCUS: Paul Hogan

BlazeVOX 2k9

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Introduction

I love to make up this section. It is a chance for me to work with a local poet. Generally we feature someone I know from Rust Belt Books, school, or some other poetic event that always just seem to happen around here. But this time, Buffalo Focus is pleased to bring you the work from, as R. D. Pohl says, “one of the Buffalo arts community's most influential voices.” It is my real pleasure to have three new poems and five poems from Hogan’s latest book *Points of Departures*.

Buffalo is a great place for the arts, and poetry thrives here, in ways one would not readily expect. This is part of the reason for this section, Buffalo may lag behind in many things that other American cities of comparable size have, but the Poetry, we have plenty of that! This has a lot to do with 40 great years of the UB English department, their resources, graduates and other delightful flourishings in and around the city. Michael Basinski, the curator of the Poetry Collection at the University at Buffalo, tells me Hogan was influenced by both John Logan and Robert Creeley of English Department at UB hence he finds his roots in the grand thriving of the Buffalo community of late 1970's early 1980s. So there is an intensity of emotion that he gets both from JL and RC. And [his] rhythm and line, or what should I say - what Paul imagines as a poem derives from the Logan/Creeley lineage.

What we all consider to be the normal poetry scene comes to us, inherited from a long line of readings and events Paul has been directly involved with. So it is his leadership in the past that makes our present so vibrant. Here are some things Paul has been involved with:

Writer's Cramp Series at CPG from 1982 to 1988 (co-coordinated with Nancy J. Parisi); 'Walking the Dog' Series for Robert Creeley when the Gray Chair Fellow (83-85); Spoken Arts on WBFO from 1984 – 1987, from which he just donated about 150 shows/75 hours or so on tape to the Poetry Collection at the University at Buffalo through Just Buffalo). Hogan also co-edited Buffalo Press with George Grace et.al

He recently read as part of the Gray Hair Reading series in fall 2007. And a wonderful review on this reading in November, 2008, *On Paul T. Hogan's "Points of Departures"* by R.D. Pohl can be found here: <http://buffalonews.typepad.com/artsbeat/2008/12/on-paul-t-hogan.html>.

Paul publishes infrequently so this is a real treat to present these poems!

Best, Geoffrey

Geoffrey Gatza
Editor & Publisher

BlazeVOX [books]
Publisher of weird little books

Author Biography:

Paul has been with the John R. Oishei Foundation for nine years, the last two as Vice President. Prior to being recruited by the Foundation, Paul worked for Kaleida Health as director of sponsored programs development and director of research administration. He began at Kaleida at Millard Fillmore Hospital as director of the Think First Injury Prevention Program in the schools for the Department of Neurosurgery.

In addition to Community Health, Paul has worked for Literacy Volunteers of New York State, which is the statewide administrative office for 45 affiliate programs. His roles there included director of development and director of community relations. He worked as director of special projects and development for the Just Buffalo Literary Center, including as host and producer of “Spoken Arts Radio” for the NPR affiliate station WBFO-FM, and as director of the Writers-in-Education program, which assigned creative writers to schools throughout the WNY region.

He has Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in English and Creative Writing from the University at Buffalo, where he held the David Gray Fellowship in Poetry and Letters under the internationally acclaimed late poet Robert Creeley. He served in the US Navy from 1972-1976, which included three years shore duty on the Mediterranean coast of Spain. He spent his teens and twenties working in his family’s office supply and printing company. Paul lives in Kenmore with his wife Barbara and dog, a rescued poodle mutt named Oboe, and has two perfect teenagers: Matthew, a Junior at Canisius College; and Lianna, a Kenmore West High School graduate.

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Change of Meds

Dreams are back with the change of meds,
less in a fog than raw; and with their return
I realize it hadn't sunk in they were gone,
that nights had passed dark,
that waking motionless and heavy
had so completely replaced the unwilled
visions of the mind's eye. The tedium
of the change of meds tightens me again,
recalls through clenched neck and shoulders
what I've held of my life within me, outside my brain; re-
minds me how much I want no part of this mis-
firing of neurotransmitters, this bullshit theory
that elevates flows of chemicals over acts of will
and failures of acts of will. Thinking will make it
so. Belief that thinking will make it so will make it
so. I admit none of these. The change
of meds is ritual, genuflection, movement
of fingertips from forehead to heart, shoulder
to shoulder, mouth. Communion: Tip back the head,
offer the tongue. Breathe out the sort of blessing
pagans intoned as they sliced the necks of sheep.
Accept this one now. This one will help.

Regrets Concerning Trees

1.

I should know the name of this tree
outside my door, shielding me as I step out,
if for no other reason than to respect
those who named it, who cataloged
characteristics of it, described in long detail
the cycle of its life, of the lives of whatever
lives in it, or on it, or near it. I should know
why it's here, why it might die,
how I could stop that. I should know
how its name resonates once understood,
what long threads of history are clearly conveyed
to those who, when they hear it, look up.

2.

Sitting on my bike, kickstand down,
watching workmen of our village
wielding chainsaws by the dozen
against tree after tree after tree, one
end of the block to the other, the cathedral
formed by the tops brought down, sun
suddenly unrelenting, nowhere left
to be left in shadow. The buzz
unrelenting as the sun. We were awestruck
at the process, at the small men high
in air and branch after branch coming down.
We knew they were Dutch Elms, because
we were told. They were right outside
our doors and then they were gone.
I will never hear the words "Dutch Elm" again
without thinking "disease."

3.

That doesn't explain my ignorance about trees
on these blocks since I must concede
it's willful. I could learn. I could take out books,
or go online, take photos with my telephone,
ask people at the store for home supplies. What
is this bush? What light should reach this flower?
When should I fumigate my grasses? Trees
are the least of my worries in this so-named
urban landscape. They've always cared
for themselves, or at least indicated no needs
to me. Even when a saturated snow
weights down the slight branches, snaps them
near the trunk, they clear themselves by spring
and I carry out what's fallen. But still, walking
streets in fading light, when I come upon a tree
cragged and ancient, that's bent in triumph
against all that time's tossed on it, I regret
not having a proper name to call it by.

The Walking

My lymphomatic dog and I wander
streets of our safe village; after
a block or two we settle on a pace
we both can live with. Though he's painfully
young yet, the cancer's clipped his step,
but not so much he doesn't still
look back over his shoulder,
checking up on me. He knows I'm aging,
no doubt hears the crunch of my knee,
pop of my ankle, and my irregular
sigh of complaint:

I know he's dying and there's nothing
either of us can learn from it. We can't
examine the faults of our lives
through the misapplied lens of the other; can't
find clarity in the lack of sense of this, can't
weigh down this walking with wanting
different paths. Even if I call his big eyes wise,
I know it helps only me.

He knows better than to ask
anything of me other than a walking pace
a quarter-step quicker than I'd prefer; water
when we go in; an ice cube if he reminds me.
But after all the trees rush past like so many people

in so many quick lives, there's nothing, finally,
to learn beyond the fleeting message at the next
tree he tugs me toward, and then the trees
on the next block, and I'm afraid he'll forget
everything he's been offered stop to stop
in his innocent rush
to get to what's next.

Hoax of Angels

At dawn birds take stock,
Find wings again against light,

duskily call out their survivals.
The boundaries night had stolen,

had given over to crickets, to angels
and their ceaseless, furious messages

the birds reclaim now with their
sharp songs. The trees take hold of,

flip over the wakening wind, and bow
to the west, relaying it away, one

to the next. There: again the birds begin
what had been finished before night's flood.

At dawn, memory's empty, floating up the sky
puffy and slow-blooded, and

the messages of night are lost, turned
into the sounds of birds singing. At dawn,

there were never any angels to begin with.

Warm Up

It's cold, and dim at eight o'clock
this morning, but she has forced herself
up, slipped on the skin of the dancer,
and now in the grey natural
light of the hall, stretched,
one leg extended back, she uses

heel of palm pushing
hip down more
toward floor, watching
line of body
in mirrors
for signs of
gracelessness.

It has not yet released her, this body; not yet
given over control to the dance, which knows
nothing of floors, only horizons, and nothing
of temperatures except
how thin or thick the air is.

Seven Post-Modern Novel Notes

— for my deconstructive friends

1.

Begin anywhere. Stormy
and dark end-of-May weather,
Friday afternoon; begin
with pulp parody, where
some sharp sound would ring out
now, some mystery insinuate.
Today (that is, present
time): curious, slow-paced,
foreshadowing a phone call.

2.

To or from a Lover.
Tight voice. Insistent,
signifying Need. Say they're unable
to create a viable situation, a scene
to meet at. Disconnect.

3.

More coffee for one of them.

Too much three cups back.

Play out four plot options

here, keep the reader feeling

unanticipated. Or pace and pace

as if gestating thought,

some decision. Blank sheet.

New Chapter.

4.

About Literature. Yes. "Writing
is Literature, and that's that."

"Words are not, of course,

'themselves,' but accepted

groups of recollections clustered

around each particular one."

Yes.

No. Strike this.

Wrong for the market.

Blank sheet, new chapter.

Say five or six, figuring

maybe a dozen in draft.

5.

And Five or Six, if not
semiotic per se, should minimally
demonstrate the narrator's,
if not the author's awareness
that such an act of writing,
necessarily self-
reflexive are . . . No.
Get off this. Too prosey
for the form. Break here.

6.

Review in part. The Lovers have discoursed
without resolve. Assume
they're sad, implying restless. Write phones
in dark colors called "expectant."
Have outside look like
an hour past sunset at one-thirty.
The storm should break itself,
move lighter towards June.

7.

The mystery now, foreshadowed.
a little more anyway. Describe
a Lover physically here.
Tiny face-lines dark. Naturally
lit by a south-facing — no, make it
north — dirty window. Have the phone
ring and ring, bring the reader up
to the Lover's eye. Pause.

Synchronization

The spirit moves, but not always upward
— Theodore Roethke.

The sky is the surface of slate
as it has been long enough
that I have forgotten to keep track
of the day's names. It has grown quieter
out in the air, and cooler.
On days the sun is direct, sounds
travel straighter up, expanding
to warmer, thinner space, only half-heard,
but today they are trapped, ricochet
down from the close clouds and seem
to be clarified, and more directionless.

Is it Tuesday today? Wednesday?

I want not to think away from the weather
to chores, or move from the exhausted light
that drops over me through the kitchen window.
Looking away north, between the sharp edges
of two close buildings, toward the stiff mud
fields of Lockport, I can make out
a swatch of far horizon — trees, or the rise
of a hill — squeezed over with grey
from the dropped clouds. Closer to me,
in the middle distance, is a stand of dark trees
whose leaves might color like blood
in clear sun.

It's probably Tuesday. Probably
not long into afternoon.

Narcissus' Pond at Night

Narcissus, kneeling at edge,
could not unlock that eye from his eye

as the yellow-white light on his pond-face
blushed into color of sunset.

Unwavering still when the blush turned red
then flat grey of night, that face

lit by other light, light
distorted, careened off the face of the moon.

At that thin, transforming sight
Narcissus' awe transformed to awe

at the dividing face, the face blemished,
pocked and cut through by the living

and dead things skimming the pond's face;
things from beneath which well up only

in black unreflecting air. And when wind
preceding dawn rippled the image, doubt rippled

into Narcissus, and he no longer could know
which was Narcissus, which eye the right eye

to lock. That was what held him so long that
his knuckles took root through stones at the shore:

not some single true face, but his infinite faces
in wavering light, faces

that pumped blood to his stomach, faces
that never are done.