

24 Huntington Ave, Buffalo, NY, United States

Address is approximate



BLAZEVOX 2KX

buffaloFOCUS
Aaron Lowinger



The House at 24 Huntington Ave.

By Aaron Lowinger

buffaloFOCUS
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The House at 24
Huntington Ave.

All the marijuana in Kenmore matches wits with all the whisky in heaven : an introduction

buffaloFOCUS is a special section of BlazeVOX that looks at the writing of one writer from our hometown, Buffalo, NY. It is a real pleasure to present the writings of Aaron Lowinger. He is a real poetic force, working with House Press and setting up and organizing poetry readings with Just Buffalo Literary Center. And to be truthful, with full disclosure, I consider him a very good friend.

He is a poet of place, using Buffalo, NY as a position for his poems to exist. More than a backdrop, Buffalo holds a special place for Lowinger. He grew up in a house down the street from the apartment Ted Berrigan and Alice Notley lived while in Buffalo. He deals with this beautifully in the talk this section takes its title from, *The House at 24 Huntington Ave*. While dealing with Berrigan's poetry, Aaron here best describes his own work: "The poem resonates in typical Berrigan fashion. It's clear and reads like an occasional poem for the everyday." Here are poems that blend sincerity with anarchy, beatific narratives mixed with experimental language forms, and social justice with near-drowning irony. I truly admire how easily Aaron can tell such a powerful story while bypassing all the traps of convention. I hope you enjoy these poems as much as I do!

Rockets, Geoffrey

:-)

WORK POEM

presently in Buffalo
crisp Sunny January weekday
the history of isolated moments
counts up
blue sky oblivion
they are not here
but quietly
like unseen surface scratches
on my lens

I buy shampoo at Rite-Aid
the transaction is not simple

I eat lunch
and I see an awful man

wasting time
is experimentation in the obvious

the things that are always true
like doing nothing

everything you do
is important
it all counts
towards something

stave off death
and do no harm

Poem for ROBIN B.
on the Occasion of her Thirtieth Birthday

We hadn't moved for days
or bathed or talked much
the earth was at siege
no one was outside
we were scared of violating curfew

The snow was deep
and the cops had killed a teenager

It was as if a new set of laws
had taken hold of the apartment
the window plastic went in and out
like a lung

On the fourth day of the siege
Robin devised to write a collaborative letter
I was thankful for the diversion
she started it as a formal complaint
a list of problems that needed to be resolved
guns, healthcare, higher education
women's rights, gay rights,
tougher hate-crime prosecution
environmental conservation
and a jobs-for-poets program
called PAW
poets in the American workforce
she repeatedly called for the public
and elected officials to realize
what a poet could do for their communities
and what a having a 'poet in the family'
meant to current and future generations
in terms of informed and comprehensive decision making
emotional and personal enrichment
attention to the spoken word at all times
the ability to see through profound bullshit—
that poets were the guardians of culture
not subject to the trends and business of the art world
not rehearsing the stale and/or antiquated forms of music
not writing cheap shtick fiction
peppered with erudite references to patronize lawyer-types

Poets are the guardians of culture
but not the culture of the art gallery
or the philharmonic or the cultural center
rather the root of culture that spawns
these listed architectures as sites of official culture
we saw it as a way to revitalize
what has become a tired exercise
in the representation of American art

And it's here we ran into a problem
if we had official democratic PAW positions
available across the country
how could it not become political
as all things involving money and position are
how would we prevent this system
from becoming something else
something just as vapid and easily dismissed
as the things we were attempting to distinguish ourselves from?

It was a relief in those dark days in Robin's apartment
to be onto something bigger than the immediate
the snow the police the all day beans and rice meals
we drew up logos for PAW
Robin drew up a poetry tiger with thick meaty paws
I drew up a skeletal paw with Latin words
extending as each digit
I remember one of them was VERITAS
we checked the internet for precedents of any such organizations
we searched "poet worker" "poet public" "poet position"
"poet ambassador" "poet economy" "poet anarchist"
until we found Stephane Mallarme's declaration

"There is only one man who has the right to be an anarchist, Me, the Poet, because I alone create a product that society does not want, in exchange for which society does not give me enough to live on"

This kept us going for a few hours into the night
but what bothered us ultimately was the notion that society did not desire us
we knew they were many poets around us and above us
poets with day jobs
poets in suits
poet plumbers
poets who didn't write poems
poet presidents

poet murderers
poets who don't speak English
poet children
and other ordinary people
who just happen to feel it more

By morning
the snowplows came out
which was a sign things we're breaking up
at 11 am the radio said it would be safe to go outside again
by 5:00 pm
no curfew
violence had been contained
in a few pockets of suburbs
where cars were being systematically torched

We were struggling to reach a resolution for PAW
the best I could do is to say
that PAW poets for now can't expect money
that money will corrupt and turn any organization
however originally constructed
into something political and ugly
that fascist poets may someday take it away or something
Robin only kinda agreed
and I wasn't really convinced either
but we did agree that there was a public vocation as poet
and those who decided to enter it
could count on PAW to support them
not with money though
so we decided for then to call it
Poets of the American Workforce
instead of IN the American Workforce
that we would keep on working our shitty jobs
and keep going to college
understanding there was an unofficial public mandate
for poets to be poets
and those in the know
for now
would be Poets by Mandate

Full Spectrum Light

Tomorrow is Veteran's Day
tomorrow I don't have to work
and for a more honorable reason than Columbus
my boss at work gave me two illustrations for Veteran's Day
one certainly typical
restaurant scene old man crying into his soup in uniform
apparently defriended and abandoned
my boss picked up his bill
the other just as appropriate
there will be an early Pearl Harbor reenactment in inland North Carolina
no boats no planes no Japanese and no Hawaii
but Veteran's Day makes me think of two things:
the only Vet I know Geoff Gatza
and the World War II generation approaching extinction
no more Tom Brokaw no more World War II vets
no more holocaust survivors
and it still feels in terms of cultural memory that WWII was yesterday
books and films about WWII continue to be extremely successful
so successful that you can be tricked into thinking that it never ended
and I think this is how a vet feels too
Geoff Gatza thought to beat the depression of post-manufacturing Western New York
by being a Marine in the late 80's and became a sniper
in Gulf War I, the prequel to the current mess
and I'm sure this experience changed him
shooting at and getting shot at
"Hey wait, this isn't a video game!"
And since he helped liberate Kuwait
war hasn't ended, the unending war is the legacy of the industrial society
which remains even though we have no industry
and gets carried over into the skewed justice which dominates civil society
and it pushes you further to the edge and you gotta get settled down
and Geoff does this by being as productive as he can
making tons of books writing great poems and getting pissed off
and other people get just as pissed off
and all this getting pissed off works itself out electronically over e-mail
and the book gets made or it doesn't
but outside of that I see clearly
that for Geoff the poems keep him company
and this settles him down

and it settles me down too
and not all the marijuana Kenmore is gonna change
that the War goes on nonetheless

A week ago from this Veteran's Day tomorrow
this city Chicago welcomed the new president
to more excitement and energy that I'm sure no one in any generation
but the World War II generation
can remember in politics
and coming to do a reading in Chicago
and thinking of what I can read
what I can say that about this
it's impossible to imagine coming to Chicago at this point in time
exactly 40 years after the Democratic National Convention in the same city
where our collective political idealism went down in flames
it's impossible not to say something about this moment in time
in which the political catch phrase has shifted from 'terror' to 'hope'
on the surface, it's easy to choose the more comfortable word: hope
hope is a secular form of faith
it doesn't resemble anything concrete
just a change of attitude, a change of paradigm
a new marketing ploy really
and it's even shorter than terror by one syllable and two letters
terror is terrifying, it's senseless random violence
and it doesn't work well as a slogan as in 'vote for terror'
it's hard to market unless you hide it under a different ideology
or multiple ideologies that drive the same point home
but that masking of terror is analogous to the masking of war
the masking of organized violent chaos
Hayao Miyazaki is brilliant film director for this
and not just for achieving this in films accessible to children
but in films period
this latent background of hostility and war
to which the characters are usually somewhat ambivalently caught up in
the motives for the conflict are never explained just as in reality
in which they are never intelligible
the narrative is never focused on the people in power
but the people whose emotional life is deeply disturbed by this ambient soundtrack of violence and chaos

Now I'm thinking of yesterday
which was a superficially disturbing day
in that it was stormy gray Buffalo weather
where the air and wind teeters on winter

and all is dark by 5pm and there's no one on the streets
and also the Bills lost and looked bad doing it
Eric calls me up he was at the Bills bar in Manhattan where he now lives
but it was sunny and he was going to meet Chelsea
and wasn't too worried about the Bills
because he's partying a lot with all the people
the people who all used to live and party in Buffalo
and I'm driving my car around the storm with Becky
and there's no one on the streets
Eric is vibrant and happy
I ask him how his election day was
and he says I blogged about it
as if once news were blogged or facebooked
it becomes one's responsibility to be caught up with one's friend's lives
or less cynical maybe more cynical it's a plug for his blog
hey man my blog is really great and you should read it
(Hope is Change, man)
because I think of you as an audience when I write it
but his election day was great it was a huge party
and as much as I love Eric and hearing his shaky love of all things on the phone
I get jealous and I miss all my friends who have been leaving Buffalo
for the past eight years all my very best friends
and I'm still there and I love it there
doing my best to go on and settle myself down
as I would if all my friends were there

CA Conrad talks about the Philly Poetry Hotel
and I always expected this hotel would unofficially be established
at Jersey and West, at 100 Plymouth, at 457 Richmond Ave.
and there were certainly glimpses of it
but most have moved on
because that's a poet's job in the classical and now modern sense
poets stay in hotels (if funded) they don't buy houses
because they usually move around a lot
but that's not really the rule

after talking to Eric we go into Organic Market
and my cousin is working the register
there's always someone I know working at Organic Market
and I get the few odds and ends that I buy there
when I notice a light bulb on sale for \$6.49
it's a depression-beating long-lasting 'full spectrum light'
and after that Bills game the diaphanous poetry of 'full spectrum light'
is really appealing to me in a way that's not unlike hope

and then a postmodern silent dialogue takes place in my mind
in between the purchase and installation of this full spectrum light
if this were a light bulb that could make the difference every day
in that every day would be literally bright more vibrant
as if the sun was shining even though it's dark now at 5 o'clock
it would cheer me up immeasurably I would have energy
I would stay up well past midnight reading checking friend and enemy blogs
I would not easily fatigue or get lazy or just watch sports
this full spectrum light gave me hope in some minor way
but hope all the same that it would look terrific
and help me not to fall asleep when reading
I put it in and it was bright and impressive
it didn't look like an ordinary light bulb
it looked like a \$6.49 light bulb
and I put the shade over it but didn't like it so much
so I took the shade back off but it was too powerful in it's naked stage
I had to put the shade back on
later in the evening I had to confess
it was just a light bulb
really no different than any light bulb
but maybe, just maybe it will be

Day by the Lake, Oswego

Woke up ate babka at Mike's parent's house on the lake
with bagels and Pike Place Starbucks coffee
'it's the original Starbucks coffee at their first café'
Mike says with an ironic grin but I know he loves this shit
we head on down to Oswego harbor to meet Mike's dad
who is with his friend and are both retired from Fulton schools
they get the boat ready for hours, the maiden voyage
of his new but 'pre-owned' or 'gently-loved' (as the case may be) sailboat
we go into town to get more coffee and bomb out the men's john
back to the boat they are almost ready
Mike's dad is a real man
we pull the boat out of the harbor with the outboard
and situate ourselves in the lake
no wind
the heat makes me break out and sweat and I feel nauseous
the boat is barely moving but it's enough to put me under
this is my first real sailing trip and I'm sick
I spend my time trying to not pay attention to anything
Mike's dad keeps looking at the sky and asking the Polish maritime god
'what are the tell-tales saying?'
it's clear all the way around with anvil looking clouds
but warnings of surprise thunderstorms that could flip the boat over
I watch the sky all day waiting for catastrophe or puking or both
but no such luck of anything no wind no nothing
there's dark clouds around us at times forming different aspects
in all directions studying the weather as the day's visible quantifier
all I normally never see in the Buffalo or care to heed
what are the tell-tales telling us?
we turn the engine on to get the boat down to the lake to another harbor
passing the three nuclear reactors next to an Audubon society reserve
Mike's dad points out all the luxurious new homes
he knows where everyone lives
the retired cops, the slum lords, an ex-factory owner, the darkening sky
it ends in a light rain in catfish harbor with sunburns and still queasy
get in Becky's car and charge it back towards Buffalo
past the spot I found a huge dead turtle the day before
and the resident gold finches
great blues every time I turn around this weekend
I see various very dark storms along the thruway trying to stay awake
hearing radio reports about hail, rain and tornadoes
hit one heavy rain where one car was in a ditch

driving into Buffalo through a kid-filled neighborhood
in this trashed over world I get a powerful shiver for it
in my "Let's Rx the World" t-shirt it's all *tikkun olam*
to bring back the swamps and forests
I get a one-second chill that wells up my eyes
and determine to write about it
see Eden in time for golf-ball sized hail
Mike calls me up to say his dad just shot a rabid raccoon
out of a tree down the street
you know they're rabid when they're out in daylight

As With Others

you lying lazy awake
soft night outside sirens
hot yellow light in
reading falling asleep
going limp
so that she comes
invites you to bed
as with others
hot yellow light in
mercy abounds out
yet not within
drag assign to real bed
falling asleep reading
thin sheets for summer
giving in
so that she comes
it only appears to be lost
and this your meditation
when alone in sleep
hot yellow light in
awake in not your bed
and this your meditation
soft night outside sirens
child asleep in next room
giving in
mercy abounds out
reading falling asleep
so that she comes
hot yellow light in
now a secret in the dark
and this your meditation
an inventory of the senses
blankness in all directions
yet not within
does not articulate
awake in not your bed
soft night outside sirens
a freighter carving the haze
as with others

voices murmuring
now a secret in the dark
so that she comes
thin sheets for summer
child asleep in next room
coming to in lazy sweat
invites you to bed

Hero

Two recent newsworthy examples of American Heroes
are Chesley B. Sullenberger and Alex Rodriguez
the first is a classic example of the kind of hero
who has greatness thrust upon him
most of the Sully's landing on the Hudson River was extremely lucky
I would like to believe there are many experienced pilots
who may have been able to get just as lucky
but Sully is doubly lucky in that he landed his plane
on the Hudson in mid-town Manhattan
can it get more Hollywood than that?
he might as well have tried to land the plane on Broadway
and he and crew could have stepped right into to a ticker-tape parade
but his fifteen minutes of fame
have almost all but dried up
the news cycle moves on

But A-Rod is a true American Hero now
His pursuit of being the richest, best-looking, and greatest baseball player ever
was stifling, boring, played out, it wasn't real
so he did us all a favor by moving to New York
where all his faults and vices have slowly unraveled
under the steady scrutiny of the media machinations
in a city built by information
and now he has fallen even lower
and America loves him all the more
their love may be expressed as disappointment, anger, hate
but Americans are hungry for a human story
a person with extraordinary talents
who is nevertheless filled with self-doubt and confusion
we love this we identify with this
we can allow the anger we have with ourselves
to displaced onto somebody else whose faults are public currency
I think these undercurrents are the chief reasons for the success
of Christopher Nolan's Batman movies

Tomorrow I will have my DNA tested
to see if I am potential match for a bone-marrow transplant
the Sullenberger in me is ready to try to save lives
the more immediate A-Rod in me hopes I am not a match
either way, I want my most heroic act to be this poem
if I'm not a match my small act will be ignored forgotten

some notch on some miniscule belt of memory
if I am a match, I expect to shut up completely, burn this poem
I will try to keep it all a secret
and enter an A-Rod-like state of meditation
where I focus on my confusion, my body, and how it all fits
in the continuum vacuum of living presence on earth
where I envision some version of myself
floating on my back outwards into the infinity of black space
but if I was a match and I did go through it
I would be a hero
but I don't want to be a hero
if I was a hero wouldn't I have to develop some really bad habits
just to remind myself of my humanity
and let everyone know that heroism is illusory, fleeting at best
and works best when confined to a single act
if you take the entire body of work
I bet a lot of heroes are real jerks
jerks with a hero-complex
and those kind of jerks can't do any good for anybody
always needed people to pay attention to them

Maybe real heroism is writing a poem
I'm at work right now writing, don't tell anyone
listening to music in earphones
it doesn't feel very heroic
I think given the public arena of politics
on the micro and macro levels
heroism has to exist and we need it
and it has to be a secret
my boss doesn't know what I'm doing right now
neither do my co-workers
I'm daydreaming of floating my body
that is not really my body
through infinite black space
and landing it directly on main strip of the Milky Way
under all the lights of stars
yet so small that I'm invisible

Birds on the List

I've had two dreams of note
in the last couple of weeks
and only one I can remember right now
which I don't think is a dream in the sense
of some visual dream narrative
but some context of anxiety
I'm in a professional hockey game
sitting on the bench in full uniform
any second now coach is gonna tell me go
and then I'll jump over the boards
but I can't skate very well at all
and I'm super embarrassed but I try to follow the puck
but I can barely move
and I know I'm gonna get drilled
by some little punk from grade school
who I never liked and was always better than
except for right here on the ice
it's basically the same dream
as the one where you're sitting in class with only your underwear on
which is a pretty powerful sentiment
I mean sometimes I spend half my time
pointlessly worrying to myself that I'm a fraud
and the other half proving I'm not
(and then you talk to other people
for whom this fear ravages them
and you think, I'm really OK)

The other dream is better
it's deeper somehow and prismatic
it's beautiful and special
but I can't remember it
I think it had something to do with war
I dreamt at least once maybe twice
I didn't want to forget it
I went around looking for it talking to friends
asking Becky if she remembered me talking about it
and she didn't
but she told me to write about
all the birds I should be so lucky to see
the birds on my list
the ones I've seen

and the ones I'm dreaming to see
and then it hit me, the dream

I was standing in total darkness
when this spectacular bird appeared and flew in front of me
looked at me squarely from the side of its head
it was a heron, large with a long and sharp beak
it had this incredible yellow streak on its crown
and I immediately misidentified it as a yellow-crown night heron
because behind it was black as night
with flashes of yellow and orange along its crest
but it was almost uniformly blue
enormous
and absolutely unfazed by my presence
a simply beautiful dream
that failed to resound enough
for me to remember it

But I remember wondering when I woke up
if that kind of heron may exist in the world
and if not in the world
it exists now and I'm happy to see it
forget about it and remember it again
and have a chance to describe it

Usually how it works is this
you look through the bird books and see the picture
or the Peterson or Sibley drawing
you try to figure out what time of year you might find it
and in what kind of environment
and then you have to be persistent in looking
but even then you have to be lucky
and if you find the bird it's truly uplifting
it forms a direct and unmitigated convergence of natural histories
the bird's and the birder's
but what of the dream birds, the abstract birds
the pest birds that follow humans
living off waste following the interstates
I won't forget seeing certain birds for the first time
American and least bittern, green heron, bald eagle
or seeing thousands of Canada geese at Oak Orchard Swamp
they have been poetic moments

I almost forgot my dream night-heron
but now I won't
writing this poem while hanging out with friends all day today
and having the dream heron come back to mind
and making it public
skating out to center ice getting booed because I can barely move on skates
hoping to make a little something real out of the world
into the world

Human Scales in 5 Paragraphs*

Among mundane contemporary anxieties to consider, few seem as relevant (in a lazy, quotidian way) in today's economy as the cost of public projects; how they are funded, managed, and chosen. I live in a city that feels broken down. There are twenty thousand vacant houses, of which, our mayor pledges to raze 1,000 a year. The dog chases its tail. There are miles of streets pockmarked with potholes. A staggering amount of public money from multiple sources is being spent to rebuild and renovate almost every school in the city, the majority of still seem destined to underperform. Given that backdrop, it is a recently rebuilt sidewalk around the central library that stirs a certain confusion: how much did that cost and who paid for it? What was wrong with the old sidewalk? Under the confusion, of course, resides the fear that nothing will ever be built new again, that our resources have, at long last, finally been exhausted. I can remember only small fractions of my dreams, leaving me to think that most of dreams unravel this confusion through the night, and when it is at last resolved, the real dreams can permeate. By the time you awake, a new building has been erected where before was an acre-sized forest in recovery, filled with colonies of chicory, wild carrot, and trees of heaven. It is an anxiety of overpopulation and the trouble with human scale.

The world's most populous bird is the red-billed qualea, a small bird native to the grasslands of Africa, the very place where early human ancestors climbed down from trees. The qualea is so numerous it is reported that it can take hours for a flock of birds to fly overhead. Yet their population is roughly half the number of speakers of Indo-European languages worldwide, 1.5 billion. Including the several dominant species of rodents throughout the world, there is likely no animal larger than an insect that is more numerous than people. With the prospects of opening the universe further to human exploration and curiosity, we stand on the brink of infinite human replication. A system of unending mirrors, a new measure of time, a refutation of death. Our imaginations have outgrown our homes.

Today in the *New York Times* I found an article about a facility nearing completion in California that aims to recreate the formation of a star. The possibilities of such an endeavor are staggering, if it is able to safely and predictably harness the energy manufactured by the conversion of hydrogen to helium. The

facility uses 192 lasers "made of nearly 60 miles of mirrors and fiber optics crystals and light amplifiers" to bombard a hydrogen fuel particle the size of a grain of kosher salt. The money involved for construction and ongoing maintenance for a facility in a state where the state parks are facing closure due to funding issues, is, of course, obscene. But the project is defended by one of its lead scientist, Dr. Moses, who states that taking on big projects that challenge the imagination "is who we are as a species."

On a barren February night in Jena, Ernst Haeckel woke up and as if still dreaming of snowflakes and got out of bed. The house was filled with a soft bluish light that seemed to glow from the snow outside in the garden. Something like a poem appeared in front of him in place where he had expected more clarity and it left him in an uncomfortable suspense, like a line in a poem, story, or petition whose meaning remains elusive despite many re-readings. He tried to escape the feeling he was being watched; instead of a chair or a chest he saw only the blue outlines. It bothered him the lines lacked symmetry and the confusion of what time it might be at that moment caused in him a quiet panic, albeit one that would quickly pass like a sunshower.

He began to sketch a medusa, an exercise to waken the sense and free himself of conscious thought. The pursuit to render an inherent perfection of natural forms - forms whose evidence he seemingly harvested from the ether of living things - caused real blindness. Blind to the ambient noise of the room, blind to chaos of ants in the night's grass outside the house, blind to trembling of the neighbor's pigs. Like a holy man, he masked emotion in the perpetuation of a presented set of truths. Behind his pictures, he could never be right or wrong. The illustrations of radiolarians, medusae, faces of bats, algae, antlers, became sensations. But they were more than images, not because images don't have the power to haunt us, but because they could be read like words. They became a universal sacred text, with an inner meaning that couldn't be isolated. He felt compelled to articulate the geometry of this text, expose its hierarchies and exceptions. The images manage to refer to the constant unseen perfection in nature, and yet to passively imply the human on the timeless abstract of living forms. For the human stalks and lurks in the illustrations with a European resolve in the seductive, unwashed hair of the tentacles of certain medusae, the fearful barbs and points of microscopic organisms, the absolute symmetry.

*title on loan from Michael Kelleher's book, *Human Scale*

The House at 24 Huntington Ave. *for Tom Joyce*

I grew up in a house my parents bought at an auction in 1978, at 29 Huntington Ave. A small side street near a main intersection in North Buffalo where the neighborhoods are filled with mostly single-family, owner-occupied homes with rather stately urban lawns and backyards. It's a short block with four large homes on one side facing six homes on the opposite side. Directly across the street from our house were the driveways for 24 and 28 Huntington side-by-side. 28 Huntington was split into multiple units, and I remember only several of its residents over the years. A parking enforcement cop who drove a blue Wrangler, a very serious student of Judaism from Bermuda who played a lot of soccer, a spinstress woman who always needed help. But all of these residents I remember from only teenage and afterwards. When I was younger I never noticed any of them. I can safely regard them as ghosts. Their comings and goings, their consumption of resources, their emotional lives; like people seen driving in their cars on highways, they were all mysteries.

The house at 24 was a different story. It was enormous: three finished floors and a fourth floor attic (or at least that's what it looks like), it seemed to loom clumsily over into the street. It was painted orange, always my favorite color. There was a weeping willow tree planted on the front lawn and the backyard was fenced off to the neighboring yards. The family that lived there were the Szareks. I remember their minivan had custom plates: "Szarek." I remember once they had a party and I went into their house. The kitchen had been newly updated, the living rooms on the first floor were spacious. It was a stark contrast to our house across the street where as the years went by my parents slowly removed each ugly remnant from the auction house that was. In particular: the green wallpaper, the paint on the woodwork, the vomitous blue-green wall-to-wall carpet. In my mind, the Szareks were in the money and they lived in a mansion.

No one in my immediate (much less my extended) family were the 'literary' type. But my neighbor Tom Joyce at 33 Huntington had a house full of books. It was the first house with books I knew. Books were everywhere in the house, most memorably in high, long stacks on top of the toilet tank. The Joyce house had a sweet dusty smell to it, like a library you'd want to sleep in and not wash your sheets for months.

There was no first floor bathroom, only the second floor bath and the basement dungeon toilet. The fridge was always stocked with pepsi, tuna fish that Tom would feed us on top of raisin bread, or better yet, cinnamon rolls. There was a period where Tom was always making chili, calling it Texas Red. Tom had every book you needed to have, even if he wasn't always able to find it. He also had sex books like collections of art nudes and the Kama Sutra, mixed in with everything else. This house he shared (and still does!) with his wife Linda and daughter Gilbert and his large meandering extended family and friends became a second home. They gave me a key. The lack of definition in his house and life created an infinity of possibility for me, a safe place at the edge of a multifaceted and gorgeous chaos. Nothing in my life at that point was chaotic, yet I yearned for it.

Jonathan Skinner was the first to tell me that Ted Berrigan and Alice Notley stayed at 24 Huntington for a summer in 1970, and Ted wrote a poem about it, a "Farewell Address" to his host Richard Taylor. Every time I read the poem now I look for any other description of the street, my house, Elber's landscaping, Bennett High School, Shoshone Park, but I never find it. It's not a typical Berrigan poem, if one's allowed to say such things, in that it's written pretty close to straight prose, in big chunks with buttressing indentations and breaks. It has the ongoing childish night/light rhyme through the middle of the poem: moonlight, delight, night, light, sight, polite, light, delight, nights, sight, light, night, delight. His description is limited to the immediate environs of the house itself: where he and Alice slept on the third floor, the living room he calls the Arboretum, the three dogs, Alice's trips with the dogs, the huge dining room with chandelier. The poem resonates in typical Berrigan fashion. It's clear and reads like an occasional poem for the everyday. He grandly thanks his friends at the end (the poem is dedicated to their host) and curiously writes, "Nothing gets lost, in anyone's life; I'm glad of that."

But the poem also mentions that Alice wrote a lot of poems about the house. The first place I looked was in her 1998 book, *Mysteries of Small Houses*, which gives the impression of a chronologically ordered psychic inventory of living spaces and memory in exquisite lyric fashion. I couldn't find anything about Buffalo, but rather got the hint that she's lived in dozens of houses over the years and that it would interest me what she remembered of the house, and whether those poems were ever published, if they still exist. I contacted Anselm, who I had recently met in Buffalo and he sent me on to Alice. Alice responded quickly. This is what she remembered: It was a fine house. She spent the summer reading through Jack

Clarke's library, which Richard Taylor was storing at the time. She wrote poems about the house that heavily featured the color red, as one of the rooms they lived or spent time in was painted red. She never published the poems. She was 24 that summer and did not think the poems were very good, but that she probably has the poems somewhere in her papers. I pointed out that her book of sonnets, published in 1971, was marvelous and could the poems written the year before be that bad? She replied, "the sonnets were my breakthrough."

Some things do get lost. The house at 24 Huntington Ave is almost lost. My parent's neighbors and former neighbors of the Creeley's, Dick and Liz Lipsitz would like to raze it and expand their garden. He says that a large pipe needs to be replaced but it is 40 yards long and runs under several other properties. Aside from that, the roof is coming off and the interior is inexplicably damaged. Looking in the back windows of the house last week, I saw damage everywhere. As if the last owners turned all the faucets on before leaving and gave each room a farewell address with a crow bar.

But I think Ted means it's the stuff of poems: the personal connections, the emotional knowledge that doesn't get lost. And I agree with him. On another level, I feel that Ted and Alice's short stay in a beautiful, now sullied American dream house is emblematic of something greater. When I think of Ted's poetry, I associate it with a fierce, daily energy that's so intense and immediate, it burns itself up ("On the Level Everyday"). It's comprised of ephemera that don't blink, never flinch, and then move on the next poem (The recent collected volume of his poetry is an essential compilation for these reasons). They match the speed and insanity of a country so drunk with energy and waste that it burns through resources and conflicts with blazing speed. The virtual omission of any reference to American militarism and war is compelling to find in the poetry a Korean War Vet in his artistic prime during the travails of the Vietnam War. It is November 6, 2009 and we are still at war.

But I can't blame Tom Joyce and Ted for the war, for feeding me tuna fish in cinnamon buns and glass bottles of Pepsi. Pages before "Farewell Address" in the *Collected* is a poem "Things to Do on Speed." Because a poem pages before this and after this mention Buffalo, the poem might be renamed? I suggest "Things to Do in Buffalo on Speed." These are some of Ted's suggestions:

Become a ravaged scarecrow
Write a 453 page unintelligible book
String beads interminably
See your fingernails flake off
Buy a Rolls Royce
Become chief of the Mafia
Consider anti-matter
Turn queer

There's a brilliant commentary in these poems that responds to the post-war "Great Awakening" of technology and the onslaught of advertising that followed and supported it. He seemed to study Madison Avenue with the integrity of a journalist, all language being fair play for the content of poems, including Times Square and plastic wrappers. It is the ephemeral quality of this era's poetry I find to be its greatest innovation as it turns life into poetic document (David Antin brilliantly describes something like this in a talk at St. Mark's in 1984 he extends the notion of "poetic line" beyond textuality and onto one's way of living).

And I'll accept it all without the skepticism of mass culture I feel is inevitable as a poet in 2009. I accept it because I think it tells the truth and maintains its innocence. Perhaps this is part of the Tulsa imprint on the New York School: its honesty. From Joe Brainard *I Remember* to Ron Padgett's *Ted*, it relied on a rather democratic notion that modes of literary expression belonged everywhere. The result in Berrigan's work is a kind of timelessness and placelessness, paradoxically two things he included so often in his poems; for the illumination of particulars appeals universally on a human level as we ourselves attempt to map out our own experience. His persistent attention to time and place at the moment of writing reveals an always moving voice, a writer, who in words as well as in reality to some extent, was homeless at heart.

As young writers growing up in the Buffalo area, we all benefited indirectly from the legacy of poetry in Buffalo started in the 1960s with Al Cook's English Department. Of my group of poets in Buffalo in 2000, there were Tawrin Baker, Eric Gelsinger, Damian Weber, Michael Slosek (Oswego), Barrett Gordon, Robin Brox, Chris Fritton, Ric Royer, Kevin Thurston, Scott Puccio, Russell Pascatore, Sarah Banach; I think only one of us grew up in a house with books. We all came to poetry from older poets and teachers who were plugged into poetry after exposure to readings or classes. It no doubt helped some

of us that Robert Creeley maintained his open office hours and Charles Bernstein offered an undergraduate class every semester.

In itself, it is probably not meaningful that Ted and Alice lived across the street from us ten years before I was born. It is probably also meaningless, in the grand scheme of a dying civilization, that this once grand house may be one of 20,000 in Buffalo in need of demolition. But what is meaningful is the ever-flowing river we step in, the chain of connections that flowed down in Buffalo and trickled through to my friends and I, a generation away in a different world. It is also meaningful to have a poem by a great poet in the poetic lexicon about the street I grew up on, and the house the faced our front windows. This faces no threat of becoming lost.

SECOND LIFE

Daquan Little was subject to two unfortunate events which landed him unceremoniously in the pages of the *Buffalo News* in the months after our meeting. The second of which happened before the first but required the first's notoriety to come to light. The second, however, came close to not allowing the first to exist.

The circumstances of our meeting were quite usual for myself, working in the capacity as a youth counselor in a shelter for homeless and runaway youth. Daquan was, like most our kids, neither homeless nor a runaway, but was somewhere between and unable to return to wherever it was he stayed (I quickly noticed at this job that the youth never said they lived somewhere, only where they stayed). There are kids for whom it is decided before birth they will be nomadic, they will never stay in one place long enough to feel as if they belong there. Daquan was one of these kids who, though having never left Buffalo, had stayed at over ten different addresses. I know this because when he came into the shelter I performed his intake interview, part of which asks the child to produce as many addresses they can remember. Most kids would only remember the street, the exceptional ones would only remember the numbers. Daquan was like most kids coming through the shelter, he remembered the most recent five years only, as if nothing existed before that.

His stay at the shelter was brief. I remember only a few details about him, and these I only marked because of what I later find out about him: His mom had put him out for not going to school; he couldn't go to his dad's because the kids in that neighborhood had it out for him; his grandmother that raised him the first seven years had just died; he was sexually active, had asthma, smoked weed and drank on occasion, never cigarettes. When I called his mother to let her know he was safe and at a shelter she said, "Good, call me when he gets to school," and hung up. It was a hard interview in that he wouldn't open up much. He was a boy in man's body and looked like he was coming apart at the seams. Strong and big, but awkward and vulnerable. And maybe that's why he didn't talk, because it protected him. It was when I was asking him about address changes that he said he moved onto Goethe street about a year ago.

"Do you remember the month?"

And he replied, "Naw. Wait, I died on August 29, we moved in right after that." "You *died*? What do you mean?"

"Naw, I didn't die but . . . I dunno, it is what it is."

“What?”

“Nothing man.”

And that was it, I let it drop.

*

It was a few months after our meeting that I found him in the *Buffalo News*. A robbery of an elderly man in residential neighborhood had gone sour and the man was shot and rushed to the hospital. Two teenagers were found crossing Main Street around the back of Shoshone Park where the railroads used to run, abutting publicly-owned and undeveloped land. Both teens were arrested in connection with the shooting, Daquan Little was one of them.

A few days later the news published an editorial entitled “Wasteland a violent cesspool,” impugning the city for misuse of public lands and asserting that the senseless and horrific shooting was partly the fault of the city for not developing land described as a “vast lot of desolate, wooded land.” It went on: “The former railroad area is useful real estate that, when developed, will secure the neighborhoods. Meanwhile, it is a breeding ground for crime. Today it is an overgrown wilderness with multiple ways to enter into and escape from surrounding neighborhoods.”

In the following days a few letters appeared in response to the article: one defending the so-called wasteland as a meaningful urban wilderness that is used by the neighborhood for recreation. It took the editorial to task for demonizing an area he saw emerging as new kind of urban park. Another letter appeared deploring the *News* for giving up on the more difficult task of examining the social causes of violence while instead seeking an easier target to blame.

But that was all for Daquan until the trial began and Warren Buffett’s local outpost printed the following story of Daquan’s death:

Teenage Suspect Survivor of Near Drowning

Daquan Little, one of two teenage suspects arraigned in the July shooting of Daniel Nowak of Flower street, survived a dramatic near-drowning incident at Shoshone Pool last summer.

On that occasion, Little was thought to have entered the pool at night with a group of youths when he fell to the bottom of the pool apparently unconscious.

Little was underwater for several minutes before emergency crews arrived and pulled the boy from the pool. Although he was showing no vital signs, fine work by the personnel on the scene led to the boy's miraculous revival a few minutes later.

Firefighter Mark Arnold stated to the news, "We didn't think he had a chance. He had to have been under at least five minutes, and that's a long time with no oxygen."

Little was given a trespassing citation subsequent to the accident and became involved in the juvenile justice system after being charged with several thefts. Apparently, his dramatic rescue did not result in any changes in his behavior.

"It's a shame to see such a miracle boy like Daquan to continue down this path," his Probation Officer, Gina Joyce said. "You'd think this experience would be a road to Damascus moment, but instead I think it's hardened him ever more and he'd embraced this whole street culture."

It is unknown what is next for Little, but it could very well be serious jail time. Assistant District Attorney Arturo Buono has announced he would like Little to be tried as an adult for felony assault and felony criminal possession of a weapon, among other lesser charges.

Messiah Blues

Some think Michael Jordan was the greatest basketball player of all time.
The purists have doubts, say check with Wilt Chamberlain or Bill Russell first
Other think it's LeBron James, or Kobe Bryant
Lebron James is younger and he's friends with Jay-Z
Kobe is a winner but he is scandalized

I think you're all wrong
the greatest basketball player ever
has never played the game
the greatest basketball player
will be easy to pick out
when he comes
he's the one who won't ever miss a shot

Bio: Aaron Lowinger is a poet living in his hometown of Buffalo, NY where he co-curates a poetry and performance series and goes to work damn near every day as a social worker. He was turned onto to poetry by his neighbor Tom Joyce and other teachers who had spent time at the University at Buffalo, where he also enrolled in while working weird part-time jobs and taking long trips. Aaron took classes with Charles Bernstein and received an MA in Linguistics in 2006, working on Germanic languages. He has published numerous chapbooks including *Open Night* (Transmission Press) and *Guide to Weeds* (House Press) and is very pleased to showcase longer, narrative poems and prose, some of which were written for specific readings, on *buffaloFocus*.