

Scott Keeney

On Meeting Ted Berrigan

The way every day is holy sneakers, a shower
of sunlight, insistent hum of cars around corners
and contagious amazement, Ted, swallowing a little
Pepsi with his pills, gulped and said, “Only you
can write your poems, but who hasn’t felt the sun
shining on his face through the bedroom window,
waking up with cotton love like a structured form
of remembrance, taken like a cheeseburger
in thoughtless contemplation of the moment?”

I nodded. “Now, that little something on the side
of your mouth, that bit of hamburger juice, that’s
your poem. Go get it, genius.” And we laughed.

“What else can we do?” he continued, “The sun
has been shining us for a long, Whitmanic time!”

With that and a “Terrific!” he stood up and I felt like a child in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty. A Buick Century with Paul McCartney and Wings drove by singing “My heart is like a wheel, let me roll it to you.” Ted lifted an eyebrow and curled his lips. “It’s fun to imagine the sun is mooning us, that intention exists without us.” A breeze shuttled a pair of ragged leaves across the sidewalk as we moseyed away from St. Mark’s Place. “Be a full-time hero. A full-time thief of fireworks. Don’t put things off for five years.” I put a ten in his hand and we both said “Thanks, man” at the same time— “Jinx, you owe me a beer.” At the corner where he went left and I went right, he tilted his head back, face to the sky— “It’s friendlier,” he said, “than originally designed.”

Meditative Chatter

Ah, the weather with its recurrent themes,
charming us one minute with clarion sunlight
and luminous birdcall, turning violent the next
as if Old Thunderclaps could burst our eardrums
if she wanted to. When nature speaks we hear
the words we want to hear, all inconspicuous love
and forgiveness, or passionate judgment, or
hazardous indifference. We write the script
and cast the parts and say the movie was already
in production. Look at the rain with its measurable
patter: it's too many pills. How it knows what it is
alone in the crowd, lost and found in the mist
of meditative chatter. “. . . always been miserable
and I don't know why. I never did harm to no one,”
he said. “I know, I know,” she replied, patting him
on the knee as he looked out the train window
at the sunlight smirking among the evergreens far
across the pincushion field the way one story ends
another begins. An earthquake is a dreamy seething

zombie army guttering in and out of existence as
they approach consummation—will they seize
our bumpy skulls or blink away in search of other inter-
galactic brains? So it goes. Or else a rust-colored cloud
crawls through town, painting the housing complexes
and single-family homes, the corporate parks and
shopping malls, the banks and places of worship
brown and red, harbinger of the melancholy whirlwind,
the hospital, too. With all due respect to greater minds,
dismissing irony and distance from spiritual revelation
suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature
of things. As our world always was and will be lost,
so poetry is always a ghost of itself, better known
by not being known, that which returns and that which
does not, and so forth. “I think I will go for a swim,”
he said, having not gone for a swim in seventeen years
but having owned a pool for three. A dragonfly
floating on the surface, an iridescent black screw
with wings the shape of blue, prominent identity
opening into an expanded view of infallible process,
the feeling that our time is spent pushing fragments

in and out of place, hoping to get it right or hoping
to free ourselves from the hope of getting it right
with every keystroke the urge to fudge, to skew,
to intervene, to announce This is who we are, when
it's readily apparent the sounds form the meaning—
as the weather's mystery remains intact, prescribe
the urge to know to something like the sequential
numbering of rice grains or blades of summer grass
or how the Kalash, Dardic-Vedic descendants of
the fire lances of the Hyperzephyrians, understand
the horned wolves of want, the black water of need,
and the snowcapped peaks of what used to be,
rosy-fingered spawn of Alexander the Great till
the blood-soaked dawn of the Iron Amir, an outpost
of light, the blue centuries of light, bringers of the light
to mountain temples, sun-worshipping winemakers
almost a footnote, surviving in threes. "If it's good
enough for God, it's good enough for me," he said,
walking three job folders to the incoming shelf
in administration, not keeping to himself the secret
he found, though no one wanted to hear it anyway.

To continue walking, right out the front door, into
the yellow wall of the sun, to take that road and stand
among the trees and hear them hashing it out
with the wind, to understand, when it starts to rain,
where the weather report falls short is art's domain.

small town siberia

after Tristan Tzara

i.

the tin roofs glimmer like crates of herring

drink to a gallop

a blue light and the heavy dance begins

you call it bread crumbs

ii.

as always my comrade

i rest on the bench

between black windows

hearts and eyes rolling in my mouth

iii.

the quiet house of my trembling mouth

a blue drink

stuck on the ceiling

cold oh yeah if only we could

iv.

the newspaper on the bench

like a label on a pill bottle

for hell's gates in my locomotive heart

i sleep against you bread crumb eyes

v.

the tin roofs like crates of herring

sometimes the light settles in a necklace around us

i rub my hand against the hard table

are you the angel? i ask anyone who approaches

Good Luck with Your Chaos

There I am: the crony
with the coffee cup
reading Extremities
on the elevated train
into work through the rain.

*

A larger vision,
a cozy warm cancer.

*

The multi-tasking self-starter
and standout team player
suddenly unable to withstand
the faces relentless as flies,
the voices' violent buzz.

*

The self as monument
to what cannot be—
a lick of sand
in the cold sunlight.

*

What am I a popular song
returning to my spot
at the edge of the night,
a clean swath across the glass?

*

What appears in
the space between
the *it* and the *is*

in *it is raining*,

in *it is night*,

in *it is* anything—

the “What is

it anyway?”

that follows.

*

As a Vietnamese monk
in a saffron robe
plucking the dandelions
from an empty parking lot
I feel more like myself
and less like the window
through which I thought
I might escape.

*

I am you and you
have recovered it—

the sunset we watch
through a blender.

Three Suburban Shaman Songs

I laugh on my way
to the source of thunder

a family of otters
pulls me downriver

• • •

The stag beetle stares
from the fallen branch

the branch that kills me
many years ago

• • •

The door to my home
swings open in the wind

the crows caw and caw
and I caw some more