

GOING WITH THE FLOW

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Going With The Flow
by Peter Siedlecki

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Some of the following poems have appeared in *Beyond Bones*, *Earth's Daughters*, *The Western New York Anthology of Poetry*, *The Buffalo News*, and *Intentional Walk*.

To all those authors, painters, sculptors, actors, and musicians
who helped bring me back to life.

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GOING WITH THE FLOW

GOING WITH THE FLOW

I share my life and spread it out now
between the Niagara and the Hudson,
and I am—in a way—like a river,
eager to flow away and toward,
away and toward, testing the test
of Heraclitus
and acknowledging the persistence of change,
the persistence of movement,
the persistence of decay.

Is this the condemnation
of which Sartre spoke—that I am condemned
to be a river connecting two rivers?
That I am condemned to this relentless change
and to embrace the beauty
Of the sad death of summer
which occurs in blazes of color
that make my eyes laugh
and my heart cry?

LOVELY BURDEN

Bearing the weight
of the knowledge of death
is too great a burden
for any poem to assume.
The poem
knows nothing
and says only what it sees,
even when it is deluded
by an autumn day
that glides up the Taconic Parkway
smothered by the colors of an impending end.

I sit next to my poem, recalling August,
which occurred, it seems, only a minute ago.
I see twin maples,
standing at each others' side
almost identical in shape and size,
but one a burnished red
and the next a golden yellow,
looking from a distance like one tree
with colors melting into each other,
causing me as I approach to contemplate
once more
appearance and reality,

Like tourist guides,
the maples pull my gaze to the left
in time for me to notice a break in the
insistency of radiant forest, a break
that frames the distant misty Catskills
in repeating pyramids of sun rays,
creating a scenic fanfare
as beautiful as the end of
any beginning.

SOME SONG

Some song,
like a spring song
sung in autumn
by a faraway voice,
draws me from my dealings
reminds me
of feelings half-forgotten,
of some sleepy April,
when you
walked naked
through my room,

some song
that smoothed our skin
and darkened our flowing hair,
with you,
walking naked and smiling,
more beautiful even
than now
as you clatter
the recycling tote
back to its place
to save me the effort.

SHUTTERS

Perhaps I acted hastily,
trashing those old shutters
that shaded our bed from daylight
for so many years.

I should have left them standing in a corner
as a memory of me,
and the inept effort of my young hands
newly attempting joinery and routing.

I will die, and you will wail
and misremember me as being perfect.
Missing from the scene,
I will not have had the courage

to dissuade your memory
or tarnish your golden image of me.
The shutters might have served a purpose
other than shading daylight.

A purpose quite the opposite, in fact:
that of letting light in.
But then, you would still
Allow yourself to be blinded by it.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

in an Ionesco world
where you can be my friend
by facing me
without ever facing me,
I recall what
my friend Paul once said
when I asked him
why he hadn't written:

“When I no longer love you.
I'll write to tell you.”

It made sense to me.

I need no catalog of friends
telling me
about their passion for polkas
or needing a description
of 1960's baseball uniforms,
or reminding me
of how it used to be.

It would take too much time
from poems.
I prefer to keep my face
to myself.

So, friends,
read this poem
and rest comfortably
in my love.

THE CALL

So he sat there with his salad,
alone as usual
in medias res
like a character in a linear narrative
—which he was.

and thinking about populations
and their seating accommodations,
and if all this space became suddenly filled,
would someone—seeing him there,
taking up so much of it with only his self
—request that he share?
He bristled at the thought
of something so awkward.

Ah, but
—and yes the accent falls on the *but*
to give it pregnancy
—what if this intruder were to be
a beautiful young woman
sitting suddenly across from him
like some luscious fruit
dropped deliciously
into the mix of his arugula.

He smiled at the adventure of his thought
and at the notion
that he might hear sea maidens singing.

He looked around him.
Space was ample.
Seating was plentiful.

They would not be singing to him today.
He was smiling at his old-man's fantasies
when he looked up to see her standing there,
her mist-colored eyes looking like sea songs.
She was asking
if he minded her sitting with him
and assuring him that he could leave

whenever he needed to,
and he was wondering
if he was hearing some sea voice.
He was questioning the reality
of this reality
when he stammered
–yes
–my pleasure
(and, truly, it was).

And they sat together,
probing the coast
of some new understanding:
comparing salads,
gossiping about Mrs. Dalloway,
and about that thing going on
between
Willa Cather and Raymond Federman,
and conjecturing on which side
Vonnegut stood.

All during the while of this,
he was falling in love
as only an old man could
when confronted by sea mist:
he touched her consciousness
ever so gently,
caressed her ideas
and kissed her mind
before saying goodbye.

THING

It is there and will not go away,
stuck in place,
as though time's sleeve
has caught on a rose thorn,
interfering with continuum
to force this thing on me.

This thing is here
and has been,
has been unnoticed
—unnoticed, having slid into itself
slowly and subtly.

This thing is obviously sly
and only now I catch the glimpse
of its withered ugliness.
I wish for its departure knowing
it will not go.

Despite my despising,
I learn in the accumulation of
passing moments
to accept the thing,
to acclimate,
to adapt.

Clichés become themselves
only because their truth
becomes so incessantly true
that it is boring.

All truth is boring.
Lies are much more
like fireworks in a distant
night sky, more adventurous,
but this thing
refuses to lie to me.

A SHORT PROCESSION

It was a short procession,
only a few sad cars
with somber flags.

 If it had a voice,
it would whisper
rather modestly:
“He is dead
and is leaving hardly any legacy.”

He will just be dead.
When time is past
his name will arise casually.
in conversation
like blown dust.
People will say, “Ah, yes”
And abruptly proceed,
leaving dust to settle behind them.

This awful exit
feeds my resolve:
I want everyone who ever
had a positive thought about me
to attend my funeral.

I want the street,
The block,
The city,
to be too small to hold it

I want it to be remembered
as though my being
meant something important enough
to be remembered.

Come on, Life!
I've loved you too much
for you to be paltry with me.
Pay back a little!
Come on, Death,
lighten up!
Have a party.

BEING AWAKENED

Either shaken or summoned
from sound sleep
is various:
the slightly nasal NPR voice
intended to bring me
into equilibrium with the day
while I slide into consciousness;
the suddenness of
mower motor,
dog bark,
or siren;
a soft touch
on my shoulder;
the pounding dream fact
that urges it be
checked against reality
to divide properly
the mist from the mud.

The most exciting waking
though
is to be tugged out of sleep
by a poem
asking to be written.

BUILDING THE VOICE OF THE GOD

He wanted to connect
to antiquity,
to build an aeolian harp
that might catch the wind
in its strings
and render its own melody
independent of strum or staff
—only the divine and ancient
voice of the wind.

To do so,
he employed
things he had at hand
in his own time and space:

the tools,
the plan.

Choosing his woods carefully,
he shaped them,
planed them,
connected them,
cut the sound holes,
inserted the tuning pegs,
strung them,
made them taut,
and
waited then for Aeolus to sing,
waited,
the way a fisherman
anticipates the tremor on his line.

CHILD'S PLAY: A RETIREMENT POEM

And so it goes.
The river flows,
and we keep sticking toes
into it, testing difference,
trying to believe in same,
deep down
knowing the damage that days do.

Arrival had been like a birth.
They all took you up,
embraced you,
treasured you,
made you nearly central for a while
in this chosen world.

But this world, in time,
began to shift itself,
push things up around you,
take things away subtly,
almost silently,
making nearly invisible
the damage that days do.

More comings and goings,
and of a sudden
you yourself seemed almost
a stranger
in the world you had chosen
—unknown and unknowing,
you could only make it into poems.

You grew more separate and silent,
feeling almost a victim
of the damage that days do.

The meanings you continued to make
of your chosen world
were straining to escape,
but were muffled by the crush of

crowd pushing you toward
the perimeter.

Now,
you swallow your made meanings,
smile, and flow away,
knowing you are the river,
the flōwer,
the flower blooming,
and not a mere thing
standing still.

It occurs to you,
as you compose this poem
about a river
that a river rives,
like the riving knife on your table saw
that keeps the ripped wood separate,
the way a river splits the land
into opposite shores,
distinct states, nations.

(You wonder
if this part is all too analytical
or too prosaic
to assume itself a poem?)

The river is a rīver.

And the plumed
and perfumed beauty
that flows out of the humble bud
after it has absorbed
enough sun
to push its process

(Is this too abstract?),

is indeed a flōwer.
Yes, the flower is a flōwer.
And it occurs to you

that language is a wonderful toy
that makes children
of even the eldest of those who
deliberately
play with its possibilities.

Yet it makes them seem so mature
to the listeners.

ON BEING OLD AND

How absurd it is to grow old
and what absurdity it encourages
among those of us who attempt
to recolor age, cover it,
or have its moment stitched into place
by an expert.

The worse thing is the gush
that swells in observers
who view age as some alien wonder,
especially those who insist upon
categorizing everyone with wrinkled skin
as quaint or cute.

I refuse to be thought of
as a cute old man.
I want to be considered dangerous
and capable of illegality.

I want women to regard me
as an outlaw
likely to sweep them away
to dark places
rather than have them dote
over me and care.