

Three Poems

Jack Troy

Reading co-sponsored by Kvasir and Aughwick Poets and Writers

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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, “Whatthey 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

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.