

Poetry

Various Authors

1989

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Port-of-Call Cass Corridor

Anchored in the oily swamp
Near the crumbling dockyard
Lurks an old ship

.

Stumbling past
The foggy glass portholes
I glance at the stowaways:
The Black men and women
Are herded and counted
The aisles sway
As they slump on plastic chairs
Escaping only the humiliation
Of an auction block
While whites and an occasional Black
Scurry about the crowded hull
In the uniform of the day
Carrying out their mission
Of sucking blood from the
Tired veins
Of the waiting.

.

I had my blood drained twice
On one of these ships
Dizzy, I nearly fainted
As the cold remains of my hemoglobin
Trickled back into my sore arm
A long thin ice worm
Slithering toward my
Throbbing and rotting heart.

.

And Hollywood visited here last year
Taking pictures
Of a politician playing an actor
Or an actor playing a politician
In a speech christening
A fictitious but new
Plasma Donor Center

.
208 takes before sailing off
To new ports of progress.

.
A bottle flies over the railing
Startling the sea gulls
With a message about a mutiny before sunrise
While the slave ship rocks gently
In the oily swamp
Near the crumbling
And moaning dockyard.
—William Blank

DETROIT MICHIGAN 1988

our town is built on the river bank
the trees are thick with life
i was born on this river bank
and learned the water flowed
between the big lakes.
i learned this piece of earth
looks like a mitten
in a sea of lakes
and this river is the water of the lakes.

.
the mountains of machinery were already here
on the banks of the river
when i arrived
at night in the factory
i walked along the stone shoreline
and saw the scrub trees covered with soot
the freighter docked along the concrete shore
the conveyor going down deep into her hold
to pull out the iron ore
leaving rusty piles of pellets
waiting to be burned
in the blast furnace.
i sat by the scrub trees
at the edge of the river
and watched a thick liquid pour
out of the factory into the water
the furnace fired and lit the night sky

the stacks spewed a fine shower of metallic smoke
across the water.
now the factory's steel bones
are rusting at the river's edge
the concrete foundation crumbles
under its own weight
as the water flows past
carrying off the remains
piece by piece.
the roots of the trees
snake through the cracks
to reach the water.
workers are at a different site
trenching out a line
from the stack to the river
at the base of the thumb
the line reads
A RACE TO THE DEATH.

.
this new stack in our town
is bigger than the rest
fueled by waste
a breath thick with sickness
settles on the water and says
I will make the trees bare
no leaves will blossom in the spring
the roots will shrivel at your banks.
the River says
I am the water of the Lakes
we stand on her shore
and listen to what the River says
rise up against the machine
when the voice of the water is silenced
our voices will echo in a lifeless place.
—Mick Vranich

All the Breaths

All the breaths all the people
who ever lived or are alive now
breathe in their life put together
could fit in a space
as big as
Lake Michigan,
Whereas an ant's total breaths in its life
would fill a space
the size of
your body,
And a human breathes

a space of air in its life
the size of
the Empire State Building,
And a Blue Whale breathes a volume
so large in its life
you could go backpacking in it
for a month
and see no one.
—Antler

Pontiac's Speech to the White Man

Out of the blue sky, out of
the waters, out of the woods, of the deer,
the beaver the bush the bird flies, out
of my people the blood, out of
so many moons in this place a man
cannot count them, out of
grace with the Great Spirit who
gave us this land, you seek
to push us.

.
(At night, in my dreams,
already I smell you, I smell
your railroads, your sawmills,
my mother's hair burning in the forest, I
smell these things in my dreams,
I see that Chrysler plant you intend
over the graves of my people. You
cannot fool me! I am the
land you seek, I am the supple
bowing of the branches, I am the leaves,
waving a warning to my young men,
I have the strength
of all the roots in the forest
under me, the fox and the bear and the hawk and the badger
have given me their skills, all things and creatures
in the forest have given me what is theirs
for I have given them my spirit, I have,
since the Great Spirit first placed us here, I have
trod with respect and care over
my mother's flesh, over
this land.

.
All this! All this! All this!
you will have to push out, you white men, you
weak pale-faced rum drinking cowards, you
who have not been able to manage
your own affairs in your own land, you

who come now to desecrate mine. Ahhh, this
 .
 is your last chance, you bastards,
 get the fuck out NOW,
 .
 or forever the food for the wrath of the forest people.
 (I know in my dreams, I know your perverse
 power, your guns and your
 driven multitudes of paid and punished
 warriors, and I know in my dreams,
 against you my branches may break,
 my leaves may be burned, my fur
 singed and bleeding in the bitter cold
 of your ways, and my heart bleeds, my roots
 squirm and heave with these apprehensions,
 .
 but I hear, in my dreams I hear
 over the clamor of your Fords, over
 the cries of your powdery women in
 your department stores over the
 shriek of the mutilated forest itself, I hear
 .
 another tongue, my tongue
 in another's mouth, in my dreams I hear
 the triumph of my forest speech
 in another time, and it says, it
 screams with a vengeance
 UP AGAINST THE WALL, MOTHERFUCKERS!
 Dave Sinclair 1968, in Detroit
 land of the Ottawas and Wyandottes
 —reprinted from the *Warren-Forest Sun*, April 19, 1968

Crossing the Freeway

Seven a.m. on the way to work
 Sun not up, headlights on
 Moving from freeway to freeway
 Exiting, entering, making ready
 To merge
 .
 And there on the entrance ramp
 From the north Lodge to east I-94
 There in that concrete cavern
 On a sorry triangle of green
 A tall strong male ring-necked pheasant
 Making ready to cross this dangerous
 River of cars
 .
 Though I'd seen them before

And now more and more in the early
Morning hours
I am open-mouthed
And my foot hits the brake
Wanting so to stop and watch and wait
And help him cross

.
But quickly thinking better of it
Knowing I would be back-ended
And cause him more of a start
I move on with the flow
Of that tainted river
Just as the sun breaks the urban line
So that his head shines green
Shines red in my passing eye
And I carry his color in my mind
The day long
—M.R.

Campfire Talk

Birds don't need opinions
because they have pinions.
What is the opinion of the pinon pine
on whether Christianity is
for or against homosexuality?
A flower doesn't need a savior
to be able to bloom.
A waterfall doesn't need a guru
in order to gush.
A caterpillar doesn't need a Bible
to become a butterfly.
A lake doesn't need a Ph.D.
to become a cloud.
A rainbow doesn't need a fresh coat of pain
every year.
Worms don't need to study existentialism
to exist.
Mountaintops don't need to kneel
and ask forgiveness for their sins.
Capitalism and Communism mean nothing
to every tree that alchemizes light.
No whale will ever know who Christ is.
No chipmunk will ever follow Buddha.
No eagle gives a shit about Mohammed.
No grizzly will ever consult a priest ...
No seagull will ever become a Mormon.
No dolphin has to learn computers
if it wants to get along

in the modern world.
No sparrow needs insurance.
No gorilla needs a God.
—Antler

Sex and Revolution

my flesh is rippling music dancing
as i move my hands my lips across your supple
body blending everything becomes bewildered unpretende
in these moments of ecstatic rhythm
reggae sweat your breath so sweet still
lingering upon my lips
your body mine the last of the wine
spilled between us in a kiss
an offering not offered to some other god
but shared
these moments of ecstatic rhythm writhing
in abandon Dionysus could not have taught me
mysteries more powerful than making love
all acts of pleasure consummate rebellion
all conscious nakedness can shuffle off this mortal coil
and by expanding span the growing chasm between
Self and Not-Self
eliminating borders to abandonment's continuum
a communion of surrender and resistance
which is survival and our happiness
think this: distances are dangerous
illusions of distinctions are conclusions of
extinction
we must be in love with the world become it
to save it from our own self-hatred
lover, i caress the whole in you with every touch
turning us away from sure destruction
bring your lips again to mine
and seal our sweet conspiracy of sex
and revolution pleasure is our bread and wine
and Anarchy our paradise
chaos comes into the inner heart surrounds the world
around just at the moment we dissolve our barriers
against it in these moments of ecstatic rhythm
we become the everywhere and everything
at last, uncontrollable and free.
—Marie Stephens
The fantastic animals on this centerfold and on pages 18, 19 and 23 are by Lynne Clive.

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