

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

Lawrence Kessenich

Out of the Blue

In memory of Jack Powers

At the time, I didn't know Jack,
except by reputation--host to
Beat poets, godfather of Boston's
poetry masses. Led into the
gallery by his patient wife, he
took the place of honor beside
the podium, facing us. Ravaged
by stroke, his once-mobile face was
expressionless, though empathetic
eyes belied that immobility.

When I, the featured reader, walked
to the front, still reeling from the
political flamethrower poet
who'd preceded me, Jack's eyes smiled
encouragement. The reading went well.
When I turned to leave the podium,
Jack looked me full in the face, eyes
dancing with pleasure, offered me
a trembling hand, a hand that had shaken
Ginsburg's and Ferlinghetti's.

Affirmation. That was his gift to
thousands of poet over four decades.
A moment you could believe that you,
too, might be a Corso or a Bly.
A moment when your voice was heard.

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Afterlife

Her heart was golden, but she didn't
suffer fools gladly — the nurse fumbling
with her chemo IV, the clueless
bureaucrat, the board member
who wouldn't get to the point. We forgave
her because she expected no less of herself.

Cancer tried her patience to the limit. It refused
to be commanded, hung around like a committee
that wouldn't go home. Finally, she saw Death
lurking in the waiting room of her life, called
him in, demanded that he do his job,
and, always responsible, did hers as well.

At her grave, a mother hawk circled
above, cry piercing the blue dome of sky.
I couldn't help thinking it was her spirit
exhorting us, like the poem read by the rabbi,
to be "a lion of courage," reminding us that
she was with us, watching.

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Imagining Miss Dickinson

She sits before the window,
small hand trembling as she writes.
I rest the ladder softly against her sill,
the warm light of her
oil lamp drawing me upward.

When I reach her, she cannot bring herself
to look at me. I lift the sash.
A breeze ruffles her stationary. Her eyes
glance off mine. "Em," I whisper.

She stands up suddenly, tipping her
chair silently onto the thick Persian rug.
I crawl through the window, across her
writing table, upset the
inkwell, which bleeds across her pages.

And then she is in my arms, fragile
as the crystal kitten on her dressing table,
more precious to me
than all the world's diamonds.

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Blue Yonder

Copilot Loses It, Seeks

God at 30,000 Feet

- *Boston Metro headline*

All his life, they assured him
God was up there. He became a pilot
to get closer. Year after year, he saw
blank sky, unblinking sun, stars

sparkling like tears in the night.
His yearning became unbearable.
He begged God to speak with him.
It seemed so little to ask. One day,

as he flew above clouds soft
as angel wings, he asked God
out loud in the cockpit. The pilot
tried to calm him, but he began to shout,

"I have a right to speak with You! I am
as much Your creature as Moses or
Mohammed, who spoke with You
so often. I deserve to be heard!"

He came to, shackled in the economy section,
the seats on either side of him empty,
passengers across the aisle staring,
afraid he would start ranting again,

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but he was exhausted, heart broken into a galaxy of pieces. Then a face appeared above the seat in front of him, round, mischievous, a two-year-old haloed in red hair.

All she did was look at him – no fear or judgment in her startling blue eyes. All she did was look at him and see that he was there.

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Community

My neighbor is the kind of guy who always has the relatives to his house on the holidays. (He told me once he spent his childhood at the Boys and Girls club.) When the relatives are gone, he's got a community in his yard: plaster statues of boys squatting in knickers or with fishing poles across shoulders, girls pushing wheel barrows or holding kittens—a world of lost innocence. For Halloween, the regulars are joined by scarecrows, black cats, pumpkins and skeletons; for Christmas, penguins, angels, elves, Mary, Joseph, Jesus and a host of Santas. Sometimes, the lurid glow of lights from Dave's yard brings out the Scrooge in me. But then he had a stroke, returned from rehab looking like a scarecrow himself. So, now, when the pulsing multicolored lights begin to get to me, I imagine him standing at his window, surveying his make-believe friends, his hound-dog eyes alight with red, green and white, and think, "Merry Christmas, Dave."