

Wilderness House Literary Review 12/2

Mark Mansfield

Today's To-Do List

Get up. Forge more letters to fellow poets
from some special sauce literary journal
with a twenty-year backlog of unread submissions,
notifying each that one of his or her less scrutable epics
will be featured in the next issue.

Print the letters using time-released, invisible ink.

Go to nearby 7-E. Try to ignore Kid Slack,
high on Whatever,
who keeps chronically Twittering or texting
while cajoling you to risk a fine and/or imprisonment
to buy him a six of some beer only delinquents
or cops would be caught dead drinking.

Put up flyers for your new revolutionary, self-help group
Anons Anonymous
for those addicted to misquoting pithy bumper stickers.
Serve only decaf at the first meeting.

Think hard of something written with a swan in it
that doesn't take a dive.

Practice more shadow puppetry with the lights off.
Find out at what point corn on the cob and cobwebs
no longer were cobbled together.

Scout around for a guru, who has never once meditated,
practiced yoga,
nor been outside Des Moines, Iowa.
Invite him and the Kid to see *Swan Lake* with you.

Return home.

Run off more letters.

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The Night You Drove Down to the *Lost Cause Saloon*

Deciding to make camp here for the night,
you plop your ass down in the least-lit booth
right by the shitter in the old *Lost Cause Saloon*.
First tossing back a few perfunctory shots
of Rebel Yell faster than Grant took Richmond,
you attempt to saunter toward the Rock Ola
as if your name were Lyle or Vern, and you
damned well fucking meant to spill that drink,
as well as every bit of change you own
along with car keys, credit cards, two M
&Ms, and a napkin from another bar
whereon is scrawled apparently what could be
somebody's phone number without a name.
Casually picking your crap up off the floor,
you start to scrutinize the juke, while trying
to figure out precisely why that ZZ Top
and Skynyrd never merged, so every frigging
selection then could be by "Skynyrd Top"
or "ZZ Skyn," perhaps. Still swilling down
the contents of your empty glass, you opt
for Don and Phil, soon joining them
in elegiacally bleating out "Dreeeaammm,
dream, dream, dream, dream,"
while poking the word REPLAY till it breaks.

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By now, feeling pretty maudlin in a shit-faced sort of way, you note the rebel sentries, who are posted, keglike bellies to the bar, disguised as denim- and leather-clad bikers, and all tarted up and wearing the colors: *Confederate Nose Punchers, Cooterville* who have begun to slowly start to move their hirsute lips en masse while staring holes through you the size of Scooter Pies and looking increasingly like the mullet Mafia.

Determined to elude Goober Patrol, you manage to stumble outdoors onto what appears to be The Smallest Parking Lot in the Northern Hemisphere, where you spy one of the sentries' mounts still idling. Hi Ho Silvering your ass astraddle "Traveler," you wheelie halfway around the lot before you surface long enough near semi-consciousness to conclude you never really did much care for *The Wild One* -- or *Easy Rider* for that matter, whilst simultaneously clutching and choking the bejesus out of your handlebar like reins (and broncing your sorry ass very near perpendicular) as more and more roundless "doughnuts" pockmark the lot, with you fanning more clouds of gravel, sand, and dirt than a shit-faced posse at high noon, seconds before one of the gnarlier-looking sentries wildly charges out the *Lost Cause*, grabs a-hold of your magic reins, then rains the first of many well-aimed nose punches down on Yankee Doodle You.

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Henri d'Boots (et Goathead)

A harmless necessary cat . . .

—William Shakespeare

He watches me each time that I go out.
Beside the door as if Bast's Palace Guard,
his long white whiskers, speckled button snout,
and mouse-gray ears all seem to disregard
my meows, which sound not a bit like "Pard"
that's still the King's tongue whether tailing poor Scout
or blindsiding the neighbor's Saint Bernard.
Or musing, might Goathead bring home a trout?

So once I fly the coop to cat about,
for how long does he perch there, frozen hard
as some catatonic catamount? No doubt
not all that long. The tale be told, the card
table's got scraps of verse and other bard-
like stuff all neatly stacked, in need of routing
via four paws and sundry claws. *What lard!!*
We merely wish Goatling might snag a trout.

And then there's Roomie Greenjeans' buds a-sprout
in desperate need of pruning fangs, or those shards
of tiles amidst the already nibbled grout
crumbling like ancient Rome in the bath. Bombard
the curtain to shreds, then leave the tub so marred
that a house call from Bob Vila or a bout
with the bottle, neither 'twould serve. *Tartar'd? Charred??*
Who cares? Goat Boy, the subject, childe, is Trout.

*A dog's life, as they say, is dumb. The yards
of Our Realm teem with such Goofy-tongued devouts
of ball and bone. Dig this, Fido! We're Starved!*
And now demand, Goathead, GO fetch OUR TROUT!

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The Rake of the Shop

*[A]rt for art's sake is just another piece
of deodorized dog shit*

—Chinua Achebe

It's hard to find a poem to "workshop"
That one can put to use like a stage prop,
A rat's nest that your classmates will help mend,
Unmixing metaphors and trimming ends
Off rhymes that should have been right on,
Backfilling black holes in your metric lawn.
It's difficult to know which lyric brat
Of yours gives a rat's ass, it smells a rat.
Perhaps that villanelle you keyed last night,
Compelled to blither on about a flight
Of birds you had no choice but to have "heard,"
Having end-stopped Line B with the word "word"?
Or could that sestina you've just about half-primed,
Now raring to repeat anything unrhymed,
Half-circling its own self-wrought aerodrome,
Crash land, this week's "Show and Tell" poem?
Voila! another sonnet slapdashed off!
May also serve—
or that free-verse Molotov?
Aubades? Rondels? Hot dogs? A triolet?
You've got 'em all, but which likely will they
Applaud the most, or at least not plagiarize?
("They" being your fellow meeece, apostrophized.)
It's not an easy gig to shop "sweet sounds."
The toughest nut cracks, forced to make the rounds
Inside his damned portfolio, to glean
One blessed line with sense enough to mean.