

Leadwood: New and Selected Poems 1999 – 2018

by Daniel Crocker
Stubborn Mule Press
Devil's Elbow, MO
stubbornmulepress.com, 2018.

Review by Joseph Farley

Every once in a while as an editor or a reader you stumble across a writer whose words stand out, sticks with you, makes you eager to see more, to read more. Daniel Crocker is one of those writers.

I first came across the poetry and fiction of Daniel Crocker in the late 1990s. Ian Griffin, former publisher of Green Bean Press, sent me a book of Crocker's poetry and a book of his fiction for possible review. At the time I edited *Axe Factory*, *Cynic Book Review* and a some other small magazines. I was wowed by both books, and felt honored to do reviews. I feel the same way now after reading *Leadwood*.

Small town poverty, madness, child abuse, alcoholism, addiction, sexuality, bible banging, AIDS, love, family and environmental hell are presented with slices of life from comic books, tv shows, and sports. Rape is counterbalanced by Sesame Street taoism and the Incredible Hulk's complex personal struggles. As the title suggests, there are many poems of place. *Leadwood*, the town, Missouri, the state and its rivers are ever present, a grounding place for the poet to return to and let the lightening strike.

*What do we do when the metaphors fail
and the analogies beg us to leave them alone
and all those dead Greeks are dead for good
(from "River")*

"Where We Came From (*Leadwood*, Missouri pop. 1200)" stands out as one of the most powerful pieces in the book with its harsh beauty. Here are two excerpts:

*The chat dump is waste spilled
from the great lead mines of the 20's*

*Our grandfathers worked there grew old and died
and left our grandmothers w/ nothing*

*The chat dump broods over this town like a tomb
(sand and lead dust pumped from the earth)*

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*Its sprawl is endless
a hand clenched tight
it covers everything here
like a curse
She cast her spells under the toenail moon
chanted words men were never meant to hear
and let me be
the curse of the wild falling somewhere between us*

*The chat dump is where fires burn until dawn
kegs empty quickly
and twenty-somethings w/ nothing else to do
ponder the possibilities of iron and steel*

Or listen to the echoes of class struggle in “City of Bones”, another powerful poem:

*The Company left us
here where the chat dumps loom
like tombstones
left us like pigs w/ out tits to suck*

Poverty and lack of jobs leads people into hopelessness, requiring something to fill the gap, such as “meth meth meth meth meth meth meth meth” or “ecstasy orgies”, but “You can never really know/ the gaudiness of suicide/ until you’ve been right there” (from “People Everyday”).

Crocker is up front about his bisexuality. Many pieces discuss this facet of his life. He describes the intolerance of small towns – several poems use the term “abomination”. He also talks of love, desire, and discovery in poems such as “Elton and George”, “Dear Lion-O” and “Jeffrey.”

Crocker is equally upfront about being bipolar choosing The Hulk, as a metaphor for his life. His Bruce Banner existence can transform at any time. In “Mania Makes Me a Better Poet” he argues that that his condition makes him a better writer because of “chaos magic.” That’s been argued before by or about other poets. I’m not in a position to say if that’s true, but if Crocker believes it helps him write better then let’s believe along with him.

A selected poems collection pulls from different previously published books and chapbooks. As with most poets not every poem in this volume sets the world on fire. What carries the weight is the emotional and linguistic brilliance of the crème de la crème, the steel beams that hold up the structure. There’s a lot of strength in this collection. It stands well, and should be read.