

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

Bob Brill

The Janus Effect

I pull up memories
or at best their tattered ghosts
even while rushing

into a hypothetical future,
trying to make it
all come out in my favor.

One eye looking back, one eye peering ahead
and a third eye trying to shut the Janus eyes
and live in the moment.

Sometimes so much happens in that moment
that it feels like a week.

Going to a funeral,

surviving a train wreck,
and winning a hundred bucks at poker
all in one day.

Sometimes the time machine slows down
to an inch worm's pace
as I wait impatiently

for something to happen.

She's ten minutes late.

Is she going to stand me up?

Come on, come on,
show up already
or the movie will start without us.

If only I had brought a book.

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

I'd have something to do
while waiting for time to get unstuck.

Ah, there she is, sweet thing,
hurrying toward me with excuses at the ready.
This will slide away into the past.

Ten years from now will I remember
the movie we saw and
where we went for dinner?

The waiter with the Danish accent?
The candlelight? What wine we drank?
Kissing in a taxi?

Forty years down the road
will I remember what's-her-name
and the guy she married?

The Janus eyes have cataracts,
squinting at a blurry past,
altogether blind to the future.

On On

Lenny Gold took a toke on the pipe. Then a shot of tequila. I need these inputs, he said. Friends, you know me for a ranter who can talk all night. I remember a time years ago ranting in a cheap Paris hotel room till canary jazz warbles in the airshaft told us another day was beginning. Had a picture in my mind that some bed-warm fusty sour-faced Parisian housewife was feeding her canary, the little bird in its cage longing for freedom, the wife too, aching to fly away. All that sorrow dripping from the metro trains speeding people to their jobs, their dentists, their lawyers, their funerals. Darla had gone to bed. The couple we called the Moo Moos were leaning against each other, barely awake. So loving that some of the expats mocked their constant display of affection. Envy is what it was. The only one still wide awake was Tom Weston, who played quiet chords and runs on his guitar, while I kept talking. That was Paris in the long ago.

A demented ambulance, wailing a wild lament as it raced thru the streets, brought Lenny back to the present. He looked at his friends, took another toke and kept talking. It's a million years later and some of us are still walking the planet. Nothing much has changed except everything. The Moo Moos are divorced. Darla moved on, can't say I blamed her, so I had to let her go and move on too. She's forty years older now. We're all forty years older. Can you believe it? On on, there's no where else to go but on on as we're swept thru bottomed out bummers and rocketing highs, speeding on to the next and the next. On on, yet another day, another heartache, another adventure, the death of a loved one, a joyous reunion, a root canal, a fervent lover, a broken ankle. Sunrise, sunset, ghost of a moon shining thru mist, all the beautiful scenery of our lives. Footsteps approaching, receding, people coming and going thru the chambers of my heart. Can't pretend to understand it, but it's so damned interesting. This morning I saw a huge black bird looking at me from a telephone pole. I had to look away. What else can you do but let it all happen? Be here now, be there then, be everywhere there is to be, and submit to the great on on. Pass me that pipe, will you, John?

A Poet's Life

Death dances in high heels and here she comes, pounding out flamenco rhythms that punch holes in the floor. I think I've seen this movie. Great special effects, cloaking the story with clouds of churning magic vapor. They make it look easy. Me, I'm still stuck with the noble art of poetry, one lobe tied behind my back and my only tool a tired old bag of words. Yes, it can be done without computer graphics or huge infusions of cash or teams of writers, idea men, cameramen, gaffers, grips, best boys and caterers. The lonely poet high in his tower room with the short stub of a pencil, some scrap paper and a sandwich, turning tuna salad into streams of words. Fluid nonsense dripping down the page. Give us this day our daily quota of word barf, then it's off to the bar to join the other poets who will relish the taste of verses still redolent of tuna. We prop each other up with midnight wit, calling ourselves the Desperado School of Poets. This moment in time, this place on the globe, we're slipping into the same past that all poets, business men, crooks and politicians sink into, even as did the Beat Generation, the Lost Generation, Chaucer and his buddies, the hot young film makers, spreading a mulch on the ghosts of the present, the icons of the past, a whiff of the great times to come and as soon depart. Meanwhile I sit in my tiny garret of a brain pouring out those special effects known as poems, spilling down my legs and pooling on the floor. We were the Desperados, an in group on its way out, fostering each other's illusions, witty and cheerful to the end. Pallbearers of defunct metaphors laid to rest with honors and ironic laughter. I'll write a blurb for your book, old friend, if you'll do the same for me. Not since Virginia Woolf, Thomas Wolfe, and Beowulf has the world of letters seen his like. Thanks, buddy. What else would we be doing? Playing golf? Well, why not? That's just what my cousins do who haven't read a poem since Twinkle Twinkle, Little Star. Golf is as good as any other pastime while waiting for the dancing high heels to deliver the letter bordered in black. Another poet runs out of words.