

TO THOSE WHO KNOW IT NOT

LARRY KERSCHNER



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Peacepoet Larry Kerschner was a featured reader during the Inland Poetry Prowl, in Ellensburg, Washington. These poems were read at the Clymer Museum & Gallery in Ellensburg, on Saturday, April 6, 2019.

Engraving by A. De Neuville, "Tel El Kebir"



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answering a question

The first man I killed was small and
hidden in the tall grass.

Being a killer forever changes you.
Even if you learn to be kind and considerate and civilized
that part of you is always
hiding down inside
awaiting a chance.

A normal person does not want to kill and
will avoid it at all costs.
The military won't allow you to remain normal.
It doesn't matter if you think
you are smart enough
not to get caught up in their lies.
They will change you.

Don't be sucked into the biggest myth and lie
that dying for your country is somehow heroic.

Really be all that you can be.

ants

Bukowski noticed that
the ants are everywhere

picking up the dead,
their dead and the other dead
working it like it was a job
cleaning the low-domed hill of the nest
keeping it free from the acrid odor of oleic acid
tiny crosses placed in remembrance in the grass
the patter of even tinier feet moving in unison
intently pushing moldering bodies away

close listening may reveal ant laughter
at morbid jokes and grave humor
with ants dying to get their attention

the bee dancer

The roof line is set
the new bee hut is square and level
open faced to the southeast
when the bees arrive
in a few weeks
I shall dance a bee dance
of welcome
by April my bare feet
may be able to raise some dust
where now there is mud
intoning a poem about bees
my fat belly jiggling
over skinny legs
I will attempt to waggle appropriately
to show them the way

both ducks

both ducks stick their bills
into the brown stones and mud
seeking food in the garden space
one bird waddling behind the other
winter's paralysis finally easing
small green buds poke from the dirt
some worms lie on the surface
with all the recent heavy rain

wild geese fly north overhead
ignored by our two who are sure
that all they need is here

force and violence

while waiting at a light
I saw a couple walking along the road
he pushing a bicycle
she backhanded him on the right arm
not hard
with her left hand
they were both smiling
I'd guess he just said something amusing
possibly a mild jibe at her
or something self deprecating
she responded with a playful swat
but a swat from any person
against another person requires
some degree of force
leaving the question of when force
between persons
especially if the one
is larger than the other
is considered a form of violence
where is that line between play and aggression
what do we name that type of force between persons
when we don't want to see it as violence

bones young and old can be brittle but
sometimes black words can be more hurtful
than a ballistic strike to the body
how do we measure the force of words
that teach about violence in a way never
to be forgotten

I will teach you how to perform a war

a clean operation
to remove that dangerous tissue
which can no longer be controlled
we first name it cancer
we curse it for an inhuman bastard
nothing legitimate to be found
the pathologic question
must be asked and answered
weighing whether a pound of flesh will be enough
shared definitions in hand
we sharpen our knives
sanitary
chrome and steel
bright lights
remove any shadow
of doubts
patriotic anesthesia dulls the senses
common and other
to the loud cutting
ripping and
bleeding to come
once hidden viscera bloody red
broken bone white
and hypoxic blue tissue
stare out at us
unexpected collateral damage
can be dressed
with sterile white gauze
although the bloated smell
sometimes remains

afterwards
we will remove our gloves and
wash our hands

I thought the clerk at the hardware store

Was just trying to get information
About the heater we wanted to replace
When he asked me
If the thermostat had three wires
Or four

I was truly surprised
When you responded
To him
In an aggressive
Assertive
Plainly pissed off tone

Later in the car
You explained
Patiently
Through clenched teeth
That I would understand
If I could spend
Twenty-four hours
As a female

low tide

at Saltwater State Park

searchers
armed with steel fork and mythic clam gun
thick as sandpipers
dance on the edge
seeking their limits
between the grey wet beach rocks
and the milky blue water
the wind whips little white caps into the fog
fat rain is ignored
in the frenzy of the hunt

gulls and crows circle
flying low
seeking the broken and
discarded

men in black

where are the MIB when you need them

the blonde clown wants to build a wall
supposedly to keep the alien horde out
but some suspect this is deflection on his part
so we won't look behind his fleshy mask
agent K and agent J won't be allowed
to look into his actual background
even when the fate of the planet is at risk
he was born in another reality like many
extraterrestrial lifeforms living on earth
these aliens masquerading as humans
may appear as god botherers however
look behind the vacant eyes and you might
recognize an arquillian disguised as a republican

remember don't watch major media
don't look into the flash of the neuralyzer

on stage in Alaska with Allen Ginsberg

om
om mani padme hum

poet
I heard you sing each word
full of that sound
that droning
early in the throat sound

om-ing and chanting
buttocks dancing
air vibrating
incensed
by the very words

when you sang of cement rivers
and tobacco machines

when you sang of
divine signs in abo dreams

when you sang of sad paradise
and dancing devas and amorous Bodhisattvas
when you sang of the grey smoke's secret smile
and of tomorrow's love and sorrow's many names

when you sang the sound
a universe makes

you sang the song
the universe truly sings

Rock Dog

lives in the dark places
of the Earth
Rock Dog is seldom seen except in the shadows
he is hard in the way that the night is hard
the way a dream is hard
crystal in the moonlight

Winter comes from the north and proceeds south
everywhere there are bones
rib bones, back bones, a stray ulna
washed white in the downpour
It is not clear which of the People lived here
or who died here
these unknown (to us) men and women
may have hidden from each other
waiting for their wounds to heal
singing in a low drone while the world decayed

The People stamp their feet
their children breathe ice and lie still
Rock Dog's unpadded nails clatter over the stones

Rock Dog lifts his hind leg
to the quartz in comment
his words can be sharp

when it rains Rock Dog wears
slick gray like a new skin

In the past there was a boy with no name. He awoke and found himself in the forest. He saw a cave and climbed in for shelter. He could remember being in the hole in the ground when a large rock was pushed over the entrance. He did not know who his enemies were. He was afraid of the dark but he began digging. Soon he found some roots that he could eat. He became stronger and continued digging. The smell of the Earth became the smell of his Mother. He began to eat small rocks. His teeth became diamonds so he could eat larger rocks. He continued to eat into his Mother and finally came to another cave. It had an opening to the outside. It was night but since he had been in the dark so long the light from the stars hurt his eyes. He went back into the cave. As he continued to eat into and through his Mother first his bones and then his muscles became stone. Now he rarely comes above ground and only comes out in the dark. This is how the unnamed boy became Rock Dog.

the war was black and white

at first but then
in living color red and yellow and khaki green
brought into the living room but what was always missing
was the smell of war
my war smelled
of dying vegetation eau de agent orange
burnt gunpowder and burnt people
dark blood sweet and warm
piss shit sweat
testosterone
the same smell is found in what is left of a pizza shop
in Jerusalem
now the smell of war is in Jenin and Ramallah
piss and shit and blood
mixes with the frustrated cries
of the people
Helen Caldicott holds up
a picture of a baby with his head blown off
the smell of his head seeps up through the
concrete rubble after the tanks roll on
the same smell of piss and shit and blood
rose in the hot desert
some days after Iraqi soldiers were buried
alive
the same smell at Waco when the embers died and
the smoke cleared
the same smell of
more piss and shit and blood
was found by firefighters
and police digging below the twin towers space
the same smell more piss more shit
more blood
was found near Kabul raised with the dust
by bombs from 40,000 feet
next we'll find that same smell in some new axis of evil where
the smell of oil added to the smell of dead children
added to the putrescent odor of piss and shit and blood

of war and death
should gag us all

however as Erasmus said five hundred years ago
war is sweet
to those who know it not