

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Two Detroit Poets: A Place Where Waters Move Swiftly

Terry Blackhawk · Wednesday, August 14th, 2013

Two Detroit Poets

Terry Blackhawk is author of *Escape Artist* (BkMk Press, 2003) winner of the John Ciardi Poetry Prize; *The Light Between* (Wayne State University Press, 2012) and four other collections. Recent work is in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Collagist*, *Verses Daily*, *Poetry Daily* and *Nimrod*, which awarded her the Pablo Neruda Prize. She is the founding director of InsideOut Literary Arts Project and is a [2013 Kresge Arts in Detroit Literary Fellow](#).

Down in Detroit

By Terry Blackhawk

“Help me! I live in Detroit.”

Sign taped to a tip cup on the popcorn counter
of the Maple Art Theater in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, 2003

Remember when the flight attendant had us prepare
for landing in “Honolu...oops, Detroit”
and the whole plane laughed?

And did I tell you the one about the ex-
Michigander who turned her back on me
& pointedly bestowed her life story (Border Collies
and Harry Potter included) on another woman
waiting for the Napa Shuttle after I winced
& replied yes, yes, in Detroit, I live
IN Detroit. Or the librarian from Oakland Hills:
his “You live down in Detroit?” still echoes
down, down, down.

Tough enough to love
this town without the shocked looks, dropped
jaws of fellow citizens who assume whiteness
unites as they eye you, reassessing instantly. Still,
“The D” — dear “D” — must have some magic in it.
How else explain the doubled take, the suddenly shed
disguise? In less than an eye-blink, I’ve had men
switch from flirt to default mode, their mental
U-turns screeching with chagrin. Such power

in a word: to make a person give himself away.

Dee-troit, *day–twah*, strait in French, place where waters
move swiftly.

NOTE: This poem is forthcoming in Poetry in Michigan/Michigan in Poetry, New Issues Press, 2013

M. L. Liebler is a internationally known & widely published Detroit poet, university professor, literary arts activist and arts organizer, and he is the author of 13 books. Liebler is the founding director of both The National Writer's Voice Project in Detroit and the Springfed Arts: Metro Detroit Writers Literary Arts Organization. He was recently selected as Best Detroit Poet by *The Detroit Free Press & Detroit's Metro Times*. His forthcoming book is *Underneath My American Face* from The Wayne State University Press in 2015. www.mlliebler.com

Save the Frescoes That Are Us

by M.L. Liebler

for Edith Parker-Kerouac

These murals would have existed here,
in Detroit, even if Diego had never painted
Them. The sweat and labor of this city,
Along with the sacrificed blood
Of its workers, would have stained
These walls. No matter what.
This town, beautiful, lonely child
Broken by too much post-industrial
Hard luck, is always, once again,
Resurrected with deep convictions.
Our longevity cuts deeper than forever;
It's far longer than Rivera's Lenin-headed
Mural-Rock Center-Manhattan, torn
Down by those city slicker liberals in NYC
Beachhead of American culture and civilization.
Not here ! The politics of Detroit
Go beyond arguing fresco vs. classic,
Or any something vs. anything. Here we deal
In a culture of collective energies,
Beating union heart. Here, it's always
Work—Not talk. We know that
Talk is cheap, but work is
Forever. We know
That building is more
Essential to our survival than politics
Is to our reality.

Urban Farming

by M.L. Liebler

I'm not going back
To being no farmer
In Detroit, the greatest
City ever, creator of the middle
Class, the Arsenal of Democracy.
I don't want to order
My dungarees from no Sears' Catalog.
I don't want to know
My butcher by his first name.
Is it Larry? I don't ever want
To say "How Do?" to anyone.
I don't want my grandchildren
Saying they can't play baseball
Until after they slop the hogs or
After they seed the back 40.
I don't want my grandchildren
Yanking on cow's utters for their milk.
I'm not going back
To those days when daylight
Saving was invented for more
Farming to getter done. Screw
That! Thank God I am
A City Boy. Post Industrial
As that is nowadays.
When people talk about
Urban farming, I shudder.
I've visited plenty of small
Towns in my day—always
Leaving them saying
"Thank God I don't
Have to live there."

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