

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Gerard Wozek: Three Poems

Gerard Wozek · Tuesday, November 8th, 2022

Song to Myself at Seventeen

I didn't know how to save you then,
so forgive me. How you were able
to latch onto your spirit and go on
breathing, astonishes me even now.
Even though you knew who wrote
Faggot on your locker in indelible ink
your junior year, you never said a word.
And still somehow, you kept going.
In your mind, you sang to them
and your voice filled them with light.
You imagined they became your friends:
the ones who stole your gym bag,
smashed the headlights on your car,
or yelled Queer down the hall at you.
Still, you kept walking. And singing.
Quietly, almost silently, to yourself.
But then, how you found the courage
to take on the choir solo, I'll never know.
Your lips trembled next to the mic.
At first, a tremor, catch in the throat.
Then the first notes, unsteady
and broken but poised to soar.
Flaming Caruso, how you torched
the auditorium with your song.
Then afterwards, the handshakes
and back pats from the prom king,
the captain of the varsity football team.
All docile. All dumbstruck. All yours.
Until you left alone that night.
I didn't know then. If I could have
somehow stood next to you,
walked you to your car. Made sure
you got safely through the dark parking lot.

Now some twenty years or so later,
 I still touch my throat. That thin line
 of raised white scar tissue. But
 I am not silent. I'm singing
 to the you who once was me,
 and to all the brave Carusos, who
 dream their voices into the world,
 a little wounded but on fire.

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Whitmanesque

— Every moment of light and dark is a miracle. Walt Whitman

1.

The last pearl of morning dew lodged
 in a rose petal. Whorl of the Vitrinella
 seashell curving toward infinity. Curling
 frond of the cat palm tree. Soft green glades,
 green Irish mosses, bending fiddlehead ferns,
 jade finches, clover auras of breaking light
 arriving on wind. The grey-green calyx
 still alive underneath ten-foot snows,
 the verdigris remembered from childhood's
 erased savannah. The first green notes
 of the newly hatched wren. A universal
 pattern present in every living green opening.

2.

Let me be an unearthed snail fossil, creeping
 rhizome, imprint of a wet leaf on a rock bed,
 octave range of the ripening Greek fig. Let me
 be a dandelion stem plaited with soft clarabelles.
 Let me enter the pollen-dusted gardens
 with the force of an early April gale. Let me sing
 with my chosen family: Sappho, Cavafy,
 Adrienne Rich, Frank O'Hara, James Baldwin,
 James Broughton, Essex Hemphill, Audre Lorde,
 Jaime Gil de Biedma. Let me be part of that kinfolk
 chorus and share generously. Let me remember
 the ancient code in the amniotic fluid. Via Negativa,
 that state of being where no words can translate
 the pulse moving through me. Let me whirl
 in the primeval song of the Madre Divina.

3.

I am a divining rod for the buried ley lines
 that run from the pyramid at the Paris Louvre

to the Saint Louis arch in Iowa. I am the low hum
 of the Aurora Borealis, vibrating radiation dust
 fifteen billion years old, tremor of this earth's tsunamis,
 her massive sink holes, her shore erosions, brushfires.
 I am yoked to her tumult, her sudden ravages, her third
 eye that sees beyond the lifespan of stars. Tethered
 to this cycle of death and rebirth, I enter the soil
 serpentine and fertile, encoded with purpose, I sprout
 up like a seed nestled in velvet fertilizer, fungi. Stirred
 by planetary shifts, I am bound for elsewhere.

4.

I am Whitman's verdant spark, the spawn of
 the vagabond poet's pen tip, new flesh formed
 from his prototype, a soul shaped to fit his archetype.
 I am the tenuous leaf he dreamed would someday inhabit
 the forest. Pagan spirit, blended with everything
 I see and know and imagine. Speaking myself into
 becoming, germinating all my tomorrows in my imprecise
 lexicon. I am an earthbound body, now phantom lover,
 now spirit bird, unseen but still hovering over you, present
 with you here, invisible in each tomorrow and still here.

*

Air

Not the bird itself
 but a place for wings.
 Not the nebula, but
 a place for enormous light.
 Before the snows,
 before starlight arrived,
 before branches etched
 the sky, the spirit-bird
 lived, making heaven
 and earth its nest.
 Invisible, you feel it:
 a promise, a portent,
 the urge to soar,
 to whirl lavishly.
 It is a sparrow not seen.
 Listen for the trill,
 thimble song in your heart.
 The gods there, wide awake,
 are growing wise.



Purchase *A Little Wounded But On Fire* by Gerard Wozek

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