

Open Letter to a Man Sitting By the Sea in Crete or St. Croix as His Wife Buys a Scarf

Who ushers January through doors,
into pool-blue dens, down hallways,
nails winter into the bars of the crib?

Who pulls skin drum-taut
over the grandmother's cheek bones
as they sit in their kitchens six to six
not far off open oven doors?

Who penetrates the bedrooms of couples.
Uncouples them, under blankets of figures,
bills, papers, while the only type of dreaming left
presses their bodies down into the mattress?

Who turns the social security number into
a ghostly hound let loose to hunt in bank ledgers,
in factory offices where checks are
cut to fraction before the printing?

Who makes hands pass over pears, grapes,
steaks, to lift instead an aluminum can
down the grocery aisles of sorrow?

Who seizes the tongues of children in school yards?
Who has us reading fury behind eyes on sidewalks?

Who sleeps between the man and the woman
now that they are not touching without
passing flames of rage between them?

Who writes the ticket for the gun he raises at a Quick-Stop
just 18 blocks away, and then leaves him latter in a cellblock,
alone, to understand that he is not anymore as hungry
as his children are hungry every waking day?

“Louie, Louie” Lyrics

Eight hours after sly Paul Kramiwitz started
telling some of us the “real lyrics” to
“Louie, Louie” in the rows of Home-room
I had to re-do a math sheet because I
grabbed it quick to keep my spurt from
staining sheets my mother saw before washing.

I push my rod up in her hair.
And on that chair, I do her there

Since I hadn’t even got close to second base,
the stuff Paul Kramiwitz was whispering
hit me like a cyclone. Twice the dice since
Janey Forbes sat just down the row in her
Catholic-plaid kilt with legs akimbo.
Kramiwitz would dish out just one couplet
a morning, I’d go home, lose a spoonful.

A fine lil bitch she wait till three
To get her kicks on top of me.

Listening to the Kingsmen, I never could
make out the same things Kramiwitz said
which is how it was for F.B.I. agents
in suits, in Washington. Ones that Hoover
charged with getting to the bottom of this
seditious rock and roll disease poisoning
the young minds of his nation. Make
no mistake J Edgar, Spiro Agnew thought
it was their nation. They were out for us just
like Rick Santorum would be now if he could.

When night go dark she ride my bone.
She ain’t the type a boy take home.

It would take moving through six states
and more than two marriages for me
to learn how the dark, often treacherous,
currents of sex and love could be
woven together. One thing was clear.
In these matters, I was far more ready
to take the word of boys bursting out
of their britches than to heed the
tongue clicks of Christian Brothers who
towered over us at the fronts of our classes.

Once Was Is Not

Who once was a hippy, who now is a snob.
Who sits in the a.m. with patio-eyes wish-tugging
up clover roots, plan-plotting their extinction
from his crewcut, emerald, dewy domain.

Who now is a snob, that once as a hippy ingested
seaweed prized for trace macrobiotic minerals.
A purple water-plant heated on gas jets that
gave the slime-tongued effect of licking eel.

How that snob once hippied but now is ticketed
as an early arriving aficionado at jazz venues.
Nappy toe to top, he might as well be sporting
a neck-full of ascot as he savors scotch, single-malt.

Hippy to snob, snob from hippy - don't you know
he went shirtless in his garden working his own and his
main-squeeze's poop into the earth so that come June
organic-all tomatoes could burst up fresh in rows.

What was hip, what is snob, is now quick to down
a gobble of caramelized creme brulee or savor
the dark sweet of tiramisu with espresso sipped slow
in a bistro where weekly-changed plants are arranged.

Now is the snob who once was a hippy, cautious
all of his days. Then found puffing a roll of jay got
from down Me-jico way but now quick to pull the lever
for any bellicose politico shouting "No" to taxes.

Hippy, snob, snob-hippy soon hobbled,
Is and was many more times than once,
but now both - as one - almost gone. Gone
was, as sooner/later going begets gone.

Tattoo-doll and the Maserati

Lanona, tattoo-doll, sashay through her screen door,
sing a song been on the radio all day long.

"He want long leg? Long leg
smooth as manakin coming right up."

Meanwhile from cross town
where the watches show news
come one Vinnie Esthebar
complete with Maserati
and a foot full a gas.
He trailing a half mile ascot
brown with big yella dot-a-dots
straight up Hamilton Boulevard.
Vinnie bring a whole lotta metal
everywhere he go.

When he pulls up to tattoo-doll's curb is
when the sky goes from brood to madness.
When lava come to your town,
it pour fast. Zap you as you are.
A bit of singe and cavity of air
is all the lava leaves. Pockets you there.
Might be wife-type with hose-head
showering her herbs down. Might be
some whanker with a weed whacker.
Might be splay-legged under a car
chassis, wrench bit into bolt and nut.

When lava come to town you
crisp up fast. Only the archeologist
of future time can know what you
were up to. Can find some Vinnie
in a Maserati. Some tattoo-doll
fresh out of the bubble bath, hopping
into tight jeans. Sizzling with anticipation.

On Becoming Hungarian

Black limbs weighted
by snow and crows,
I skate past lines of birch
along the Drava river.
Villages as much for
hogs and fleas as men.
Cut fields of alfalfa, rye
in my own house
where the bull dog snores
behind my lazy-boy.
On my patio hibiscus
draw hummingbirds
into their skirts.

But as I travel, transform,
I need to skip, really,
the blows of hammers,
any effects of winter,
oils that settle into
creases in the hands.
I think I'm almost there.
If I just keep talking
about suicide. Suicide this,
suicide that. Slug back vodka
under a grimy window.