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Barbara Henning

Sunday, August 23, 2009

Warming at Simon Pettet's *Hearth*

In *Hearth* (Talisman, 2008), Simon Pettet is in love and in loss with his lover, the street, his suffering and he's singing and musing about it in an odd slanted way.

Instead of giving an answer, he left.

Later, he wrote a long letter
without saying a word about it.

No one was wiser. (2)

There's an answer in Simon Pettet's poems but it is always a sideways glance. He often yokes the most profound problems and situations with the most ordinary, for example holding back the flood of the Nile that carries "flotsam and jetsam" and "Give up cigarettes. Avoid all forms of poison." Hold back the flood with personal restraint. And then we are swept away with the poem and our lives. There are details that seem everlasting and then the reminder of our fragility--

the robin and the butterfly
and the leaf and the flame
and the extinction (121)

Or everything can be deeply philosophical until Simon turns it upside down and makes it ordinary—

Listen,
You once said that I was
Ruminating deep red was it? but I was
doing no such thing

I was just giving poetry readings. (66)

Many of the poems are humorous, and very 70-80-90 New York School and of course Simon is part of New York School St. Marks Poetry Project community. One of my favorite early poems, and I think it is from the 70's, is "Wireless" dedicated to Harris Schiff. I am not an uninvolved observer here. I know both of these poets and I hear the sound of Harris's voice in between the lines and I definitely hear Simon's voice when he writes. "Wired? Not me, Sheriff, I'm much too old for that" (9). For a moment I think I'm at St. Marks, sitting behind these two, during intermission.

But I'm spoiled ma like our hound dog, or a spaceman,
I can think of nothing higher than the moon. (12)

About Me



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We

will not bother
the scholar
who bought the house

and who wrote
the definitive book

on "the third eye"

and who lives alone now
(possibly in the back there)

in reflected ghost-light,
(the naked bulb),

drinking beers,
and watching re-runs

of
The Twilight Zone (144)

With simple humor and straight out general statements about emotions and love, he then veers off in quirky directions.

Poem

When you permit me to see
With lucidity my anger
Know that it shines straight
Into your dark forest

Cutting through the inadequacies
With which we clothe ourselves
Like brambles So illuminating
That private place like some good soldier
That we call our heart (21)

Anger becomes warrior light into the heart and at the same time little spikes that shelter vulnerability. Sometimes Simon is ecstatic, like Rimbaud, or Elio Schneeman: "O winter of New York!/how decidedly damp you are!.../containing whole universes!" (25) "It's the truth!/ O Jump Now before balmy death/Time shall not take away our breath. (52) Or "it is water! —/our/every/fucking/precious/sparkling/moment!" (174).

Then there are the jagged combination of things arranged in
unexpected ways--
The books on the sidewalk are dutifully arranged

The officer is a moonlighter because he works at the other precinct

Dance performers from around the world are advertised on a torn poster. I can't see them though, since my dog is blind. I make a wish.

I wish
for another one. The tethered akita is granted a reprieve. All of this
all the
time. Every conceivable moment. All the worlds you'd ever want to know.
(128)

The mathematics of birdsong
has eluded me until the present
Laconic cable messages
speeding over the wires (83)

"The mathematics of birdsong", all these poems shooting back and forth
over the internet. Here always the hard look at life but with a tender heart,
optimism, and a raised eyebrow. And then a wink.

I am squatting like the proverbial egg on a wall
White concrete, it will hurt me if I fall
It is the hour of mid-to-late afternoon
Summer seems—and actually is—endless (170)

Simon Pettet's poems are at times philosophical, lyrical, spacey, funny, sad,
weird, leaving us with the image of Humpty Dumpty, teetering on the edge
of the wall. He is fragile and he will fall. And so will we. We can endlessly
worry about it or we can celebrate our endless summer with the sun on the
back of the squatting boy, the hearth of the present. Thanks Simon for giving
us this *Hearth*.

Labels: **Conceptual Poetry, Simon Pettet, Talisman**

posted by Barbara Henning @ 1:04 PM



1 COMMENTS:

 At 7:42 AM,  **Bill Hawthorne** said...

Barbara,

My name is Bill Hawthorne, and I represent maacenter.org, a leading web resource for asbestos exposure and mesothelioma cancer information. Our organization is dedicated to increasing awareness of the terrible health consequences of asbestos exposure.

I found your site through a search and decided to contact you because of its high environmental and green presence which is extremely important in our movement. The promotion of how buildings should now be built using sustainable green products to avoid asbestos and mesothelioma as well as the awareness of past buildings and preventative steps in avoiding asbestos exposure are extremely important. My goal is to get a resource link on your

exposure are extremely important. My goal is to get a resource link on your site or even to provide a guest posting to be placed.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please feel free to check out our website. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Bill Hawthorne
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MAA Center is now on Twitter – follow us @maacenter

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