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Barbara Henning

Thursday, May 13, 2010

Tenney Nathanson/ Roberto Bolaño/ George Tysh

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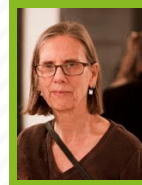
Ghost Snow Falls Through the Void (Globalization) by Tenney Nathanson (Chax Press 2010). Ever since I first arrived in Tucson, I began to love Tenney and his writing. I've heard him read from these poems many times. I wasn't prepared though for the power of it as I sat down and quietly read the entire book. The dailiness of his life, with a clear articulation and poetic isolation of the visible bits and pieces of political justification and hiding, corporate hiding, chocolate child slave labor in Africa, murder and theft. Here Tenney uses poetry to undo, attack and ridicule, with rhythm, with zen precision, intention and clarity. The book unfolds as a kind of 21st Century revision of Whitman. All over the page, lyrical and political and right here it is: the whole story, uncovered, and HA, HA, HA. In between there is shopping and prayers, ghost snow, various poets appearing and disappearing, and the zen bells ringing. Who ever said that a zen poet had to step softly—HA, HA, HA.

Here's an excerpt:

*I'm not sure where the dashes go
or the butterflies, or banks of flowers at noon
is that what it means
they have all gone into the what?*

*where does the evil of the year go O'Hara asked
in beautiful September New York air, October too actually
especially at night bizarre being teary twenty-seven years later
hey Tenney where does the evil of the year go
last year your head hummed into the buzzing light
transcendentalized pumpkin brimming the floaty ether
which now are we in here huh Barack Obama I greet you at the beginning of
a great career
Barack+Walt? quod erat demonstrandum?
I shake my white locks at the runaway sun
the body of Walt is the body politic after all I'm sorry I doubted it run
through
the body of the Buddha
all three bodies tomorrow see you probably in Nirmanakayaland bump
bump BLAM (105)*

About Me

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Antwerp by Roberto Bolaño. (Trans. Natasha Wimmer. New Directions. 2010). I've been reading all of Bolaño's books as they've been translated, and I'm always hoping to have something as exciting as *The Savage Detectives* or *By Night in Chile*. *2666* was wonderful, an expose, parts of it exceptional, but it seemed unfinished to me. And the last two that have been translated, *The Skating Rink* and *Monseñor Pain*, were not as exciting in terms of form and content. But *Antwerp*, this new little book (written in 1980 or so), is a collection of linking prose poem chapters, each one only a page long and one paragraph only—here I can feel the author's presence in the book, the author living the story. In Barcelona, lost kids, collaged sentence to sentence, overheard conversations, a poet who writes postcards instead of poems, the body giving out, we think with the man on the train: "*We've created a silent space so that he can work somehow. He lights a cigarette. . .*"

He's on a train and it seems as if something awful is going on and at the same time everything is ordinary dark. And each poem carries the narrative forward. There is a problem with a hunchback and the people who are groveling, homeless, searching for food, the lost selling their bodies, another commodity. He switches point of view, even reverting at times to jagged and curved lines rather than text, and at one point he introduces himself. *My name is Roberto Bolaño...* Life is moving by this narrator like the landscape on a train. The Calabria Commune campground. I think this story or setting was woven into *2666*. There's a problem here: six dead children, killed by an Anti Terrorist Brigade. The town folk would like to see the campground eliminated and are not so unhappy about the deaths. And then a collage of voices talking, the reasonable and the unreasonable, evidence of a problem everywhere. The narrator talks to himself. He listens to others. He's a detective, an investigator. The unhappy author who looks through a camera: "*Empty images follow one after the other: the reservoir and the woods, the cabin with a fire in the hearth, the lover in a red robe, the girl who turns and smiles at you*". (27) Sad, yes, dark and beautiful.

Again, I like the sense of the author in this work. In the end there is a postscript and Bolaño explains that all he wishes "*to recover is the daily availability of my writing, lines capable of grasping me by the hair and lifting me up when I'm at the end of my strength [as] Odes to the human and the divine*." And I was not disappointed like the Amazon reviewer who thinks it doesn't all come together, too experimental. This is poetry-fiction! It isn't supposed to come together. That's the point. Sometimes in novels, there is too much effort at connecting everything.

Here is the opening chapter.

I. Facade

Once photographed, life here is ended. It is almost symbolic of Hollywood. Tara has no rooms inside. It was just a facade. – David O. Selznick

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The kid heads toward the house. Alley of larches. The Fronde. Necklace of tears. Love is a mix of sentimentality and sex (Burroughs). The mansion is just a facade—dismantled, to be erected in Atlanta. 1959. Everything looks worn. Not a recent phenomenon. From a long time back, everything wrecked. And the Spaniards imitate the way you talk. The South American lilt. An alley of palms. Everything slow and asthmatic. Bored biologists watch the rain from the windows of their corporations. It's no good singing with feeling. My darling, where ever you are: it's too late, forget the gesture that never came. "It was just a facade." The kid walks toward the house.

George Tysh's *The Imperfect* (United Artists 2010). I am immediately drawn into this book because of the soft white cover, with a light grid and a drawing by Janet Hamrick, the repetition of almost-handwriting shapes, over and over, a practice session. Kind of mesmerizing. When I turn the page the white space isolates the words, like someone whispering in an empty room. The first poem starts with half of a word: "*ssance*", almost sense, almost seance, science, half of renaissance, or reconissance. And so I'm curious to go on. When I read "*Metaphor*", I realize that this book of poems will be incredibly personal, moving close to the body, to our desire: is it *mustache* [or] *must ache* or mistake. And then these little evolving shapes in our lives:

Heart

*the outline of a soap dish
on a shelf in the pink*

*evaporates this morning
in the bathroom I think*

*of it
beating*

When I read "*That Still Clear*", for some reason I feel like weeping. Perhaps it is the glimmer of my past life in Detroit, just the edge of a word, or perhaps the sense in this poem of so much in life and so short, all that suffering the Buddha talks about, that loss, and it's there in just one syllable. In this poem there are a series of haiku like stanzas—quiet, violent, peaceful, despairing, beautiful and on we go. "*from heaven the peace of money/rains down*" (21)

With "*Song*," a few simple words, lined with space, with no arrow pointing anywhere but the word itself, none of William's plums, just the desire trace—

*how sweet
time was*

*how lovely
we*

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What's so "Imperfect" about this book by George Tysh?—that which is imperfect, is unfinished, still possible, all those margins, and right there we find beauty and laughter. Simple words slip, we step softly, and then we and the author begin to marvel or laugh.

"Death Magazine"

*When I discovered it had no pictures
and no word, I let my subscription expire. (71)*

or the ending quote by Bataille—

*The night is my nakedness
the stars are my teeth
I crash among the dead
dressed in sunlit white.*

Labels: **Barbara Henning, Chax Press, George Tysh, Ghost Snow Falls Through the Void, Imperfect, poets, Roberto Bolaño Antwerp, Tenney Nathanson, United Artists**

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