

# 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*, *Verse 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](#).

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### 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*

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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](http://www.mlliebler.com)

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## 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.

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## 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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