

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Gerald Locklin: Five Poems

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Gerald Locklin is now a Professor Emeritus of English at California State University, Long Beach, where he taught from 1965 through 2007, and continues as an occasional part-time lecturer. A profile based on a retirement event was broadcast on NPR and is archived. He is the author of over 155 books, chapbooks, and broadsides of poetry, fiction, and criticism, with over 3000 poems, stories, articles, reviews, and interviews published in periodicals. His work is frequently performed by Garrison Keillor on his *Writer's Almanac* daily Public Radio program, is archived on his website, and is included in all three of Mr. Keillor's *Good Poems* anthologies. His most recent full-length collections of poems are *Poets and Pleasure Seekers*, Spout Hill Press, 2015, and *The Marriage of Man the Maker and Mother Nature, Volume 2 of the Complete Coagula Art Poems*, 2014. His books are available on Amazon.

Edward Hopper: *Clamdigger, c.1935*

I used to know some hilarious jokes
 About clamdiggers, but I have forgotten
 How any of them went. I do recall
 That penises figured prominently
 In them, though. This guy, sitting back
 Against the side of the house, is holding
 A long legitimate digging tool, and his hands
 And arms are sinewy from using it.
 His face is sharp enough to dig soft soil
 Itself. A cap shades his eyes from the light
 That renders the tall grass yellow, the sky
 And house-paint bluish white, and the
 Foliage lighter and darker than green.
 A black trapezoid supports his legs, and
 A silently brown dog replaces any semblance
 Of shoes at all. The dog must be a model
 Because that's all it's doing. There are no
 Signs that any clams at all have been dug
 So far, not by this Clamdigger, not on this
 Pleasant day at least. The Calendar says that
 Impressionism was the only Movement

That had impressed Hopper on his
 Youthful travels in Europe. I guess he was still
 Paying homage to its investigations into the effects
 Of Light. Like most in the 1930s, he'd also
 Acquired a sympathy for Human Labor, or the lack
 Of it. And then there was always that
 Loneliness Thing.

Edward Hopper: *Sailing Boat*

Birds of every feather
 Oblige our sense of order
 With the ways in which
 They stick together,
 The formations that they fly in,
 The hierarchies of their afternoon prayer meetings,
 Their worship of the sun, the wind,
 Their internalized clocks and calendars,
 Almanacs, and Regimental flocks.
 We salute them in our sailing boats
 And religious ceremonies,
 Our billowing sails, and masteries of flotation.
 There is absolutely nothing
 They can learn from us.
 Take, for instance, Frank Gehry's designs
 For the Disney Concert Hall,
 And every other structure he's designed
 Since Bilbao.
 When the birds fly past these,
 They yawn . . . in unison.

Edward Hopper: *Ryder's House, 1933*

Ryder must have valued his privacy highly:
 As many windows—two—of modest proportions
 On the three visible sides of the two buildings.
 And what seems to be a tiny portal
 For entering a storm shelter.
 The rest is grass and sky or varying hues
 And shadows, all studies of the effects of light.
 Monet had a similar interest in light and shadow,
 And he did them better.
 In other words, and I hate to admit it,
 The greatest American painter was maybe still
 Not as great as France's.

Edward Hopper: *White River at Sharon, 1937*

Maybe the clarity of the tree in the right foreground
 Was to prove he had not lost his ability to delineate
 In his headlong rush into impressionistic blurring,
 But any individuality within the background greenery
 Vanishes with distance into darknesses—plural intended.
 The painted river is not white—that is left to clouds and sand.
 The river is a flat blue wrinkled surface that suggests a lack
 Of depth. I think Impressionism has in fact been defeated
 By the expressionistic externalizing of the artist's passions/vacuities
 The influence more Van Gogh than Pissarro. That's all fine and
 Good: the viewer does experience a rush of dizziness and nausea
 In the form of matter melting into recharged spatial batteries,
 An explosion of conflicting subjectivities in a global, carnal cauldron.
 Maybe I am reading onto this canvas the recurring nocturnal cinema
 In which I am the only one I recognize in a wrath-night dancehall
 Of strangers, aliens, vampires, vultures, the eyeless, the toothless,
 The Grinning, Salivating Legions of the Damned.
 Or maybe it's just the revenge of all the salmon
 I've been smoking.

Edward Hopper: *People in the Sun, 1960*

Two middle-aged people, in business attire,
 Relaxing in their perfectly aligned
 Folding wooden deck chairs,
 Ponder whether or not to be alarmed
 By the horizon of either foothills or azure waves,
 That seem to be advancing towards them
 Like a scene out of *Macbeth*
 Across the meadow floor of level hay.
 Behind them a more casually clothed young man
 Finds more interesting than daylight
 The only written text on view among
 These people in the sun. The artist obviously loves
 The opportunity to estimate the comparative lengths
 Of the elongated shadows, which never let the people
 Of the sun forget the injunction to *memento mori*.
 The sun giveth life and taketh it away.
 So far I've only had one melanoma—superficial, diagnosed
 Early, and quickly removed. I'm convinced that my years
 Of swimming without sunblock were less to blame
 Than the radiation treatments the best dermatologists
 In my home town fired into my facial glands to mitigate
 A near-Bukowskian onslaught of acne that dampened
 The social pleasures of my teenaged years.
 For now, though, the geometrically ordered “X-es”

Of the legs of the deck chairs and their shadows
Bear false witness to the order we think we are
Capable of imposing on the universe.

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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