

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Matthew Lippman: Two Poems

Matthew Lippman · Wednesday, October 29th, 2014

Matthew Lippman is the author of three poetry collections, *American Chew*, winner of The Burnside Review Book Prize (Burnside Review Book Press, 2013), *Monkey Bars* (Typecast Publishing, 2010), and *The New Year of Yellow*, winner of the Kathryn A. Morton Poetry Prize (Sarabande Books, 2007). He is the recipient of the 2014 Georgetown Review Magazine Prize and The Jerome J. Shestack Poetry Prize from *The American Poetry Review*.

Salami Jew

I was a salami Jew when I lived in Brooklyn
around the corner from The A and G Pork Store on Court.
I'd slide in there with an Aranciata orange soda,
order me up a half a pound of Genoa,
go next door, buy the fresh baked ciabatta,
find a stoop and get fat in front of God's face.
It was nothing personal I just loved the Genoa. Still do.
In Pakistan I was a sandbar Jew.
When I roamed the hills of Cleveland I was an Indian Jew
and my tribe was a million miles from Poland.
How can you get a million miles from Poland
when the death of a whole century of young women in curls
hemmed their names into the sky before the firing squad?
In upstate NY I was a member of the Sinai congregation of autumn leaves.
My bloody hands were bloody from the rake, the tarp,
the half acre plot that was endlessly green.
It's impossible to be a Jew made up of other Jews
when all the Jews in that neighborhood
want you to wear the black hat
and all the Jews in the other neighborhood
want to drive to Target on Saturday and buy cheap jeans.
I figure I'll be the best Jew I can be.
That means kissing the tops of my daughter's heads on Friday night.
That means saying hello to the postman
when he hands me the envelopes.

It also means Bar Mitzvah-ing myself everyday for the rest of my life
 even though I never stepped foot inside a synagogue till I was thirty eight.
 This is America and I can do that.
 If I was in Poland or Hungry a long time ago
 it would have been something else.
 Tonight I am a Jew on the couch
 and in the morning I will be a father Jew, a husband Jew,
 a Jew who shops for the Seder and gets the wine
 then tries really hard to be the kosher Jew
 that can't wait to get my hands on the grilled shrimp.

Farm Poem

(for Rachel)

You can come down to my farm and pick my strawberries.
 I don't care how many times you don't believe that I ate the cookies
 when I said I didn't love the cookies.
 I love them because they help me figure out
 I am no longer beautiful,
 that all my pain is a manhole cover stuck
 between my right clavicle and left.
 I invite you to the barn.
 We can watch the cows.
 We can toss the hay.
 No matter how many pennies I throw into the river,
 the ones you were saving for our children,
 the ones you wanted to use for floral arrangements
 the likes of Cassiopeia.
 My bad days are bad dance moves.
 My good days are bad dance moves.
 If I were good on my feet
 I would have given you that house with thirty five windows
 all of which face the inside of my heart
 and the outside of a tree.
 Come down to this farm. We can pick ragweed and pretend
 to make wine though neither of us likes the Merlot.
 The pigs are waiting and the organic carrots.
 The children are in the grass and everything is saffron, horseshit and cold nights.
 I know I have let you down.
 I know I have manhandled the potatoes and the laundry.
 In the celery stalk of my bone
 I know have I made for you ugly chairs and half concocted songs
 from strips of tape and mold.
 Who cares?
 Join me in the silo where the grain goes gold,
 where the children slide and faint;

join me in my nuttiness and bad hair
and I promise you all over again
that soon enough your fortunate moon will rise
up there in the sky where I have, for all these years,
been digging a hole to stick it.

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