

Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream



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Vol 44 No 5

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Volume 44

Number 5

and I want to be with you
attending a show
at the Bread & Puppet Theater

from "Like a Bird on the Wire"
by Monique Laforce (WWv33n6)

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Volume 44 Number 5

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Mary K. Lindberg

Bread & Puppet Theater

"Art is as basic as bread," Greenwich Village, 1970's

After museum visits uptown, we tour
Greenwich Village's Fourth Avenue bookstores.
I am reminded of Edward Hopper's painting
"Early Sunday Morning." You politely note
Hopper depicts Seventh Avenue.

Browsing later in a cluttered bookshop,
I meet a man who sells books as a sideline.
He looks like Rembrandt's goateed horseman
we saw in the Frick Museum.

He shows me his own artwork
on the back wall.
Unlike Hopper's isolated figures,
the canvas brims
with reds, purple, black lines, thick strokes.
Abstract.

He's friendly, over coffee vents frustration that
social policy does not support artists like him.

Before dusk, you and I cross Seventh Avenue
in the West Village where a parade of gigantic

ghostly figures materializes. Towering puppets,
wild, grotesque faces, arms held up by chanting
puppeteers, enormous signs lament high rents,

rats, garbage. Political theater. A cacophony
of eerie chants, drumbeats, surges forward, as if
purged through the pot-holed street from an
underground green room. We join a sidewalk
crowd, riveted by what is a Bread & Puppet
protest.

I am fascinated with its wild pageantry,
underlying sheer
tenacity of belief that a bunch of
mammoth puppets
could influence urban excesses, but my eyes
are drawn
to someone on a bicycle — the bookshop artist.
I did not think I would ever see him or his art,
again —

a lone rider, canvases strapped to his back,
pedaling against the outrage of social ills
so fiercely displayed by giants of street theater.
I think he would be in Hopper's diner
Sunday morning.

Sylvia Manning

Today I saw a loon
and heard its call
and also Peter Schumann's show.
I cried.

"There's one who swims alone
again this year,"
Colline remarked, and I said
"Yes, she's there."

But later no one heard
my heart-sad pain
when puppet migrants
stood to be abused
by ICE, its minions hired
to make us cry
with silent tears from lonely
lakes of shame
for what we've done to these
who need be heard
who need be held
who need be home.

[ICE = Immigration Control and Enforcement]

Sylvia Manning

Tips toward Apocalypse Defiance*

Save any seeds you can
especially wild flowers

Be kind as you're able
to the differently politically-abled
especially if they're folk

Refuse to hate the occasional weed
Hate the constant consumerist refuse

Remember Ferdinand the bull.
Try to forget Inquisitional Ferdinand
and his unlovely Isabel

Remember to save seeds for another year
even if a Future threatens to disappear

Don't vote for assassins.

If there's no other choice, don't vote.

Scatter those seeds for sweet Ferdinand
and monarchs other than
the above-mentioned.

*Bread & Puppet performance theme,
August 2, 2022, Glover VT

Sylvia Manning

Free OBO (Cheap Art)

“the puppeteer discovered puppeteering, craft of the free”
in Eduardo Galeano’s *The Puppeteer (Century of the Wind)*

Almost half a century ago,
Peter Schumann won an award
for Lifetime Achievement
from some folk who must not have known
he’d barely begun. Brings to mind
the story of a New Yorker
driving through fall foliage,
says to an old Vermonter on his front porch,
“Nice place you’ve got here.
Lived here all your life?”
Old Vermonter, smoking and rocking slowly,
answers just “Not yet.”
Feature writers up from cities
want to ask Peter what’s ahead.
He’s free to not answer.
Let the puppets and the posters,
the banners and the bread do that.
River clay dug, not purchased, wheat paste,
left-over paint, newsprint from over-runs,
cardboard from recycling bins,
hand-me-down anything,
lately dream-stained sheets –
they can say for him:
Next is the needed new piece.
Next, by some grace, needed Peace.
Or that old saying hand-lettered,
cheap as it can be:

Use it up.
Wear it out.
Make it last
or do without.



Sylvia Manning

Karl and Peter and Peter

“... a lecture "On the Law of Mutual Aid," which was delivered at a Russian Congress of Naturalists, in January 1880, by the well-known zoologist, Professor Kessler, the then Dean of the St. Petersburg University, struck me as throwing a new light on the whole subject.”

Introduction, Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution, Peter Kropotkin

We've a Kessler Street in my Texas town
possibly named (the years work out)

for a professor of zoology in St. Petersburg
who'd seen orphaned wrens tended by robins,
along with their own.

Not like the cowbirds we have down there
who'd replace a robin's own if we had robins –
with one of theirs, robbing the robin of off-
spring.

Kessler thought the robins' kind concern
evidenced nascent bird-brain conscience.

Professor Karl Kessler in 1879 thus
first proposed the concept of mutual aid
to balance Darwinian struggle.

(Kropotkin says Darwin noted this also but failed to have time to include mention in his rushed Origin of Species.)

Peter Schumann spoke to it in January's Bread & Puppet annual meeting, to let us know how social Darwinism had early and immediate refutation.

Our Peter had a stroke just weeks ago. One of his own five children found him, but many others tend to his daily needs. He's doing well.

There are birds named for Kessler, but not the kestrel. Not that hawk you might see on Kessler Street



Renaissance Festival '75

We dig into the cookie tin
once filled with shortbreads
and I have to push into
the very bottom to come up
with singles and change
but together we count out
ten dollars and there's enough
gas in the Nova to get there

there, the Renaissance Fair up the highway
and how we spent \$8 to get in
wander fragrant straw strewn paths
between fire-eaters and jousters
pausing at an open air theater where
once Shakespeare might've trod
but today it's dukes and wenches
sound and color and we splurge
on turkey drumsticks down to a dollar
as we lick our lips wipe our hands
and dance away with the queen
paupers on May Day.



The “Troop Leger”

I thought I could be with you in April.
I thought I could be with you in May —
but I’d rather be with you
 watching a show
 at the Bread & Puppet Theater.

We put our hearts on the floor
and polish stones in cold water.
We gather leaves at back doors
and wait for snow to fall over us.
It’s all the same — our dolls won’t dance
and the show was never victorious —
but the lion did jump through his passage of time
by entering a red velvet hoop
the snow leopard spoke of cold wind-blown sand...
the horse with no rider went on
across the old stage that was sinking,
into white paper water where fish with no eyes
watch the moment pass and I flew
beside you to find our reserved seats —
the play was about to begin —
and became puppets lost
in magic moonlight,
caught in the glory and valor of night,
not leaving the show just begun.

The Maiden Speaks

I was not chosen to marry.
I couldn't live under your wing
but I loved you and wanted to be
where the wind wiped your tears away
and the sun woke the poems within
our hearts where we kept our dreams
and promised our souls
we would rise and fall and rise again
until we were free to read our parts
at the Bread and Puppet Theater
where we watched and acted at the same time
so that I was there — and not —
but you were my soul and I was your love,
flying on through eternity
as sweet as thyme, old as spruce,
and only in need of an hour or two
 maybe three and four,
to laugh with our muse while time
 slipped away
—somehow— at the Bread and Puppet.



Trembling

What a mess my life
has become. This comedy
of lost laughs,
a paper trailing story
has left a sweet taste
on the tip of my tongue.

All my art, in time, collapses
and flows through
the narrative current below
the travesty of tv tyrants.

Inhaling dawn's rising aromas,
I chance the questions
posed and pause to leap
past my reflections.

Let's break bread at the borders where
we'll dance with the migrant, pregnant,
addicted, incarcerated,
hospitalized, homeless, ill-
iterate, wielding puppets to
vibrating reeds and strings.

Let's sing
mime and busk in the streets and schools;
changing relics into visions
to guide the eyeless
through the sad forever night.



Our Geography of Poets

Kansas

Pat Anthony

Kentucky

Jane Stuart

New York

Mary K. Lindberg

Richard Spiegel

Vermont

Sylvia Manning

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