

3 Poems by Bill Berkowitz

Accessible

(for Roger Martin)

My friend Roger likes my poems because they are accessible.

I like that.

But what would happen if I wrote a poem that wasn't so accessible?

Maybe it would reference Sumerian culture,

or Sufism and the actualization of Truth.

Maybe I'd pose unanswerable questions,

riddles only connected by the mystery of finding one's spot.

I'm not a foodie but maybe my words would be thin and delicate

like jamón ibérico de bellota from Jabugo in southwestern Spain,

where free-range black pigs eat the sweet acorns.

My friend is right about accessibility.

He's not expecting Pound-esque Cantos,

and he's more likely to get an allusion

to Grecian hair formula for men

then anything approaching Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn.

Poem for Julie

Would you laugh like an Oklahoma cowboy with a six-pack in your hand,

on Saturday night on your way to Spring City to dance all night?

the stone motel in Cottonwood Falls in the winter, in time of snow.

is that is your grandma & granddad's wood farm house in the gully,

just off the dirt road?

on boulders with your brothers, holding a rifle to the times when you washed all their hands before dinner;

you being the only girl, and the oldest, had a special responsibility, and more, a special place.

sitting in a quick-climbed cottonwood tree, looking out over the spaces of your middle-west

and not dreaming about the big city or blue ribbon beer.

your a blond haired gal from St. John.

what train will you be on?

Seventy-Five Years Ago When The Children Sang

Thoughts on sitting in Square Laurent Prache, 6th Arrondissement, Paris, France (for Ron Tanovitz)

In Square Laurent Prache,
a pocket park in the 6th arrondissement,
tired old men drink beer.

Tourists are sprawled on stained green metal benches.

The men swig their beer, and chew at their fingers.

They may or may not know

what happened in this neighborhood seventy years ago.

Across the street in a small shop,
well-dressed ladies pick out tapestries for couch pillows.

Others sit in a sidewalk café,
drinking espressos in a leisurely manner.

They sip their drinks carefully,
more carefully than the beer men across the street.

Do the elegant sippers know

what happened in this neighborhood seventy years ago?

In the middle of Square Laurent Prache,
Stands a rock sculpture made up of upended grave markers,
and a simple sign in French:

“Arrested by Vichy government policy,
which collaborated with Nazi occupiers,
more than 11,0000 children
were deported from France from 1942 to 1944,
and assassinated at Auschwitz because they were born Jewish.
Many of them lived in Paris in the 6th arrondissement.

Among them, 6 very young (children)
who were not ever able to attend school.

As you pass by, read their names,
your memory is their only burial.

Lena Dymetman, 2 years

Evelyne Herszberg, 3 years

Georgette Kagan, 3 years

Lea Kagan, 6 years

Regis Dautricourt, 4 years

Hugues Haas-Dautricourt, 8 months

Let us never forget them.”

Were the children playing?

Were they laughing?

Were they listening to a story?

Were they eating with their family?

Had they just drifted off to sleep?

What were they doing when they were dragged away from life?

From our pigeon-shit splashed green metal park bench,

we stare at the rock sculpture,

and gaze up at the memorial.

Our memory is their only burial.

Paris, France, Oakland, California, May 2015

Bill Berkowitz (with assistance from Gale Bataille)

