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POETRY OF CHARLIE BONDHUS

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View from Staten Island Ferry

...and the Staten Island Ferry also wailed.

-Allen Ginsberg

Off of starboard
Manhattan high rises
drag rightward
encumbered as Israelite slaves
ghosts of bricks inscribed,
hieroglyphs of handshakes, skin-brushed-against-skin,
forgeries and friendships, sex-been-had,
prayers said, children raised,
lunches and dinners-been-consumed, voices-been-elevated
or silenced—

as the letters
of the Torah
tramping across the vision
of a preadolescent boy:
the mind scrutinizing each figure in its turn

right
to
left.

And I come to the city
from the water
like Joshua to Jericho
Jonah to Nineveh
Sheba to Solomon.

Waking up in a Room by the Pier

By the standard criteria, empty,
a bed, a chair, sawdust...
and a curtainless window.
Morning mist thick as sails
everything the color of fishbone.

This is a place where the things we never quite see—
love, for instance, or satisfaction, peace of mind—
ease out of their shaky, vibrating habits, and become somehow static.
Not in the corrupted symbolic ways of “signs and representations,”
but in something less, and therefore more,
like a glaze of ice over the water, or
a bit of smoke from the captain’s pipe,
already a minute or two old.

Or is it the reverse, this experience of each foot in a separate place,
love & co. unchanged, but the calloused non-mystic
ceasing his snub-nosed perseverance in the ways of the solid world
no longer secure in the binaries of being and nothingness,
the mind trembling like an old car on a Coney Island roller coaster?

But inevitably forgettable, as a whiskey revelation, even if the glowing brain had
enough command of the half-deadened body to
grab a pen
write it down
lines of gibberish
even on a partly-cloudy day.

Yet he’ll try to encode it anyways, in pictures:

Clangs of buoys
mumbles of workmen
sloshes of coffee
all a.m. reality traffic
soldering itself to indistinct— dreams?
sensations, really—
the end result
a notable interpolation
rather than a true integration
like a colony of barnacles
sagging from the bow of an imagined ship.

Loving Without Airbags

It happens quite suddenly
and often under the worst conditions.

With Ella in the changer,
wheeling hips cease regular rotation
and break into an offbeat spin.

Anti-lock ankles fail to function as
hands tighten around coccyx
nipples skid across nipples,
heads jerk upwards
and darting tongues collide

Contact.

Hair spiderwebs into a shower of glassy sweat which
pummels the fender of forehead.
Shards of eyelash grit across cheek as
fingers fold into hollows of abdomen
and oily navel jams against shifter.

A centimeter of folded cartilage neatly envelopes nostrils
my nose—
carwrecked into your chin.

Such are the dangers
of unfastening belts
and loving without airbags.

Charlie Bondhus won his first prize for poetry in the eighth grade; after that he spent four years writing dreadful high school verse. Fortunately, he came to his senses about halfway through college and actually started listening to what other poets were writing. Since then, his work has appeared in *Mirage #4: Period[ical]*, *Red Owl Magazine*, *Poetry Motel*, and *Swell*. He received his MFA from Goddard College in 2005, and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in literature at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where he also teaches writing. His critical interests are gender theory, the eighteenth-century novel, and gothic literature. His first book of poems, *How the Boy Might See It*, is in search of a publisher.

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