

PATHOS · HUMOR · HISTORY · CREATIVE NON-FICTION



CALLAHAN COUNTY

STAR SPOTLIGHT

WRITERS SHOWCASE

(All submitters retain ownership)

American Life In Poetry

Column 228

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

I don't often mention literary forms, but of this lovely poem

by Cecilia Woloch I want to suggest that the form, a villanelle, which uses a pattern of repetition, adds to the enchantment I feel in reading it. It has a kind of layering,

like memory itself. Woloch lives and teaches in southern California.

My Mother's Pillow

My mother sleeps with the Bible open on her pillow;
she reads herself to sleep and wakens startled.
She listens for her heart: each breath is shallow.

For years her hands were quick with thread and needle.
She used to sew all night when we were little;
now she sleeps with the Bible on her pillow

and believes that Jesus understands her sorrow:
her children grown, their father frail and brittle;
she stitches in her heart, her breathing shallow.

Once she "even slept fast," rushed tomorrow,
mornings full of sunlight, sons and daughters.
Now she sleeps alone with the Bible on her pillow

and wakes alone and feels the house is hollow,
though my father in his blue room stirs and mutters;
she listens to him breathe: each breath is shallow.

I flutter down the darkened hallway, shadow
between their dreams, my mother and my father,
asleep in rooms I pass, my breathing shallow.
I leave the Bible open on her pillow.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry

Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org), publisher of Poetry magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright ©2003 by Cecilia Woloch, whose most recent book of poetry is "Narcissus," Tupelo Press, 2008. Reprinted from "Late," by Cecilia Woloch, published by BOA Editions, Rochester, NY, 2003, by permission of Cecilia Woloch. Introduction copyright ©2009 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.



The pen is mightier than the sword

Writers And Poets!

The Eastland/Callahan County Newspapers announce that the Baird Star will be publishing submitted poetry and short stories. We will also be publishing a literary journal in the near future.

1. We ask for first-time publishing rights. All other rights will remain with the author.
2. There will be no payment, but you will get your works before the general public. We will be sending sample copies to other organizations, the literary world and libraries for their archives and your notoriety.
3. Short stories should be brief. Poetry should be no longer than 24 lines.
4. Each submission should be typewritten, single spaced, with author's name and contact information in the top right hand corner. You must include a SASE for the return of the submission.
5. Please address all submissions to:

Literary Editor

Eastland/Callahan County

Newspapers

P. O. Box 29

Eastland, TX 76448

email: thebairdspotlight@att.net

Submissions sought to:

Star

P.O. Box 29

Eastland, TX 76448

email: thebairdspotlight@att.net

S.A.S.E. for returns

--WANTED--

20 lines,

double spaced or less

Poetry

Fiction or Non

Each entry with brief biography notes. All must be family oriented; no smut, slander or liable material.

Expectation

Abuzz I was and all aglow
My trove at apex lay glowing
In womb of mate to happily grow
My sib lay cozily growing
Its naked gender past knowing.

This shaker axed without restraint
Sequestered in buoyant repose
Acolyte mime of kindred saint
Sublimely napping, free of woes
Awaking image 'midst the doze.

Serene the vessel, welled with pride
So rapt in regal elation
Endowed with awe at wisp inside
Sleeping since dawn of creation
Who leapt at such revelation.

Alas the drama tends to melt
This sire so poised with no bother
With moods that pain if ire be felt
Unfolding this place of father
To slumbering son or daughter.

- Weldon L. Smith
Eastland, Texas

Instinct

(For Emily, June 25, 2009)

Her roundness fills the room-
the breasts and belly of a woman's heart
she paces, carrying a baby she has never met

bends her knees like an athlete
preparing for a marathon
the games of life that transform fear

self-imprisonment, a kind torture
into this young mother's fortitude
changes the padded softness of love

into broken glass--just long enough
to always remember that sacrifice
that perseverance, that letting go.

- Marjorie Bruhmuller
Quebec, Canada

Rhyme Words:

Handy
Sandy
Candy
Dandy
Hootenanny
Nanny
Cranny
Transatlantic
Frantic

Words You Can Use:

Tribuloid: This is a plant that produces fruit that pricks.

Quincunx: This is the center of a rectangle combined with the four corners of it.

Purdu: This is an adjective not known to be used in Desdemona, Texas, meaning something that is lost.

Hypocorisma: This is a word for all pet's names, not the name of a single pet, unless you are in "that" part of the world.

AND WOW HE LIVED AS WOW HE DIED

The hard-boiled, Great Depression-era poetry of Kenneth Fearing.

By Jason Boog
Poetry Media Services

During the darkest days of the Great Depression, artist Alice Neel painted a surreal portrait of her friend, the poet Kenneth Fearing. In it, the gaunt 33-year-old stares out through owl-rimmed glasses, eye sockets hollow from exhaustion and hunger, a gaping hole in his chest. There, a grinning skeleton perches, spilling a river of blood.

These were dark times. And Fearing was the poet for them.

Eighty years ago he burst onto the literary scene with his reckless and stylized first book, *Angel Arms*. The strongest pieces were free-form riffs on hard-boiled fiction themes: "dangerous, handsome, cross-eyed Louie the rat / Spoke with his gat, Rat-a-tat-tat—" snarled "St. Agnes' Eve." A majestic revolutionary spirit balanced beside these staccato pieces, like this stanza from "Ballad of the Salvation Army":

On Fourteenth street the bugles blow,
Bugles blow, bugles blow,
The forpid stones and pavements wake,
A million men and street-cars quake
In time with angel breasts that shake,
Blow, bugles, blow!

Though the poems were written earlier, during the Roaring Twenties, Fearing's apocalyptic imagery proved timely. Coward McCann published *Angel Arms* in 1929, within months of the stock market crash that plunged the United States into the Great Depression. Historian Monty Noam Penkower details the meltdown's subsequent catastrophic effect on the literary scene in *The Federal Writers' Project*, stating that between 1930 and 1933, new books published decreased from 10,000 to barely 7,600, magazine advertising dropped 30 percent, and newspaper "mortality rates" reached 48 percent (sound familiar?).

Albert Halper's 1933 novel *Union Square* parodies the poet as a drunken wreck: "Blow, bugles, blow," he mumbled sloppily, "and answer, hot dogs, answer, wharking, jarking, karking. On Fourteenth Street the mustard's green, in Union Square the mob is queen. Blow, bugles, blow, set the wild echos barking. And answer, comrades, answer, harking, larking, farking." Alongside Neel's portrait, these two works present the Fearing of that time as a troubled—and troubling—genius.

He seemed headed for oblivion, but the Federal Writers' Project (FWP)—a government-funded program that lasted from 1935 until early 1943, employing thousands of writers around the country as oral historians, researchers, and authors of state guidebooks—rescued him, if only for a short time. For some writers, like Claude McKay and May Swenson, the FWP provided a foundation from which they could launch their later careers after the economy picked up. For others, like Fearing, the project provided a brief respite from what came to seem an inevitable decline. But in that brief time, the FWP enabled Fearing to write some of his most enduring works.

In 1935 Fearing published his second collection, *Poems*. Out of the 20 pieces in the slim volume, eight were first published in *New Masses*. This new work blasted the bankers, fat cats, and politicians who had plunged the country into an economic dark age. Straight from the pages of *New Masses*, the bombastic "Dirge" dishes out comic-book retribution. "Wham, Mr. Roosevelt; pow, Sears Roebuck; awk, big / dipper; bop, summer rain; / Bong, Mr., bong, Mr., bong, Mr., bong." The pop hymn mocks and mourns the domesticity of J. Alfred Prufrock in Fearing's most famous poem:

And wow he died as wow he lived,
going whop to the office and blooie home to sleep
and biff got married and bam had children and
oof got fired,
zowie did he live and zowie did he die

The country's resentment over the economic meltdown electrified the poet's experiments. Horace Gregory summed it up in his 1946 anthology, *A History of American Poetry, 1900-1940*: "When his second book, *Poems*, appeared, the public that had ignored Fearing suddenly discovered his value . . . a generation that was more distinctly urban, that was self-consciously 'hard-boiled,' that had shared the hopes and disillusionments of 14th Street in New York and Union Square."

The populist anger that Fearing kindled resembles 21st-century rage over CEO bonuses and stock market scammers, though no poet today has yet claimed this zeitgeist in the way Fearing captured his. The first print run of *Poems* quickly sold out, becoming a surprise hit despite the Depression. His success shocked the *New York Times* books section, earning his publisher headlines for "unusual sale of their volumes of radical verse."

At the end of the Depression, Fearing reached the pinnacle of his poetic career: praised as an exemplary FWP member, earning Guggenheim Fellowships, and landing a contract with Random House. Sadly, it wouldn't last. In 1938 he published the poetry collection *Dead Reckoning*. "[He] was content to repeat the earlier successes of his writing with slight variations on a central theme," wrote Horace Gregory.

The collection includes "Literary," a sarcastic advertisement from an imaginary writing school brochure. Fearing rails against "The Literary System" that provides [a] thousand noble answers to a thousand empty questions, by a patriot who needs the dough.

And so it goes.
Books are the key to magic portals. Knowledge is power. Give the people light.
Writing must be such a nice profession.
Fill in the coupon. How do you know? Maybe you can be a writer, too.

After his singular moment passed, Fearing's verse would get buried among the "thousand empty questions" that concerned writers after the Great Depression. He found more fame as a novelist in the 1940s, writing a string of novels that climaxed in *The Big Clock* in 1946. Ray Milland starred in the classic film noir adaptation of the book, which eclipsed the fame Fearing's poetry once enjoyed.

After his second marriage dissolved in 1952, Fearing spent the last years of his life in his bachelor apartment. He drank pints of whisky every day, cobbling together a living as a publicist, book reviewer, and, once again, pulp writer. The poet lost the fight against the bloody skeleton lurking inside. He died in 1961.

Jason Boog is an editor at mediabistro.com's publishing website, *GalleyCat*. His work has appeared in the *Believer*, *Granta*, *Salon.com*, the *Revealer*, and *Peace Corps Writers*. This article first appeared on www.poetryfoundation.org. Learn more about Kenneth Fearing, and his poetry, at www.poetryfoundation.org.

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