

“Buffalo, Rome” Exegesis ...for an Icelandic Cousin

These poems are written like jazz music....

I have a theme, a little song in my mind.

some of the poems have the idea of fresh flowing youth turning to stone.

Another idea in some is reverence for the making of poems, the inkery of it.

The title is a pun from the song, "Home on the Range" which is a cowboy song that Americans of my age sang as children. It has a love of the countryside written into it, but corny...?

"Home, home on the range, where the deer and the buffalo roam..."

So I took buffalo roam (wander) and changed it to Rome the capital of great empire. Buffalo is the name of a city in New York State also. So Buffalo, Rome looks like an address.

Then there's the picture of the buffalo nickel, an old American coin.

So it says: this is about living inside the Empire.

This Empire is like Rome, but was made while killing a million million buffalo...and then singing about their ghosts.

When I say jazz, I mean, I'm playing with the sounds of language and letting the soundplay take me to meanings. The poems have many made-up words, like 'jointed uffoon', and 'sloom' and

'thags' and 'matty' and 'imposse' and 'metamaudlin' and 'kewered'....etc etc.

I don't believe we already have all the words for everything. And I think it sets off a little charge of energy in a reader's mind, that it's a tiny liberation. Oh, maybe there are things we haven't named yet, thoughts we've never thought, ways of being...we haven't been.???

To give you an example of how the word-play happens:

The poem that starts "Cardboard rubbish", near the beginning of the book.

"i was kewered

by the already well-bealed.."

I was cured, made well....that's what the sentence wants to say. But "skewered" is the way the spelling makes you think, and that means: to stab through something with a small spear for cooking over a fire. So, I was speared and cooked over a fire, not cured...('cured' can also mean aging meat in salt, like cured ham)

"By the already well-healed"

'Well-heeled' is an English expression meaning rich and upper class. It's a strange idea, but maybe there was a time when having terrific shoes was the clearest mark of being wealthy..??

So, "I was cured by people who were well-healed", means just I was sick and those who got well cured me. But 'I was kewered by the well-heeled' could mean,

"I was speared and cooked by the wealthy"

So, that's what it feels like in Buffalo, Rome...sometimes.

The first group of poems are like that, feelings of alienation from my Times & my Place in its harsh political reality. Then come some poems cooked in my long life as carpenter, as you can see by the drawings of hammers etc. Playing with the words of carpentry and some of the hardship too.

Then are some love poems & some that are mystical, like "It was after Pearl Harbor.."

Then are poems about poems , like "Across the lexicon, paddles dripping.."

The next-to-last page has an ending that is still what I believe about my work: Just before it there is this stanza:

"no countertop specialists

cheap & fast

from Cygnus yet

with templates blazing

taking our jobs."

So, I was an expert at kitchen remodeling and there were men who would come in and install the countertops very fast.

Cygnus is a star...so, imagining there are even better carpenters from another star...but they haven't arrived yet.

Whew. We still have our jobs.

But the idea has come in that there ARE such people, much better at what we think we're great at.

I finish with:

"i'm still not the best

at what i do.

but nobody else

is doing it."

So, now it's not carpentry we're talking about.

It's ...what I do.

And nobody else is doing it.

But I'm still not best at it.

Best I can do.