

Meditations on the Day Abbie Hoffman Died

Thomas Wolfe said it
and so did my analyst
but that didn't stop me
from returning to the homeplace,
back South, to plotz
in the red mud and marry
the boy I loved in 1968,
the first boy I let
put his hands down my pants
the summer of the Chicago 7.
He doesn't remember—
having put his hands
down so many girls' pants.
But then, he doesn't remember
the Chicago 7 either.

Pastoria

These dark hills can be beaten into form:
mountain sonnets, grassy odes. Words, feelings
defined within fenced pastures. Over reelings
of the Willis River, my husband informs,
“Each stream has its own sound—this one bubbles,
but listen to the Slate River, how it scrapes along
the rocks.” To me, water is water, no song
of differentiation, no washed troubles,
no real rhythm, the thump, jolt, swing of trains
on elevated tracks synchronized
with airport takeoffs from LaGuardia—
just ripple, bubble, scrape of rock. A tin can gains
speed going downstream—like me, nothing there
to grab hold to, floating down in water’s lair.

Cow as Metaphor

After combing wheat field, wood,
bitten by ticks, mosquitoes,
I get clean, sleep
and dream finding the lost calf
105th and Madison, New York.
There's our baby Hereford
on a corner with Puerto Ricans
listening to Salsa.
Que pasa? they say.
That's my cow, I say.
No man, they say, that cow's from the Bronx.
But ain't you Felix's old lady?
Not now, I say, I bought the cow with divorce
money and followed his pointy footprints
from Virginia.
But the calf breaks in a run,
through the South Bronx hulls,
up Arthur Avenue,
past the zoo.
I know I won't catch him,
will never catch him.
I know the cow
is living with Felix
learning Spanish,
and I wake up
exhausted.

2 Miles Off US 15

Trapped in no-wax linoleum
 when before there was concrete
 over a molten core
I can't see the bottom of words:
 fountains genitals hyacinths;
so panicked, I imagine
 my imaginings sprayed across walls
 like automobile primer.
Yes, yes—there were places to go,
 but the airports are far
 the planes broken with
 crumpled wings, asthmatic engines
and now—I'm here
 this trailer, tan '85 Champion model,
wondering, "How happen?"
 Lost in waves
 far from the sea.

Camera

Beyond these trees,
electric cow wire
red mud where fought
last Civil War battle
(leaving dybbuks to roam
Slate River's snaky banks)
are cities!

The roar, thump, steam
of El trains to Jerome Avenue,
New Utrecht, 31st Street, Queens,
Subway fests of electric guitars
and the blind guy playing
accordion: polkas and "Moscow Nights."

This Byzantium I gave up
for love. Ignored,
two months pregnant, demented by silence,
I think, "He'd better watch his
step."

I'm not hanging out for the scenery,
counting ant hills.

My \$3 an Hour State-Subsidized Analyst Suggests Lithium for Balanced Decision Making

Blotchy skinned and pregnant,
I watch *Soul Train* and look
at old pictures while my husband works
nights at the prison. Here's me
last summer by mother's pool,
palmetto trees, looking like Jackie
O. From movie star looks to country
frowse. How one day sophisticated
New Yorker, the next, poor in trailer.
What will baby think seeing Mommy
photos when I'm dull-eyed, fat,
smelling of cow manure and the last
spritz of French perfume.

Ekeing Out a Living in the Third Poorest County in Virginia

On a sunny winter morning.
We turn in a closed gas station
where a mangled-up car sits,
a tin, rubber, chrome heap.
“This is the car,” my husband says.
“Ice patch skidded a truck head-on.
I’m going to get the thermostat.”
I say, “Wait, wait!
I don’t want a dead woman’s
thermostat; car heat that breathes
death and bad karma each time
I turn it on.”
He says, “We’ve got a baby,
we need car heat,
and we’re too broke
to be picky.”
He’s right, I think,
as he pries loose the grill.
Some days you do have to rob the dead.

Snow

What place poetry now
when the pipes freeze,
the well pump breaks?

What place poetry
living in this trailer,
manuscripts stuffed

behind the laundry bag,
complete Whitman
mildewed, green fuzz

growing on the page edge.
What place poetry
for my son—six weeks old?

In from hunting, the men hunker,
drunk, empty-handed, stupid.
But what else to do here?

I change my son's diapers.
He coos, I ask, "Would you
rather live in bleakness

with a father, or shall
we venture back
to the world?"

Melpomene

Dead calves started the week—
three in three days:
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.
Each time Doc tried hitting
them with his hat, but
they just laid stretched
in the hay, cold noses,
stiff tails.
We buried them in shallow graves
like murder victims.
Next we found the cat
by the roadside, an older male
who'd raped the kittens.
Still, too much death,
too many omens.
So when Doc got drunk Friday,
I said I'd call the law
if he went riding with
his gun. But he did, so I did,
and they picked him up
near the Tastee Freeze.
Now he can't forgive me
calling the law on family,
but I kept thinking of the calf dead,
and Doc hitting the calf with his hat,
and Doc dead,
and how death is this thing
that no amount of hat-hitting
can bring you back from.

Oceana

Today the sun is high
making warm the baby pool,
full of bugs.

There are bigger pools
than this, but they are far
from here. They are called
seas or oceans
or Olympic size. Still,
we will swim by the buzz
of horsefly after the pool's
been scooped.