

"Words' Worth" Poetry Readings

Poets at the Culture, Arts, and Parks Committee of the Seattle City Council.

The Man Who Looks Down by Mark Harlow

The man who looks down
is a grave man;
deep in thought ---
deep in doubt ---
deep in debt.

He who looks down is a snob, perhaps,
looking down his nose
at trifling aspirations
and empty, giggling triumphs.
He counts the pores of his skin
before he counts us.

The man who looks down
sits on a bench,
awaiting the bus that will take him
home again, home again, jiggedy-jog.
He watches an ant haul a pork rind
across a vast expanse of concrete.
Bittersweet labor.
The man who looks down suddenly chuckles.
How easy to crush that ant,
end his struggle;
how easy to be crushed.
He chuckles
and we who share his bench
(looking down for reasons of our own)
shift uneasily.

The man who looks down,
awash in vague memory ---
was it really love?
did it really happen that way? ---
wonders if all reminiscence
is a lens
vaseline smeared.
He may look down a well
in some forgotten rustic piazza
in some forgotten Etruscan town;
a well that has slaked a million
ancestral thirsts.
He makes a wish
as the worthless penny click click clicks
but softly
off the moldy stones.

The man who looks down
is afraid to look up, look forward,

lest he stumble on the matter at hand;
the bowed bovine neck,
plodding resignation.
He looks down
but really he listens
to the soft hum of the city ---
as soft and fuzzy
as the summer coat of a bee
going about its busy-bee-ness,
cross-pollinating without knowing ---
crossing intersections without slowing
as the business of the town goes on
whether he looks up or down.

The man who looks down
has had a change of heart;
no longer looking out but in,
no longer aching for action
but resolve,
if not repose...
The man who looks down,
there's a crick in his neck from reaching for pie in the sky.

The man who looks down,
he's weeping his eyeballs bone dry.
One more contact lens has fallen to the ground.
He just don't look up.

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