

Racing Our Shadows



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Racing Our Shadows originally drew me in because of the vivid and unique concrete images that anchor every poem. Even when we are inside the narrator's head, such as when he/she walks "quickly past the shoes" in the poem "Scattered," we are grounded by the buckle, the lace, the smallness. I also enjoyed how the poet explores spiritual themes without falling into the sentimental, the cliché, or simple biblical paraphrase. There are some wonderful uses of form in here as well, which are often connected to exploration of language in interesting ways, such as in "Definition" and "Incorruptible." And then, when each poem ends there's a beautiful kind of opening up rather than a shutting down – something that leaves us questioning or wanting more, which draws us to read the poem again and again. And the more we read the poems, the more they reveal to us.

Marci Rae Johnson
Chapbook Judge

the order of things

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Wondering

14

Incorruptible

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Scattered

Pantheon Rain

12

Of the Unknown

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Wondering

If you hear sunset songs
is there something
wrong with you
or something right with you?
If you hear the birds of peace
do you stop
or had there in the sky
I have seen

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Green Room

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Stories

Defining

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Based on
a police
mugshot

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You are the
child now

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Wondering

If you hear sunset songs,
is there something
wrong with you
or something right with you?
If you hear the honk of geese,
do you stop
to find them in the sky?
How much
does justice weigh?
What does God
smell like?
Is there anything
more liberated
than a goose?

If Peter Pan isn't going to
grow up,
does he care
about the ticking of a clock?
What do I have the time
to live with
and to love?
How often
in the day and night
am I aware of my soul?

Incorruptible

adj. (and n.)

Incapable of undergoing physical corruption

(what is said of the body
of Saint Victoria
glass-cased
across from Bernini's
ecstatic
Teresa and the angel
who pierced her
heart)

That which cannot decay or perish

(except for the parts
that have –
these are replaced with wax
and silk roses
and someone else's curls)

Eternal

(the Capuchin friars
decorated their own crypt
with the bones of their brothers,
sculpted into chandeliers
and canopies, lining the walls
with vertebrae and scapula butterflies)

Everlasting

(visitors are reminded

What you are now

we once were;

what we are now

you shall be

by the vacant scrutiny

of four thousand skulls)

Of the Unknown
Notre-Dame de Paris

We ascend
out of the mouth of the earth,
into the morning,
and run –
joyful –
from the train,
racing our shadows
toward the pulse
of the bells.

The guards do not
bother to open our bags –
they know
we are not from here,
we worship in another language,
we are
harmless –
they wave us through,
into the
sanctuary.

Behind the cathedral
and below,
the toll of the bells
swirls with the sound of the Seine –
two hundred thousand
lights shine constant
in an empty tomb.



Scattered

Notes-Débris de Paris

I have heard many stories
of people who were
utterly affected
by a certain buckle
or a lace still tied
or the smallness.
Yet
I had to walk quickly past the shoes.

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Defining

Democracy most of all affiliates with the open air, is sunny and hardy and sane only with Nature – just as much as Art is. Something is required to temper both – to check them, restrain them from excess, morbidity. I have wanted, before departure, to bear special testimony to a very old lesson and requisite. American Democracy, in its myriad personalities, in factories, workshops, stores, offices – through the dense streets and houses of cities, and all their manifold sophisticated life – **must either be** fibred, vitalized, by regular contact with out-door light and air and growths, farm-scenes, animals, fields, trees, birds, sun-warmth and free skies, or it will certainly dwindle and pale. We cannot have grand races of mechanics, work people, and commonalty, (the only specific purpose of America,) on any less terms. I conceive of no flourishing and heroic elements of Democracy in the United States, or of Democracy maintaining itself at all, without the Nature-element forming a main part – to be its health-element and beauty element – to really underlie the whole politics, sanity, religion and art of the New World.

Finally, **the** morality: "Virtue," said Marcus Aurelius, "what is it, only a living and enthusiastic sympathy with Nature?" Perhaps indeed the efforts of the true poets, founders, religions, literatures, all ages have been, and ever will be, over time and times to come, essentially the same – to bring **people** back from their **persistent** strayings and sickly abstractions, to the costless average, divine, original concrete.

"Nature and Democracy – Morality" from *Specimen Days* by Walt Whitman.

Great Ideas

Where the action
can be identified
between the cities,
along all
their fragile borders
admit that they disturb
the substance
of your
the machine.

Also

Where the boy in the
blue uniform
stands

"Please,
do not cough

the work

It is only with
You would peak right
through."

Green Room

n.

Where the actors
can hide themselves
between the scenes,
shrug off
their fragile facades,
admit that they disdain
the audience
but crave
the applause.

Also:

Where the boy in the
Secret Service uniform
warned us –

“Please,
do not touch

the wall.

It is only silk.
You would push right
through.”

Based on a police mugshot.

Smoke on porcelain, color light bounce on wall.
She felt the need of darkness.

Capturing smoke must be simpler than we thought.
She is captured here – dwindling into darkness.

Scattered parts of the vision within (*this shadow, my likeness*) –
she is lonely, and in darkness.

The person depicted is often not her true self.
Those who live with shadows know the intricacies of darkness.

Even the light of the angel in Peter's cell
leaves corners undelivered from darkness.

*Inspired by Robert Tarbell's *Failure to Appear* series
from his *Smoke Screens* portrait collection.

Stories

They float between
this quiet place &
every dream

in the blue
of the arc between
river & bridge

in the hush between
breathing or heart
beats or waves

between the looking
glass & the
otherworld inside –

and why do we
more readily remember
the happily-ever-afters

than the stories
that end
with tongues cut out –

voices
permanently
silenced?

(I am as guilty as anyone)

You are the child now –

the one you were before,

when shadow was separate
from self

and the sky was soft and possible

and all that you felt was deeper
than every blue.

What will you do with this childhood –

before you grow a heart
or lose a dog

before you learn that the world is ungentle
and that shadows must be sewn –

before you are left with the ruins of was?

And what will be left after this is done?



*After Kristi Malakoff's *Maibaum*.

Princess's Reflections

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You are the child now

the one who wears red shoes

when shadows stay separate
from all

and the sky was soft and possible

and all that you felt was deeper
than every blue

What will you do with this childhood—

before you give a heart
or lose a dog

before you learn that the world is ungodly
and that shadows must be seen

before you are left with the ruins of war?

And what will be left after this summer?

“After School Mathcad” Matheson

Previous Publications

Rose of Jerico, Natalie Cross | 2018

Fractured Fath, Pauline Harris | 2017

Decay and Other Artifacts, Molly Rupp | 2016

the girl who says nothing, Dana Stull | 2015

Refraction, Rowanne Fairchild | 2014

If I Go Away, Matt Comi | 2013

Biography of Early Living, Matt Comi | 2012