

Gerald Parks

POETRY AND THE NOISE OF TRAFFIC

The noise of traffic coming to my ears
reminds me that the city does not die,
even at night. The open road is littered
with broken dreams and Coca-cola icons.
The poet takes to whiskey to survive.

Proud Whitman throwing your arms around the
masses
in verse they thought obscene, if seen at all;
your optimism staggers to its bed
to retch on comradeship and innocence.
The efflux of the soul is feverish.

Death is not noble thus--ignominy
of sore and drunken eyes with double vision.
The world would wake if only we could see,
could touch the genuine issue of the earth
in the reconciliation of daily bread.

A poetry commensurate with the land
in time and space that eat each other up
confuses desire and fact; the barbaric yawp
trails off into a self-orgied yawn.
The poet sags down into his highballed sofa.

Populous accidents bloat the open road
beneath the stars that suffocate of smog.
The continent is drunk with affluence,
awaiting penury and apocalypse
in the Death Valley of its parched desire.

The modern chant over the bones of death
bares naked power in the kniving place
where truth is sharpened. Poetry slinks demure
behind the scenes to itemize defeat,
compute the bill of selfish urban pride

in urging nature to remake itself
for our convenience, in a feast of evil.
To throw the window open will not help:
the fumes of our roast conscience dwell at ease
with the intonation of traffic in our ears.

Maria Gillan

IN NEW JERSEY ONCE

In New Jersey once, marigolds grew wild.
Fields swayed with daisies,
Oaks stood tall on mountains
Powdered butterflies graced the velvet air.

Listen. It was like that.
Before the bulldozers.
Before the cranes.
Before the cement sealed the earth.

Even the stars, which used to hang
in thick clusters in the black sky,
even the stars are dim.

Burrow under the blacktop,
under the cement, the old dark earth
is still there. Dig your hands into it,
feel it, deep, alive on your fingers,

know that the earth breathes and pulses still.
Listen. In New Jersey once,
flowers grew.