

The Gossips

Theodore Roethke

The vulturine necks stretch out; the mean eyes bunch,
Float over hedges, witch-like, branch after branch,
Droop down from grimy windows; lust to lynch;

Or narrow to a dark reptilian stare,
Glide, poison-fanged, from bridge tea to the store.
The victim walks, his curdled spine aware.

Whatever could this bumbling man have done
That these cold venomous eyes should merge as one,
Freeze and transfix him like an evil sun?

O Me! O Life!

Walt Whitman

Oh me! Oh life! of the questions of these recurring,
Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill'd with the foolish,
Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless?)
Of eyes that vainly crave the light, of the objects mean, of the struggle ever renew'd,
Of the poor results of all, of the plodding and sordid crowds I see around me,
Of the empty and useless years of the rest, with the rest me intertwined,
The question, O me! so sad, recurring—What good amid these, O me, O life?

Answer.

That you are here—that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.

Source: *Leaves of Grass* (1892)

Wheels

Jim Daniels

My brother kept
in a frame on the wall
pictures of every motorcycle, car, truck:
in his rusted out Impala convertible
wearing his cap and gown
waving
in his yellow Barracuda
with a girl leaning into him
waving
on his Honda 350
waving
on his Honda 750 with the boys
holding a beer
waving
in his first rig
wearing a baseball hat backwards
waving
in his Mercury Montego
getting married
waving
in his black LTD
trying to sell real estate
waving
back to driving trucks
a shiny new rig
waving
on his Harley Sportster
with his wife on the back
waving
his son in a car seat
with his own steering wheel
my brother leaning over him
in an old Ford pickup
and they are
waving
holding a wrench a rag
a hose a shammy
waving.

My brother helmetless
rides off on his Harley
waving
my brother's feet
rarely touch the ground-
waving waving
face pressed to the wind
no camera to save him.

from *Places/Everyone*, 1985
(University of Wisconsin Press, 1985)

Kinship

Margarita Engle

Two sets
of family stories,
one long and detailed,
about many centuries
of island ancestors, all living
on the same tropical farm...

The other side of the family tells stories
that are brief and vague, about violence
in the Ukraine, which Dad's parents
had to flee forever, leaving all their
loved ones
behind.

They don't even know if anyone
survived.

When Mami tells her flowery tales of Cuba,
she fills the twining words with relatives.
But when I ask my
Ukrainian-Jewish-American grandma
about her childhood in a village
near snowy Kiev,
all she reveals is a single
memory
of ice-skating
on a frozen pond.

Apparently, the length
of a grown-up's
growing-up story
is determined
by the difference
between immigration
and escape.

Source: *Enchanted Air* (Atheneum Books for Young Readers,
2015)