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A Folk Song

Terry Stokes

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What I like about the poem is the internal mumbling, bitching, & the poem as an explanation of how a poem gets "made" thru co-mingling of the public & private voices. I like that poem better, now, than "The Man" or "Crimes of Passion," which are, tho consistent in tone, etc., not quite as expansive in the use of voice, i.e., the latter sets a stance, a character, & he simply speaks his one song. In the former, there's a self-consciousness about the poem under hand, & I like the narrator commenting on that as well as the other nonsense which seems to be going on around him.

The Voice is the foot that pulses on the other side of this page.

The Voice is the language of a country which didn't exist before this minute.

The Voice is a fellow countryman mumbling in a dialect. You comprehend the meta-messages.

The Voice is the hot-line to your twin, your cousin, your great-great-grandfather.

The Voice is a great scalpel in the mouth of the child.

The Voice dreams it will always grow up, so it can talk to the alarm clock, the windows, the grave, & the darkness.

The Voice laughs at its own jokes.

—Terry Stokes

A FOLK SONG

My woman & her wishbone, I repeat,
my woman & her wishbone, dry
their hair in the gnarling sun.

It was not salad in the eyes of
the world. They took the land like
mongrels with signs that said, "Over

the river, & thru the woods to Grandmother's
house, we go." I'm not going there
& we slobber on the shallow road, seeing

who can spit, who can fabricate a stream
with their own blood. I was dreaming
again last night, oh honey, the building

with blue spires was sold for seventy-five
fish, count them, seventy-five. Each time
I reached into my pocket to count out the

bills, lambs, lambs are not smackers, &
where could I go from there. I hold my
famous pole-axe, it belongs to an ex-

student who wanted me to see the weapons
shining in his room. I took this pole-
axe, & did some damage to his collection.

A valuable lesson can be learned, eventhough
we eat the spring chicken as tho he is a
diced rat, we can look at the book of

strange fucks with an open eye, almost
as if we were there when it all took
place. I give nothing up, I crouch down

in my chair & pass out the pencils, "Write
your name at the top, & if you have to piss,
hold it." Yesterday, quite seriously, a

tired wasp landed on my arm, a pea, a small one, in his mouth. It was a choice, take the pea back to the hungry kids or suck a little

weak blood from my arm. Oh I knew the wasp's answer, tho I didn't know what I would have done. Random sampling

would get us somewhere if we had any needs. But there you are, no one to hold you but yourself, & you do that,

after you go for the mail, & several gallons of gas, & a couple of next week's lottery tickets, apple juice,

& the local newspaper. As that American poultry critic once said, "This guy writes what's at the front of his head."

He was not kidding. So you slide off into a haze of Milk Duds, & you buy back last year's tools. You speak in the voice

of the late candidate, "I been to the doctor, I know what it is, a dwarf swimming the Atlantic, from North to South. It is no

secret what God can do. What he's done for me, he can do for you." The willow rides out the storm in the arms of its

mother. The blue ant slithers across the carpet; its head tucked close to its apparent body. Give it a whirl,

it's no fun there in the belly of the copperhead, tho the weather is good, clear, never a cloudy day in this part of the

country. Dressing up to go downtown, rustle up a quick bologna sandwich, & a double-shot of Wild Turkey, no water. A slim

woman carries her body before your chuckling
eyes, you have nothing to say, except, "Please
shut off the jukebox." Her bodyshirt you

did not know it was a bodyshirt tucked
in, you thought it was an orange blouse
which clung like hunger in a bad movie, now,

you clutch, you clutch her arm, "You look
like my sister, she's a nurse." You take
out your bongos, bang out a tune of rough

passion, she responds, like a two-tone
Ford, kicking you in the balls, upsetting
everything. You deserved it, you were

tapping out some wild things with your
fingers, & you know where that gets
you. Someplace near the end of the evening

you hold a "No Parking" sign in your arms,
not only do you cling to it, you set up
a stand, "Come on in, & see the Great

Fucks, & the Bad Scars, Scares that'll
chase your blues away." You come upon
your own lost country, my woman & her

wishbone we climb the best tree
in this country of crags. Oh where
have we been in the long time before?