

Mark Elber – Two Poems

Memphis Sunset

It is December and I am homeless in two cities a thousand miles apart
And on this date when I first opened my eyes to see what I was crying about
When I first began to stir all these sensations into a great muddle
When the round bodies of automobiles held the keys to every horizon
When only my mother's lullabies mattered
As my parents' faces slowly emerged out of the blur that is our glorious beginning
And I grew to peek around corners
Not knowing one day I would chase my past down roads it never took
And 46 years later find my way to Memphis
Standing by the river whose broad current cuts through the continent
Who has carried cities of silt down to the Gulf
Who has clothed America in cotton
In whom raw dreams have kept afloat only to be banked at unlikely turns
And every day the highway leaps across the Mississippi
And every day I trample sacred ground
Where someone first tasted the sacrament of another's lips
Where someone stood waist deep in the moment

But I am a restless pedestrian pacing the upper deck of a riverboat peering at the
history of America
And I am nothing if not a gentrified vagabond, a collage of mixed metaphors, a
repository of insatiable desires, a body with only so many breaths left

And so I have rummaged through the remains of paradise
Beholding myth in the sweat of mortals
Seeing art when the sky was just doing its job

And the brown waters eddy beneath the bridges I cross and recross
And there is no rest though the sun slips off into Arkansas
Though the delta sleeps a few depleted hours
While the country grows fat off the memory of heroes it's martyred
And in this world of wet clay, rich humus, gambling barges, trailer homes built
on
stilts by riverbanks south of Memphis
Under the humid stars, under the spell of flooded banks, wooden rafts, the
hushed wind, the migrations of millions
The river inexhaustibly outruns itself.

Poland

whose soil I never saw
whose language engulfed me, drove me into my shell
a child

of refugees whose friends here
survived the same slaughter
mourning their parents, their siblings, their faith
fleeing the landscape of mass graves, ashes that were family

crossing the Atlantic in the late 40s
recognizing each other
familiar inflections, shared unutterable
heritage of loss

the strange noises of this continent are native to me
screech of subways, car horns in congestion
slang that's second-nature

Poland, where I would have emerged
bloodied by the short journey from womb to maternity
Poland whose borders were dizzy with change, squeezed from every side

the Angel of Death could get no sleep during those war years
Poland of piety, lethal ghettos, barbed wire crowning the walled-in nightmare
corpses in the streets
starvation, sickness, liquidation

what child could watch his parents' pain in silence?
what child could not?

Mark Elber was born and raised in NYC and lives in Fall River, Massachusetts. He has published numerous poems in the following journals among others: *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *The Jerusalem Review #9*, *The Minetta Review*, *Home Planet News*, *The Sierra Nevada College Review*, *Mudfish* (#'s 5, 6, 9, 20), *arc 8*, *Borders and Boundaries Anthology*, *Newtown Literary*, *Poetica*, *Slow Motion Magazine*, and *Voices Israel*. He is the author of *The Everything Kabbalah Book* and *The Sacred Now*.