

Neil Silberblatt – Five Poems



Feature Poet

Mountains

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo
And the LORD showed him the land ... and ... said to him, “This is
the land which I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob I
have let you see it ..., but you shall not [enter]” So Moses ...
died there ... and he buried him there

Deuteronomy 34:1-8

Not again, this trek up
and down a mountain.
The last time, you will recall,
when I descended,
I returned to a people
lost, who had already forgotten me
and you
and had moved on to other gods.
Then, my brother's two sons were consumed by fire,
as so many of my seed would be.
I cannot stand for another such climb
and descent.
Better I should not descend
to see what they've become,
to witness more deaths.
But, if you can assure me a good vista
and firm toehold,
I will gladly

make the ascent.
I, with my staff.
You, with your spade.

Pure (for Zakai)

Ivory Soap boasted that
it was 99 and 44/100 percent pure.
Vanilla extract, cane sugar and flour
made similar claims,
making the other baking products
feel leprous by comparison.
The pure are like that,
always touting their purity,
leaving the rest of us
feeling sullied,
dirty.
You, dear one, are not pure.
Who would want - in this world - to be pure,
blameless,
the "he who is without sin"?
Who would want the privilege
or responsibility of casting the first stone?
Such a weighty thing
to be pure.
No, you are not pure.
In you flows the blood of mongrel races -
from Puerto Rico and Kishinev,
from Finland, India and the Caribbean,
from shtetls and barrios,
from the third world to First Avenue.
Your swaddling cloth is the kikoi
under which your grandparents were married,
the fringed and frayed tallit
in which your great, great grandfather draped
and lost himself,
the lace mantilla passed down to your grandmother
by her mother, and hers,
the tablecloth carefully pressed

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by your great grandmother -
with wine stains from the year before -
for the Passover Seder.
Your family tree is not some maple

with its symmetrical branches and leaves
as precise as snowflakes,
ready to yield pure maple syrup.
It is a mangrove swamp,
its gnarled roots forming new growth.
You are something more precious
than pure.
You are a tapestry of the hopes
which led a frightened 8 year old girl and her parents
to flee to this impure land.
Not for you to cast the first stone.
You will gather those stones together
and build a new foundation,
leaving purity
for soap and vanilla extract.

La Mer

You left part of the beach
in my bed.
It is not just the sand, though,
there is that.
Nor was it the shells
which fell from your thighs
when you rose,
and sought refuge on mine.
Those washed off
this morning
in the hot spray
and soapy foam.
No, you carelessly left
the scent of the ocean
all over me
and my once dry-docked bed.
And now, I cannot wait
to return to the sea again
and dive headlong
into your waters.

Corn Hill Beach

We lay on our backs -
my brother and I -
on the cool turf of Grand Central
as he pointed out to me
Orion's belt, no trousers,

and the dippers
which I always confused
for ladles.
"And here is Ursa ...",
until a cop came and told us
to get up
and stop star gazing
and, jeez, didn't we know this is Grand Central
and you can't do that stuff
here.
These are not
those painted stars.
And there's no cop telling us
to move along.
Just the moonless night sky
flecked with light,
and you
in my arms
as we crane our necks against the dark
to behold
the dazzling ladles.

Couverture

She wears me like a blanket
drawing my frayed body atop hers,
gathering me close, tucking me in
where it's warm.
I don't object
of course.
I am only too happy
to drape and comfort her.
It is a fair exchange
as her shoulders offer,
without the slightest plumping,
the softest pillow.

Neil Silberblatt is the founder / director of Voices of Poetry. Since 2012, he has curated and presented more than 400 poetry events at various venues in MA, CT, NY & NJ, including Provincetown Art Association & Museum; The Rubin Museum of Art, McNally Jackson Books and Jefferson Market Library in NYC; The Mount / Edith Wharton's home in Lenox, MA; and Chesterwood in Stockbridge, MA. Those events have featured acclaimed poets - including former U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky & Pulitzer Prize winner Frank Bidart - as well as those who have not (yet) published a word. Neil's poems have appeared in numerous print & online literary journals and

anthologies, including *Plume Poetry Journal*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Tiferet Journal*, *American Journal of Poetry*, and *Tikkun Daily*. His poem, *Burnt Offering*, was selected by Mass. Poetry as their 'Poem of the Moment'. His work has also been selected for various anthologies, including *Collateral Damage* (Pirene's Fountain); and *Culinary Poems* (Glass Lyre Press). He is the author of several poetry collections: *So Far, So Good* and *Present Tense*. His most recent poetry collection - *Past Imperfect* (Nixes Mate Books, 2018) - was nominated for the Mass. Book Award in Poetry. He has been nominated several times for a Pushcart Prize and, in his spare time, battles Stage IV metastatic colon cancer.