

Home and Variations

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Also by Robert Archambeau

Poetry

Citation Suite (Bray: Wild Honey Press, 1997)

Criticism

Another Ireland (Bray: Wild Honey Press, 1997)

As Editor

Word Play Place: Essays on the Poetry of John Matthias

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ROBERT ARCHAMBEAU



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for Valerie, for John, for Michael, and for Ben

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“Home and Variations,”

that is to say:

*the first home and its variations
as we move from it with it and to it*

and:

*variations, as in music—
a theme or score or text or style, worked and reworked
until it feels like home.*

Home and Variations

Some stay in one place.
Others move. Still others move
from place to place, staying
for a while. But some
stay in one. And if they think of this,
they call it “home.” Stop.
And if those who stay in one place
and know it are at home, others, moving, or
moving place to place to stay
and move, are not.
And if they know it, know
they’re not at home. Stop.
And if they stayed in one place and moved on
and if they know it, then they know that
when they hadn’t moved, they were at home.
Whether they knew it. Whether they not.
Stop.
And if they left and know they left
they feel a lack.
And others stay in one place. And if
they stay and the place won’t stay as
the place they knew was the place that’s “home” they feel
a lack. Stop. And this tells.
And some who feel a lack will fill
the lack they feel. Stop. And my father
played the phonograph. Played sea chanteys,
played Hank Snow. Played them till my mother,
or went and played them till they stopped. Stop. Played
at being with the sailors, played at being
with Hank Snow. Played at doing what
they did, which wasn’t play. Stop. If work
was what men did with hands and tools
on farm and sea and if my father’s father worked
with hands and tools but didn’t sing. Would the

singing of the sailors would the singing of Hank Snow
be singing so my father he could play at
being home. Stop. And if his son who moved, and
moved from place to place. Whether he wanted.
Whether he not. If he thought of father thinking father
thinking work and farm and home would
the thinking take him farther would the thinking take him
home.

For Possession: Manitoba Barbed Wire, 1885

take and
use just this single
wire line, for now, urging on to
some ragged stop, tied or
fastened as best you
can, tenuous on the
perpendicular earth, let the wire line
sing, a low howl with
the wind, to mark also
by sound our quiet
divisions, to say that we are
on this ground

the Cree the Blackfoot the Métis

the Cree the Blackfoot the Métis

Two Short Films *on the translation of the European imagination to America*

*. . . what we feel of sorrow and despair
From ruin and from change, and all the grief
The passing shews of being leave behind,
Appeared an idle dream*

WORDSWORTH, *The Prelude*

*Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We
intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia . . .*

MARINETTI, *Futurist Manifesto*

1. WORDSWORTH AT THE CUYAHOGA'S MOUTH, 1796–1996

In newsreel stock, in jumpy monochrome
You mount the windy bluff, glance back and turn
To face the valley. Far below, white water foams

Birds cry, and black waves peel from slabs of rock,
Back down to the great lake's boom and suck.
You stand, a silhouette, black coat and stick.

The film moves quickly now—clouds fly and light's
A flickered blur of days and nights. You wait,
The still point of a world that's turned to haste.

You wait, and plowed lines break the dark earth's crust—
The valley peopled now—and frontier huts
Crop up each harvest time. A rail line thrusts

On past that limestone ridge, with quick faint wraiths
That, caught in a frame that stutters through the gate,
Are horses, wagons, wide-backed men. You wait,

Brick chimneys frame the screen and black smoke swells,
A furnace-city churns its molten steel—
And one quick night's a flash: city plays hell.

And you, above this growth and flux and ruin,
Does your sleepwalker-muse fetch Whitman songs
Great port, great ore-port, great handler of iron —

Or bring *an image of tranquility*
So calm and still, a green dream's tapestry
Of soft grass overgrowing history?

I can't expect an answer: You stand, there,
And breathe the flickered light of setting suns, the living air.

2. MARINETTI AT UNION STATION, CHICAGO

Arrived, the locomotive paws the track,
deep-chested, bellowing

(we gather, from this silent reel);
its steam-plumes jet in cavern air

beneath the city. And, arrived—
in the city of railyards,

apparatus, of stokers groping blackened
through the mill-fire's angry blast,

the city of shipping, chemical manufacture,
stockyards blazed with electric moons—you,

mounting the platform, gestures broad,
erratic, oratorical.

Saying (we barely see, white letters
over faded stock) *Hold no ideal mistress high,*

her form divine rising to touch clouds;
saying *All must be swept aside,*

to express our whirling life of steel, of pride,
of fever and exalted speed;

saying, in that rush of sailors, workmen,
quicke-eyed thieves, *death to Ciceroni, antiquarians . . .*

Mechanic-limbed and darting, the crowd
won't pause to hear you, and I

wonder, do you dream of Venice,
soft, past-loving, shocked

in all her statuary, when you declared
The first dawn is now, an explosive breath?

You, erratic, oratorical, the last frame
fading on your words, *our bodies die for speed*

for movement and for darting light.

Victory Over the Sun

Here come the Futurists.
One wears a spoon in his buttonhole.

One signs an unknown hieroglyph.
One sings vowels, another consonants.

Here come the Futurists. It is 1913.
Kruchenykh, Matiushin, Goncharova,

Burliuk who leads his giant brother,
“I-Burliuk” on both their brows.

Here come the Futurists. Come, Kazemir Malevich,
saying “let the familiar recede,

let all by which we’ve lived
be lost to sight.”

They come. Let all by which they’ve lived
be lost to sight—

let Moscow, drunk, serf-shouldered,
(a stunted mongrel, a cold and coal-blackened thief)

be lost. The massing of troops,
the Czar who calls a madman to heal his bleeding son,

the hunger,
the boy who beats his brother in a tailor’s grimy shop—

let these recede, be lost to sight.
Here come the Futurists. It is 1913.