

for BEN

May 19th 2018, Central Philadelphia Meeting House

Farewell and adieu to you, Spanish Ladies
Farewell and adieu to you, ladies of Spain;
For we've received orders for to sail back to Boston
& so never more shall we see you again
- Quint "farewell & adieu" *JAWS*

WALTER BENJAMIN CHURCHILL III

G o n e D o w n Jan 21/22 , 2018

Climbed rock bridge wall

dancing to Steely Dan
above Daniels restaurant
river out the window
all summer long
spinning on split-ankle
no pain

fucked a blonde
college girl
out on the lawn
back of dormitory
above river
afterward
beating the chest
roared with life

busted walking out the door
of downtown pharmacy
one hot summer afternoon
with an ice cream
making a joke of it
on his way out
with the girl behind the counter

no joke
sheriff knocked on your door
rang you up

roller-blading up
on scaffolding
over downtown parking
lot

ended
w/ another broken
ankle bone

...

bullshitting yr way
into a job
w/ a press in DC
talking up a vastly enhanced
personal history of sailing
hob-knobbing in names and places
only to find a gal
but lose the job

*

“Ben and I met because of books. In May of 1999, he was hired as a publicist where I was an editorial assistant, in Washington, D.C. To say we were opposites would be an understatement. I was serious and quiet. He was gregarious and charming—his arrival a jolt of adrenaline to our somewhat cloistered office of fewer than 20 people.

...

Our email exchanges (composed at our 10-foot-apart desks) were peppered with lines from Wallace Stevens, William Blake, and Herman Melville. He’d been surprised-slash-impressed when I’d told him that I’d read *Moby Dick* ... and that I’d read it more than once. We’d flipped through my marked-up copy, reading passages to each other.

...

That summer was the beginning of nearly 10 years together, during which Ben and I crossed the country and back, trying to find ourselves and having loads of adventures along the way. It was an intense and tumultuous relationship, off and on at times. When it ended for good, the love that remained evolved into a deep friendship.

...

Our story—particularly the beginning— is, I think, a perfect illustration of what I love so much about books (and, more recently, about owning a bookstore): how they bring people together, prompt meaningful discussion, change minds, inspire adventure, and broaden horizons.”

- Joelle Herr, inaugural column “Bookish” *The East Nashvillian*, Mar-Apr 2018

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*Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the Devil’s foot,
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy’s stinging,
And find
What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind.*

- John Donne, “Song”

the human breath
enters in the lungs
spills out the eyes
dancing its way
throughout limbs
spun about

absorbed in talk
trade between the like-minded

*

A few years back I wrote a conversation between shades of long departed poets Charles Olson and William Blake, inspired to do so in large part by the fond memory of my undergraduate final project collaboration with Ben for a class on *American Literature of the South*. We composed an “imagined” conversation, taking turns at his typewriter, between novelist William Faulkner and escaped slave-turned-revolutionary Nat Turner. It evolved into almost a game of chess (I think we in fact did simultaneously have a game going next to the typewriter). Much of our text was drawn from out my recollections of reading Faulkner’s 1950 Nobel Prize Speech, along with several interviews, and Ben’s thorough immersion into the Nat Turner presented by William Styron’s *Confessions of Nat Turner*. Over the course of a delightful few afternoon hours we took turns moving from typewriter to chess board.

My Olson-Blake chat was published in a literary journal out of Buffalo. Along with several other epigraphs it includes the following lifted from out a letter from Ben:

Actually, and this is such a divertissement; head lice and crabs are from the same species of louse and due to the slight discord in their mutual genome evolutionary scientists believe they can estimate the time period when humans began to shed body hair and thus maintain two distinctly hairy regions of the body—the head and the pubis. So, for a louse, the distance between the head and groin is vast and was only achievable with a hisuit land bridge that could sustain an expeditionary team of lice with less prodigious grazing across the belly, chest and back, yet still those sparse plainslands provided enough meager viands to complete the harrowing journey. Once the land bridge closed due to our relative hairlessness, (much like the Bering Land Bridge that enabled our migration from

Eastern Siberia into Alaska during the Pleistocene era) the two sets of lice were now able to let the driver of evolution, mutation, propel them into their differences, ie, their distinct adaptations that making the head louse efficient at parasitism in the drier sparser climates of the head, and crabs better adept to handle the lush, tropical ecosystem of the human equator.

- W.B. Churchill III

After publication he was nervous for reasons of employment opportunities that this might come up in a Google search for his name (it doesn't). A couple years ago I published a book collecting together reviews I'd written on the poet Robert Duncan. In my Olson-Blake chat I had inserted some stray words of Duncan's into the mouths of each poet. Avid reader of their work as he was. I tagged the chat onto the end of the book as an epilogue of sorts. Including the above mention of our undergrad collaboration in a short bit introducing the chat. As I recall, I lost touch with Ben before I was able to get a copy of this book his way.

All of my writing comes from what I've read and the conversations I've had. My influences are reading writing and friendship. Ben's presence shall always remain strewn throughout my work.

*

"like light as song"

-David Meltzer

the friendships
missed become
the friendship
carried along

the friendships
missed
become
the friendship
cherished

hold yr friends
close

carrying them
along

*

below
or above

no doubt
hesitant steps

won't do
dancing to Steely Dan

ankle-scar twisting & turning
no pain

nothing to it

how you danced & danced

river water flowing

one living force

all together in momentary splendor

*

a heart hurled against denial
no slumping

there is nothing heroic
in wild eyed mind
“terrible from joy” (Lansing
piercing everyday humility

there is nothing heroic there is
everything heroic

each move
those thought
alongside that
unthought-of

flicking
cigarette’s gleam
baring down

there in heroic measure
arrives madness
joy is bound
by song become

*

hinged to humming
full-throated

delight in a summer's day
river tossed back-n-forth
between rocks

drifting through our talk
loud tunes shouted over

we carried on our way
merrily enough aware

gone years soon rush in

*

*Surely of the passionate dead we can but cry in words Ben Jonson meant for none but
Shakespeare: 'so rammed' are they 'with life they can but grow in life with being.'*

- W.B. Yeats, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*

the dearest of jubilation

who wouldn't enjoy

the company

wherever whenever

forever