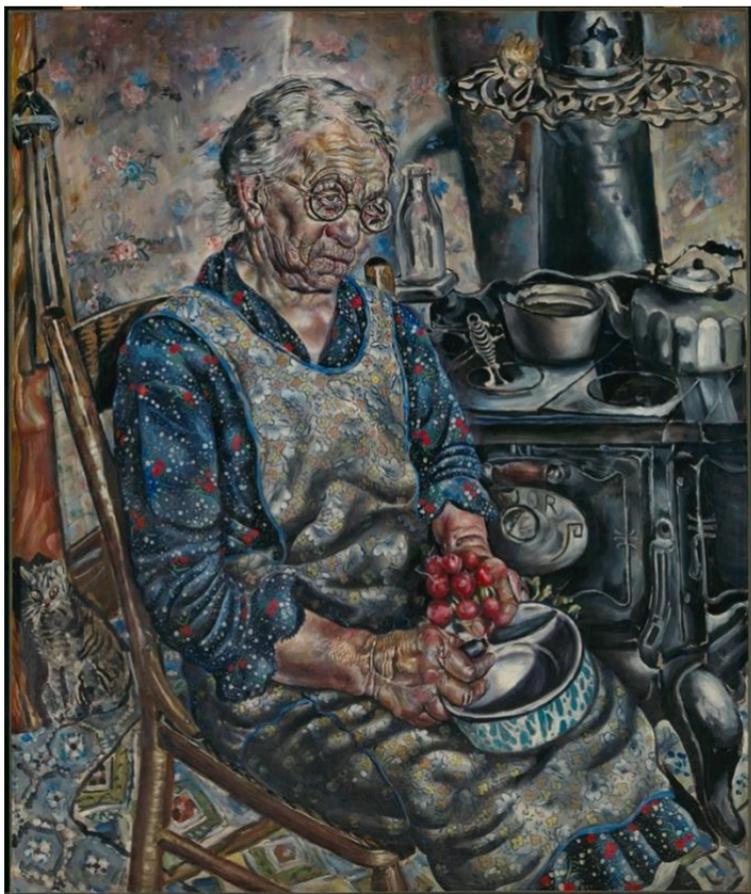


Buttonhook Press 2022 Pamphlet Series:
Americana

A Writer's Portfolio

Kirby Olson

POEMS FOR FAMILIES



OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters (O:JA&L)

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celebrating the publication of Kirby Olson's poetry pamphlet *Poems for Families*.

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canvas. No size specified. 1934. Public domain via U.S. Department of Labor.

RAGAS THUMPED ON MY EARPHONES

I arrived as an Indian prince from Delhi
on a strange highway over salt marshes from Newark Airport.

I saw shipping containers piled in parking lots,
and glassy buildings arising from the seagrass.

Trucks and smaller cars competed with my taxi
as I was deposited before MOMA.

I wanted to see the Cezanne drawings
that had been showcased.

Like a mummy, I put on my Covid mask
and walked through the aisles of lyrical abstraction.

Trees and boulders from Provençal
boosted the buoyant nihilism of Naturalism.

Going back to the plane the following day,
men stared into their phones at potential wives.

OCTOBER SCHOOL EVENT

Morning and the fog drifts over the soccer field.
This morning the grass was white with frost.

Late morning the sun alit upon the grass.
The frost “sublimated” into gas,

as trucks brought petroleum into town.
Moms called home via cellphone towers.

Julian played left half-back,
stopping and popping the ball up the field.

It resembled an atom as it twirled,
the centerpiece of my busy world.

BODIES IN MOTION TEND TO STAY IN MOTION

Running Lola to the crossroads
as steam caresses the frozen hills
and water trickles the creases.

The soft pink light of the sun
caresses the craggy trees
as cars ease around icy curves.

A crow in the distance hulks
as its wings flap—
a comma moving toward a period.

I try to follow the Ice Age River
that the geologist pointed out at Cannon Library, it ran
from the cross-section of Turnpike

down Route 28 past Fall's Mills,
following 28 down into the Courthouse
before emptying into the Delaware at DTC.

The wintry weather along Hwy 28:
lights blink and traffic forms a caravan
as the blizzards begin.

cross my windshield snow dots.
We approach Delhi, the county seat.
I follow a schoolbus that turns right on 10.

MICROPOLITAN GREETINGS

Branches of trees overhead raise arms,
to resemble a Stoic chorus in ancient Greece.
As our F-250 truck rumbles on the ridge road,
the cratered “highway” is barely passable,
although it appears on Gould’s map of 1856.

Orange flickers of the last of daylight,
and not an oriole or flicker in sight.
A roar of a diesel engine breaks the solitude,
at an altitude above Federal Hill #3,
where I thought only snowmobiles could exist.

The two-mile road exited by the Whittaker Farm.
There, milking continues by not-yet ghosts.
Our cities are packed with cosmopolitans, b
ut the countryside in America is pure as milk,
where one family spanning 3 generations still farms.

MOTHERS' DAY

They live at the end of the lane
where there is a single streetlamp.

Their life is made of purchase orders:
pencils, shoes, buttons, diapers.

Fathers go for a walk on a golden street.
The streets share lonely sheriffs and shaded men.

GOLDEN DOT

Jason and the Argonauts went to Colchis.
They got the Golden Fleece. I found gold at home
with Riikka her golden hair twisted into a braid. It
falls down her lovely back as we drive through
the golden autumn of late leaves.
Lola is practicing a Finnish song.
Tristan has a new red race car and a fever.
Julian is being good.
At home, Lola & her mommy danced backwards.
I read Kierkegaard & thought of Jason. His men
went around the world with him and Medea
returned with him, & when he left she slaughtered their children.
I stay home.
The Golden Fleece is always here.

HIGHLINE PARK IN NYC

It curved industriously along a path. It
was the culmination of Christo &
environmental art à la Smithson; yet was
also iron rails and boxy bldgs. The
Hudson River was a sheen of glass.

As I walked my hands froze. I learned that day of
H.L. Van Brunt's death. I compared his rural poems
of Okies, to Frank Gehry's wacky IAC building. As
we walked I thought of my mentor's last breath.

The grass was sere and daffodils dead.
I saw traffic on the sts. and aves.
The red glitter of brake lights.
Oh, the oceans of pedestrians!
Brunt lived alone and without family. I went for spaghetti with
mine in Little Italy.

AT STONY LANE POOL, GLADWYNE

For John Powell, R.I.P.

The swimming pool is rectangular turquoise.
In it are several adults swimming in straight lines.
A dozen children play with toy sharks in the shallow end.

My child Julian is in my arms.
I walk him around, encourage him to float.
Large trees surround the pool:

the only one I recognize is a sycamore.
2 dozen SUVs in the parking lot,
& Julian is floating.

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MORE TITLES IN PRESS

ABOUT THE WRITER:

When Kirby Olson studied with Allen Ginsberg in the 70s, he gave him this poem, as it was the only poem he'd written up to that point.

*I have often met the beauty of the living
It was in the magenta sunset.
It was in the hummingbird.
It was a child reaching up to kiss his mother goodnight.*

Ginsberg told him to write a big, dirty, sex poem instead. Olson thought he was crazy, but it was funny.

All of Olson's poems in some ways are about family, but now more about his own children rather than his parents. He still thinks that true beauty can only happen inside of families. Olson's poems have been in *Poetry East*, *Partisan Review*, and a hundred others.



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