

Two Poems

P E T E R B A L A K I A N

Reading Dickinson/Summer '68

In the hermetic almost dark
under the fluorescent dizz

I found her broken nerves,
smoke coming off the dashes,
the caps like jolts to the neck,

the pried-open spaces between vowels
where the teeth bit off twine
and the tongue was raw then cool with ice.

The air of the stockroom after lunch
was the marbleized silence of the
small blank pages she stitched into privacy—

air of paper and faint glue
bond, carbon, graph, yellow pads.

In the stockroom I could read alone—
the confetti of money dissolved on the blank wall.

After work, I slid the numbered poems
on blue mimeo into my playbook,
and felt the open field

the zig-zagging past cornerbacks,
the white lines skewed to heaven.

Excuse my mood—unbridled, chemical,
her scrawled messages smooth to the mind,
excuse my absence, again and yes, then, too—

the cold stone of the Palisades was there
after we split—

alone naked in the Hudson,
the water greasing me in the tepid, chemical mix.

I don't know why I returned
to the cement of 9W in my father's Skylark

the night black and soundless within.

Blue Room

(for George Arus 1915-196?)

Bread lines were dissolving on Second Ave.
Staten Island fog dulled the horns,

the lamp-lit snow trailing into cold rain
like confetti around FDR's motorcade,

but it was seamless air, tongue and slide
breaking across the partials,

more than Helen Forrest doing "Softly
as a Morning Sunrise" or Shaw's manic trilling

into the high morning where everything falls:
the swirling lights, the acid-rust of gravity

that feeds the downtown cabs running
on war bonds and lost radio waves.

The poppy-colored walls screamed,
the sweet arms and legs were light then dark.

You dropped down so many flights
you thought you were floating back up

into the dirigible clouds,
into the rain coming in trefoils off the Garden roof

into the blue room of the Hotel Pennsylvania.

2

You could ride the impulse beyond itself
part of the essence / age old fire /

(The Armenian past was just a smear of grease
on the chassis line at the Ford plant in Detroit)

cooling into the big blow,
the invisible coming off the Hudson,

tonguing the singing thing
the way you would do *Lover* after the war

after the blond woman left you
for the whiskey-colored rooms in a western city.

The A train slammed the girders of Penn Station,
the floor was smooth as any track.

3

You lived out on the edge of the golden horn
not the Dardanelles but the one you made

where the spray came off the broken edge
and the water lapped you all night long.

You traveled across the dark
thin, and keen, and cutting

like the high D in *The Thrill Is Gone*
as the ghost notes drifted

into the other life,
that rose as smoke so you could see it

like breathing ropes of myrrh
that poured out of the chalice on the altar;

all night it rose in coils
to the ceiling of the blue room

into that last existence, that letting loose,
the turns so sweet and smooth

there was no need for embellishment.
Who can stay up there, all night long?