

After a Shoot at Heckscher Park

While cleaning his lens
my friend was forced
from his car & searched –

one cop shouting
what do you have
what are you dealing
you must have something

until his face blew
like a gunshot
& the other
cop yelled

jesus, another monkey
can't put the right socks on –

as if my friend's Brown
cheeks & hightop fade rendered
his one Spongebob
one Jamaican flag sock
accident –
inconceivably quirk
or whimsy

as if, to don asymmetry
amid oaks & willows
he hadn't climbed Everests of angers
breached grids of munitions
thumbed a thousand beads
down to a simmer
low enough to
claim nature
as his own?

as if he, flash on the hood,
 palms on the roof
 his beautiful authority
 beneath their callous
unscrupulous scrutiny,
 wasn't the real hero?

Lucky this time blue
 didn't stash stash in the glove,
 jumpstart my friend's "record"

 mold his sweet clay &
 photographer's hands
 into "criminal"

or, worse, unload their immunity
 into him, knowing, in their bones

emancipation was Lincoln's greatest
 sleight of hand: a Euro-Matrix

to pull the eye while America returned
 Africans to the brutal hull of its ship.

What is freedom when breath
 is profiled? When murder itself –
filmed or not –
 warrants no conviction?

When, in a land my friend's ancestors built (for free!)
 & to which they were thefted,
no one protects or serves
 their preposterous courage
 their inexplicable dignity
 their right – should anyone have to say this? –

to live?

Tonight, citing no violation,
two police officers
left my friend
on a rock
without a sock
& disappeared.

Poet of the Year

His verse ticks to the meter
of smug scrutiny, worships

at the phallic altar of foppish
bards & their counterparts:

incidental women, who,
in his poems, are

neckline & aura
synecdoche & scent

never possessed of
his speaker's cock-

sure wit. The women
in his poems echo

like night wolves,
mentor sad flesh,

are brilliant only

in the stoking & stroking

of ego between tropes
of girlish mystery & lunar

chill. Some in this audience –
coached to break glass

in case of male gaze
emergency – know the women

in his poems are furious
& would rather die

than glare furtively
from the birch tree,

rather vent about his small
ideas & bloated conceit

while perched on bathroom
counters perfecting eyeliner,

organic chemistry & the
navigation of men's

what-have-you-done-for-me
latent content. His reading

persists, ornamented with women
less vital than cigarette smoke,

women scanned like barcodes,
pushed into margins & meant

to find his bearded chuckle
& jokes about Allah

& Planned Parenthood
charming. Having been

granted fewer dimensions
than sheetrock, the women

in his poems have, in my
imagining, ample time

to write clapback poems,
which they do

& perform, too, at festivals
where their words rise &

explode like New Year's Eve,
bright stanzas blooming

with colors unknown
to the Poet of the Year.

In their poems, he is a creep
in scholar's clothing,

haughty mimic of
bygone odes intended

not to know
but woo women.

O! How angry
he would be to find

himself the punchline—
a fool whose body

of work had robbed
his body of love.

MATT PASCA is a poet, teacher and traveler who believes in art's ability to foster discovery, empathy and justice. He has authored two poetry collections—*A Thousand Doors* (2011 Pushcart nominee) and *Raven Wire* (2017 Eric Hoffer Book Award Finalist)—and serves as Assistant Poetry Editor of *2 Bridges Review*. In his corner of New York, Matt curates Second Saturdays @Cyrus, a popular poetry series, and spreads his unwavering faith in critical thought and word magic to his Poetry, Mythology and Literature students at Bay Shore High School, where he has taught for 23 years and been named a New York State Teacher of Excellence. Pasca is currently at work on his third poetry collection, tentatively titled *Traitor*. www.mattpasca.com