

Bards Are Pigs/The Hippo Loves You, or Bile Them Old Saws Down by Nathaniel S. Rounds

Hubert(a)
the hermaphrodite hippo
played old-time country
standards (*Stoney's Waltz*,
Flop-Eared Mule)
on a modified autoharp
with picks fashioned from Model T
head lamp reflectors.

(S)he took her music
from Virginia to Vermont in a Jeep Wagoneer,
playing any watering hole that (s)he could.

I stayed with Hubert(a)
in a Springfield, Vermont apartment
sublet by a chain-smoking
Catholic school custodian
named Lola Beanfield. She
piled dog feces and rags and clay idols
into mounds on the high places,
buttressed by votive candles and truck tires.
I took the daybed on the closed-in porch.

The hippo took to the tub, until the stench and smoke nearly
killed us. We paddled upriver,
to an estate probate farmhouse, complete with three
whitewashed cow stanchions
minus the cows. Maybe one cow ate the other cow,
and then ate itself. A perfect tin roof winked between
hand-hewn boards. There was knob and tube wiring,
and newspaper ads for ladies oxford shoes
(on sale, one week only, June 15, 1958).

Hubert(a) settled in, typed a manifesto
on a Singer electric typewriter, ranting with a quick
staccato touch against metallic hum, all about the harvesting
of artificial hips from the dead poor, pay toilets in department
stores, and subliminal advertising at drive-in theaters.

Hubert(a) lost focus,
ate more two buck Tony's pizzas,
became less the rambling he-she mystery hipster
championed in mimeographed broadsides.

One winter day
that tasted suspiciously like spring
cast light on living-dead Hubert(a).
She had grown more disturbed than usual.
The Oscar Schmidt autoharp's sliding bars,
shifters, strings and springs were sent to promenade
over a flight of stairs leading to a food cellar floor.
Hubert(a) stomped them under a foot of flood water,
then pushed what remained into silt and mud
in the wake of waters subsided
by sump pump incantations.

Hubert(a)
died three days later
in a spring that ran behind the barn,
drowned in whisky-fueled sorrow,
with all the old songs gone dry.

49½ by Nathaniel S.Rounds

This versatile poem and lathe--
with included attachments--
can be employed to cut asunder,
divide and conquer,
core the apple of your eye,
and give Tennyson a run for the money.

Disenfranchised Wall of Shame
(Profile No. 12)

Sourball insouciance personified
[front head and shoulders, profile]:
Bald head (shaved),
incorrigible five-o'clock shadow,
bat ears and bad breath,
pale-blue eyes behind
budget spectacles from the Medicaid tray,
former white collar employee of the year,
now sun-baked beach bum in 5 ¢ shorts from Goodwill.
A little on the OCD side--drinks Lysol to purify
a broken heart.

His father was a devil and his mother was a cold, spring rain.
He doesn't carry pictures. He just hurts himself to feel the pain.

In the womb, Pork Chop was a werewolf baby. At twenty weeks
he ate his own beard and passed it though his bowels. This is
quite common. The stuff that is passed is called meconium,
and is marketed in glass bottles as black strap molasses.

He (Pork Chop Lancelot of Edgewater, Florida) remembers figure skating
champions on a king size screen at a dirty smudge-on-the-wall bar in
Orange, Massachusets--biker gang thugs and T-shirted locals cussing
contrasts of disdain and encouragement, vengeance and solidarity--
"Did this happen?" wonders Pork Chop. He sees his own dried blood
caking the sides of a screw thread vial from eighteen years prior, popping up
like a toadstool in a new woodland shading the former entrance to a closed
state asylum. Seventy-five beds no more than eight inches apart in a gray
room with high, grated windows, communal showers and drinking water shut
off at night. Now that had been real enough.

Herein is a synopsis of results gleaned from a case study of a husband's compromised
authority in the eyes of his formerly adoring wife:

In phase one, Lancelot enjoyed upward mobility (recall chapter eight)--making a swift ascension from office boy to senior accountant for King Arthur Flour, only to lose his position after mass-mailing a distasteful letter to their entire client base and forging the signature of a top manager in marketing named Gwen, following a scorpion bowl binge with a bruised-up dame from the mail room.

Following his termination (phase two), Lancelot took an entry level manufacturing job as a tool and die maker and became buddies with a fellow machinist who wore elevator shoes

with steel toes and who was rumored to be of mixed parentage. Their friendship compromised

Lancelot's opportunities for advancement. Discouraged, he gave his notice. His wife, Hannah Peninnah Mette, characterized by some as a "clinging vine", had failed in phase one to dress her part or make phone pals with his secretary, which only reinforced his compulsion to quit his job. In phase two, Hannah Peninnah Mette divorced Lancelot and pursued a career in the budding health industry.

On today's "squawk and talk", the Argonauts paddle past clashing Symplegadian rocks
white noise/

Andulasian gypsies dance in caves of Granada/
the Power Boys snorkel through ruins of the Texas Star.

Oyster Flavored Soy Sauce!

Irregularity?

Fifteen Minute Aerobics Workout
With the Great Whore of Babylon!

In the ocean's teeming bedrock megalopolis,
a sea star feeds on the flexed muscles of a scuba-gearred
Joe Atlas.

Lancelot's life turned suddenly for the better when he was lent by an employment counselor a hard-covered book with a dynamic relief of a silhouetted man. The privately-printed book challenged the reader to "think, stand, smile and live tall."

Lancelot improved his posture. He corrected his constipation. He developed a modest wine collection, which included a Cabernet Sauvignon, 1949, from the Hallcrest Vineyard. Then Lancelot realized that his ideals were no longer suited to the office. He decided to travel. He set up a circus wire and rappelled down a bamboo map of the eastern sea board (please tear along this line), exploring New Hampshire fields while a chalky sky coughed saccharine bile on the branches of jaded trees groped by spider web vines, seductress and seduced quantified and reproduced through that New England state and under a bridge of flowers and stopping in a Bronx menagerie of white-eyed passenger cars stammering over tear-stained mausoleums crumbling into contorted legs of bridges guarded by Speedway toll

masters nodding numbly to ghost star glimmers of Motown lullabies cradled by pamphlet promises of zoological exotica in the verdigris-stained bowels of the Bronx. Traffic granulizes into goldfish crackers solicited to homeless gulls haunting the Jersey Shore, marshland morphing into another mêlée of trees nuzzled by spidery arms in velvet gloves, sin spreading phlogiston-like on a draught-fraught ground through Washington DC, Baltimore, Maryland, Richmond, Virginia, circling Ava Gardener's nightclub tribute to the war dead of Bentonville, "Bible College" and "Topless!! Topless!!" picking at the battle's disfigurement, billboards punctured by an upturned thumb.

Along the narrow road to the deep south, North Carolina palm trees assert their immunity from turncoat gathering of grapes and take a turn at Chicken Foot Road/NC-59. Lancelot chats with palm branch bearing landscape workers outside a Hilton Head Isle Beach club. Lancelot feeds an old rag of a stray Tom cat at Joker Joe's in Hardeeville, South Carolina, and shouts a stale joke under firecracker rain fall. Daytona. Ice cream colored high-rise hotels. Lancelot's agenda: "Ignore the wannabe race car drivers, Lincoln hearses, Death's Head spiders and Fiddlin' Brown recluses. Re-torque my own lug nuts. Eat free shrimp with every drink." Lancelot buys five-for-a-dollar ruby red grapefruit for a homeless man. Feeds pigeons on the beach front, extends his generosity to include sea cows and amorous dolphins. Cocoa Beach gets struck by a hurricane. Folks in New Smyrna see it coming, and duck low. Palm trees swing discreetly, but remain haughty in their emancipation from cold snow, indecision, and strangulation by sinuous, death-dealing vines.

L'envoi:

Lancelot maintained phone contact with several blood relatives, as a means of knowing what his deficiencies were.