

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

October 6, 2006

Friday Poem

Filed under: [poetry](#) — alecsothblog @ 12:28 am



Maxwell Bodenheim (1892-1954)

I just discovered the poet Maxwell Bodenheim and his fascinating biography. Born in Mississippi, Bodenheim became a prominent bohemian in Greenwich Village in the 20's and 30's. But his fame receded and he became a panhandler and drunkard. After the death of his second wife (and a divorce from the first), Bodenheim married Ruth Fagin. They lived as homeless panhandlers. One night a 25-year-old dishwasher named Charlie Weinberg invited the couple to stay at his room near the Bowery. While Bodenheim was sleeping, Weinberg became sexually active with Ruth. Bodenheim awoke and began a scuffle with Weinberg. Weinberg ended up shooting Bodenheim and stabbing Ruth four times in the back. Here is a poem by Bodenheim:

EAST SIDE MOVING PICTURE THEATRE-SUNDAY

An old woman rubs her eyes

As though she were stroking children back to life.

A slender Jewish boy whose forehead

Is tall, and like a wind-marked wall,

Restlessly waits while leaping prayers

Clash their light-cymbals within his eyes.

And a little hunchbacked girl

Straightens her back with a slow-pulling smile.

(I am afraid to look at her again.)

Then the blurred, tawdry pictures rush across the scene,

And I hear a swishing intake of breath,

As though some band of shy rigid spirits

Were standing before their last heaven.

2 Comments

1. Wonderful poem and what a story.

Discovered your blog after a fellow Minneapolitan told me I must must must become acquainted with your work.

And now I'm off to discover Maxwell Bodenheim, as well.

Comment by [Antonia](#) — October 6, 2006 @ [7:52 am](#)

2. like reading an unsnapped photo.

Comment by [le q](#) — October 6, 2006 @ [10:05 am](#)