

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

August 17, 2007

Friday Poem

Filed under: poetry — alecsothblog @ 10:21 am

Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album

by Philip Larkin

At last you yielded up the album, which,
Once open, sent me distracted. All your ages
Matt and glossy on the thick black pages!
Too much confectionery, too rich:
I choke on such nutritious images.

My swivel eye hungers from pose to pose –
In pigtails, clutching a reluctant cat;
Or furred yourself, a sweet girl-graduate;
Or lifting a heavy-headed rose
Beneath a trellis, or in a trilby hat

(Faintly disturbing, that, in several ways) –
From every side you strike at my control,
Not least through these disquieting chaps who loll
At ease about your early days:
Not quite your class, I'd say, dear, on the whole.

But o, photography! as no art is,
Faithful and disappointing! that records
Dull days as dull, and hold-it smiles as frauds,
And will not censor blemishes
Like washing-lines, and Halls'-Distemper boards,

But shows the cat as disinclined, and shades
A chin as doubled when it is, what grace
Your candour thus confers upon her face!
How overwhelmingly persuades
That this is a real girl in a real place,

In every sense empirically true!
Or is it just the past ? Those flowers, that gate,
These misty parks and motors, lacerate
Simply by being over; you
Contract my heart by looking out of date.

Yes, true; but in the end, surely, we cry
Not only at exclusion, but because
It leaves us free to cry. We know what was
Won't call on us to justify
Our grief, however hard we yowl across

The gap from page to page. So I am left
To mourn (without a chance of consequence)
You, balanced on a bike against a fence;
To wonder if you'd spot the theft
Of this one of you bathing; to condense,

In short, a past that no one now can share,
No matter whose your future; calm and dry,
It holds you like a heaven, and you lie
Unvariably lovely there,
Smaller and clearer the years go by.

6 Comments

1. [...] Aug 17th, 2007 by elizatruiitt I'm an avid reader of Alec Soth's blog, but I usually skip over his weekly "Friday Poem." But the first lines of this week's offering, Philip Larkin's Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album, snagged me and I read through the whole thing. It's a good one. You can read it here. [...]

Pingback by [Ode to Photography](#) « [Eliza Truitt Photography](#) — August 17, 2007 @ [4:45 pm](#)

2. I'll take a minority position for a moment. Ditch the flicr pix, the contests, the whoopla and just, I'm mean JUST give us the FRIDAY poem. In fact, try a poem every day for one week. That is my Friday idea-

Comment by [David G](#) — August 17, 2007 @ [10:47 pm](#)

3. so much depends on this blog glazed with rain water beside the white chickens.

Comment by [mark](#) — August 18, 2007 @ [12:01 am](#)

4. One of my favorite poets, working here at a very high level.

Think of the each stanza as a photographic frame, and the rhyme scheme drawing each edge of that frame loosely, yet precisely, toward the definition and progressive illumination of the subject.

Our favorite subject, photography.

Comment by [Tod Papageorge](#) — August 18, 2007 @ [9:44 am](#)

5. How wonderful it is that some combinations of words operate in such a way – I suppose that is the poetry of it. Each drawing a little different picture for us – and no less powerful that each picture might be just a little different. I have to say the poetry you've been sharing is appreciated.

Thank-you.

Comment by [Matt Niebuhr](#) — August 18, 2007 @ [2:45 pm](#)

6. "Yes, true; but in the end, surely, we cry
Not only at exclusion, but because
It leaves us free to cry. We know what was
Won't call on us to justify". cry...justify....leaves me in need of a stiff drink.

Comment by [PeeWee](#) — August 18, 2007 @ [3:42 pm](#)