

POETRY AND DIALOGUE
with BOB HOLMAN

A JEW IN NEW YORK

Like everybody else, I wasn't a Jew
Until I came to New York. In Portland, OR,
The other day, a young Latina asked me
If I were Jewyorican. Papa and Bubby
Came from Ukraine, landed in Brooklyn,
Settled in Harlan, KY, and named my father
Benjamin Franklin. My mother, the offspring
Of a coalminer, married Ben, the only Jew
In town. He didn't last. Ma remarried.
In kindergarten, in Cincinnati, instead
Of moving to the afternoon session the second

Semester, I stayed in Morning and changed my name.
This is the year 5755. In Chinese it is Year
Of the Dog. I just learned that the time between
Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur
(Day of Atonement) are the Days of Awe. Moody
And gray, with dashes of absolute clarity, I love
These days. Cleansing summer's sweat from the streets
Of New York, I always think of the year beginning in
September. "That's when school starts." A holdover
from Youth. This year, for the first time, woo,
It's the real New Year, and I am a real Jew.
A real Jew, and a real coalminer's son, too.

INTERVIEW WITH ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY WORKSHOP - SPRING 2007

ST. JOHN'S: What inspired you? What in your life contributed to this particular poem? What was happening at that point and time in your life that you felt the need to write this?

BOB HOLMAN: It must have been the Days of Awe that inspired me, that I was learning, through osmosis, Jewish liturgy, learning it in a way that made sense with my own life rather than being taught by rote as a child. I've loved the warring sides of me, felt that it explains my deep connections with orality. My granny on the front porch in Harlan telling stories, laughing at my jokes when I was a little boy, "Awww Fiddlesticks, Robert!" paralleling my feelings for Russian poetry, especially through Mayakovsky (no Jew, but still...)

SJ: Is this a personal poem or something for all of us to learn from?

BH: Poems are never to teach. They exist, you give and take from them, they are a conversation. Personal Poem to my mind comes from Frank O'Hara and the New York School and just meant you didn't have to reference the names you used ---Patsy, Bill, etc.

SJ: What is the intended meaning of the poem?

BH: Poems don't have intentions. They are word hordes, adding up in all directions to infinite and changing meanings. Sudoku for the Heart.

SJ: Have you actually heard the term "Jewyoric," or is that a phrase you coined yourself?

BH: I think that this actually happened!

SJ: The title of this poem is, "A Jew in New York." What happened in NY that changed you into this person instead of just being the coal miner's son?

BH: My first Seder, at a friend's house, was so moving and meaningful. A ritual in the mouth! Drink wine! Eat harossis! Remember! My remembering lots of Yiddish from my Grandfather and feeling terrific using it. I still think everyone in New York is Jewish! and Puerto Rican, too!

POETRY IN RESPONSE TO BOB HOLMAN

by LAURA CAMERLENGO

To My Dear Bobby

Hello again Bob Holman,
You may not remember me.
My name is Laura Camerlengo,
and I wrote a poem.

Hello again Bob Holman,
Il y a deux ans,
my poem discussed being
an Italian, Catholic C-A-M-E-R-L-E-N-G-O.

Hello again Bob Holman,
I am still not a Jew in New York
nor am I Puerto Rican either.
But I am dynamic in my being.

Hello again Bob Holman,
Siil vous plaît,
I am an Italian-Croatian,
Beginners French speaking American.

by JEANETTE GARCIA

"OH MY GOD! YOU'RE CUBAN?!"

That's what I've heard since before I can remember.
Yes, I'm pale. Yes, I'm blonde. Yes I'm blue-eyed.
How I look shouldn't determine who I will become
What country my family comes from shouldn't define who I am.
Any race should be capable of anything,
not what stereotypes say they should be.
My own race even shuns me over the color of my skin.
"Your last name is Garcia? How can you be Cuban? You don't look it."
"You're Spanish?! This girl must be joking!"
Laughter. Mockery from my own "culture"?
What's the big deal about skin color anyone?
What's inside should matter more,
our intelligence, our motivations and our desires,
not what country we come from.

by THERESA CARBORNARA

Tripple 5 SOUL, Tims, ECKO - They all thought I was Spanish
When I was younger I always wanted to be something that I was not
Talking, acting, and dressing differently gave off more of an impression on my
ethnicity,
rather than on the person that I truly wanted to be.
"I am Italian, not Spanish!" Its what I used to rant and rave ..
My father who was so proud to pass down the Italian decent
Begged me to take off those Tims - he constantly yelled "Theresa I did not raise
you to
be some kind of a wannabe, this is not what's meant to be YOUR style..."
My style?
Ethnicity seems to have a matter in style now?
If that was the case than wouldn't Macy's Department store sell all their items
in
categories of ethnicity rather than, name brands and size?
Well, here I am Italian and not wearing "bebe"

So whats the problem? My last name ends in a vowel!
I still have brown hair, brown eyes, olive skin .. and even if that were to
change also,
I would still be 100% Italian.

by PAUL HALLORY

I am hungry for the old familiar ways, however,
We are here...
Our contemporary world,
The sunset is no longer beautiful, but a clock,we must be..
Filled with fashion addicts that indulge in Versace, Burberry and Coach
Coach? You say? Please show the clueless man for the hundredth time!
The one who created the man made machines,
That are fast and easy, who led us to our future of
Forgotten hardships and value ...I think we are...
Where our land was filled with...
Cocoa, Bananas ripe and green, ginger-root...
I could smell it....can you?.... If you are ...
It's a walk in a street no longer a passage over the river
Far from a journey, we are rushing however to a place we've
Continued to go to..... we are robots.

by KELLY KNAPP

Love, loyalty, and friendship.
County mayo with a little of Norway.
Brown hair brown eyes, nothing special.
College grad in three months.
Born and raised in New Jersey.
Making sense of who I am never was easy,
Especially being Roman catholic.
I wish I could make this poem make sense,

But I don't make sense,
..im still trying to find my sense.

by **DANA FERRERI**

red hair and freckles
"irish?" you ask i am not
100% italian is what i am
off the boats from calabria and napoli
is what makes my family
heritage is who you are
english/italian? english/italian?
language is a beautiful thing
confused as a child, i loved every minute of it
heritage is history
the steps taken in elders' past is what will help me attain
the brightest future
family dinners, fish for christmas
is just the beginning of a list of familial rituals
you ask what makes you who you are...
look to the beginning and the foundations laid out

by **DANE VARRIANO**

6' 1 Blonde Hair and blue eyes, an easy target in a crowd,
Separated strategically, the only one destined for the crown,
The other ones horsing, joking and playing around,
Im about my business, their asking--What are you doin clown?
yea, yea sure. Keep talking while Im walking,
When unleashed I bite, you just standing there barking,
Because no one want to walk around stepping in dog shit,
and get doo-doo on their shoe again as soon as they washed it,

but inside he's a go- getter,
Aside from a cold sweater,
he won't hesitate to get them,
Fist fighting with momentum,
Originated his own prophecy
Catching up with velocity,
Too late now. nothing else is stopping-me,
The Irish is seen, but the Italian dominates--- to make it complete..
Consider him the Rose that grew from Concrete.