

Steven Ray Smith

Homestead

Our great, great, great grandmothers and fathers walked,
ran, and cantered through the hot sun from nowhere to
somewhere with a mere \$10 to fence-in their 160 acres.
Sunburned, starved, parched, and frostbitten
they were landed gentry
within a mere five years, or dead. Gentry or dead —
the only two options for us Americans.

There are no homestead parcels left, but what you make
people say about you is the prime claim.

Ten dollars will buy a made-up
name at made-up-name.com.

You become this name, your own fence
around your own unique vocalization of consonants
scrummed together, pretending to be a vowel.

The plow is Twitter, the harvest followers,
the deed the handle, though

ravers, ranters, die-hards, and sex-tapers are quick
to overtake. That's the footrace. The Sooners

gallop in overnight by cheerleader tryouts,
obesity and its hasty loss, waif modeling, crooning,
disdaining one another around tropical campfires,
living naked in Belize, copulating
and marrying total strangers on national reality
television, claiming their new gentry nuptials,
becoming talked-about, undead.

The long leg

Sometimes rent, the price of a dry
mattress and a night's sleep free
from murid bites
becomes a free-for-all:
everyone wants to pay it
while no one can afford it.

At that point, the engineers
will create a calculus for a lighter,
hollower steel beam to raise
the building ten stories higher:
rents go down, warmth goes up,
shivering declines, rats scurry off
with their Salmonella, stories of killer rats transmute
to stories of killer robots,
good stories make people hungrier,
genetic engineers invent juicier new cultivars,
heartbeats outlast the marathon, an entrepreneur
organizes a jet set of centenarians
to travel from the Sphinx to Machu Picchu
to Angkor Wat, to Petra, to Easter Island, and the afterlife.

Transmutation, and engineering,
and invention, and entrepreneurship are playacting
the supremacy we plainly see:
creation has one terminus — its beginning —
after which the add-ons and improvements last forever.
Yet passenger after passenger walks that airbridge
without a satchel for the long leg of the excursion.

The problem remains unsolved

Unlike the Birch and Swinnerton-Dyer or The Hodge
this problem has no conjecture;
false proofs cannot be retracted
because we don't know what question the problem is asking.

This problem also comes with a big prize for solving it,
but there is no endowment set up to pay it.
An endowment is a sum of capital that can be expressed as a coefficient
but this x is dangling apart from the equation itself.

We detect this problem only by the antibodies not
the antigen itself. Elevations
of habits such as trysting strangers on weeknights,
amassing new friends merely to revamp as new enemies,
replacing tires with deep sipes simply for fresh blackness
mean the problem is exponential, though desisting
one palliative just spawns another.

Theories advanced thus far unproven:
original sin,
Dukkha,
nihilism of capitalism and impotence of socialism,
handheld screens, their newsfeeds that remind us
everything is always outdated by day's end, better hurry.

Steven Ray Smith's poetry has appeared in *The Yale Review*, *Southwest Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Slice*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Grain*, *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature*, *Stoneboat*, *Puerto del Sol* and others. New work is forthcoming in *First Class Literature*. A complete list of publications is at www.StevenRaySmith.org. He lives in Austin with his wife and children.