

## Dale Walkonen

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### Rhine Gold

The house opens its eyes,  
double French doors  
lead onto the stone terrace, and beyond,  
the fruit trees come into bloom.

In the morning light,  
stone remembers the intrusion,  
the heavy boots, muddy with spring,

boar tusked Nazi voices  
strangling the sound of rain,  
the song of the house cut short.

The daughter survived.  
When she laughs,  
rivers spring from the floorboards,  
pears fly to her mouth,  
the kitchen fills with succulence.

She shows me a lock of red hair  
that she keeps in her bedroom drawer,  
luscious hair, life's fire  
glowing in her hand,  
her mother's.

She is my cousin through marriage.  
Red hair runs in both our lines,  
in her Russian, in my German genes,  
like Rhine gold.

Now her fingers move  
on the white grand piano,  
lustering the air with Chopin.

My husband doesn't know how  
to be a Jew. They didn't tell him  
at five or six; too late now.

I'm the one  
who wants to hear the forgotten verses,  
who wants to listen to the rain.

*In the myth, forswearing love, Albrecht pulls the gold from the Rhine,  
darkening its light, leaving the maidens to weep in the leaden blackness.*

## **Evelyn**

She was the Baron Von Kettlerle's granddaughter,  
eight years old in nineteen seventeen, she spoke the enemy's tongue,  
hid the blue eyed shame  
that came with the sauerbraten from her mother's oven, lost  
her first language.

What did being German mean?

All the kids were from somewhere else.  
Her mother called them kikes and wops,  
as she plopped her spatzle into boiling water,  
flinched at the footsteps of war,  
at the movie reels demonizing Huns.

Evelyn's mother didn't believe in college for girls,  
so she enrolled in night school, worked days,  
dressed in the smart styles of the twenties,  
grieved for the college degree she couldn't finish.

Shorthand and speed typing saved her  
from the food lines in the thirties,  
sat her in the executive secretary's chair,  
at the epicenter of the Manhattan project,  
where she typed science that she didn't understand,  
drank champagne in the office celebration  
at the flattening of Hiroshima,  
shivered decades later, with new recognition.

When her fiancé came back from Hawaii  
in the late forties,  
hooked on liquor and Lucky Strikes,  
she married him anyway, and raised us kids  
Catholic, sent us to the Sisters of Mercy,  
joined the Mother's Club with the Irish and Italians,  
wore her fifties fashion well below the knee.

In the sixties, she wore the buttons of protest.  
Sick of praying for death,  
the imprecision of napalm falling on the faraway bodies of Asia,  
she left the Church.

When the century turned and the towers fell,  
the music from the nursing home radio interrupted -  
did she hear it, the latest rattle of ignorance,  
in its distant fury?  
She lay like stone, amid the scatter of events,

the shards of a century littering her mind,  
dishes of distant sauerbraten shattered,  
fell and were cleared away.

## Chalcot Square

My rented bike turns the corner  
from Fitzroy Road,  
finds the way from Primrose Hill  
back to my twenty first year.

Around the bend,  
Number Two Chalcot  
looks down through tall thin windows  
on the acacias in the familiar square,  
and remembers me  
writing poetry in its womb,  
watching the park across the street,  
weaving from its pigeons and passersby,  
a shroud of youthful misery and pain.

There's a new plaque on Number Four,  
*The American poet, Sylvia Plath lived here.*

So I learn that she too walked  
in the sulphur afternoon,  
under the fog choked street lamps, followed the  
rounding road from Chalk Farm tube station  
to our street, our square,  
ten years before me.

It hasn't changed, not then, not now.

If I could, I'd knock on the wall,  
send a Morse code through time and plaster,  
ask her to meet me on the stoop,  
salvage words to save us both,  
to find a way out  
from the mind's cold reach.

I pedal around the square, salute our trees  
with tenderness, then turn down Fitzroy  
as the rented time expires.

## John Muir

He walked, learning the land, grasses, and mountains.  
*Shoreless and boundless*, he walked away  
from the *puppet* God in church, found  
*grand undivided currents*  
where god's fragrances grow wild.

He worked when he could, sawing wood,  
till his hand slipped, the everywhere hand of god slipped,  
kicked up a chip of wood,  
sent him for six endless weeks into the dark,  
wondering if he would ever see  
light again.

Light again, he walked, walked a thousand miles  
through prairie and forest,  
read the book of river flow, cloud dance,  
cliff shear, till every cell of him became mountain,  
every pore saturate with dew.

Watching sheep on the hills of Yosemite,  
he was not waiting for a star,  
when every second is a  
particle of light,  
each sequoia a true cathedral.

Opening a thousand windows  
to luminous glory,  
his heart a torch igniting  
the others with  
god's wildness,  
John Muir walked the earth,  
baptized a nation in nature's mighty water.

## **Paul Cezanne**

Sunlight races before him like a squirming child  
he struggles to control, but  
everything is moving so fast,  
light, color, shadows.

Succulent as sap from a great pine, his paint  
pours onto canvas, sculpts  
rocky hillsides.

Clouds cross the mountain to seduce him.  
It is for them, he works furiously,  
layering color,  
preparing a sky inviting as a lover's lap.

With every turn of his head,  
the landscape changes.  
Each eye sees something different.

How can he hold on to anything?  
He's devoured by light, the divine architecture  
mirrored under his hand.

His wife thinks him a wild uncivil lunatic,  
howling at the sun,  
belonging neither to Paris, nor to the village, nor to her.

But what does he care for that?  
With his little blocks of color  
caressing God's objects,  
he is a speck, a frantic brush,  
pushing against time.

**Dale Walkonen** was an adjunct professor at Concordia College, Sacred Heart University and the College of New Rochelle. She is also a painter, mime, playwright, and environmentalist. She is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College (BA) and Boston University (MA). Her work has appeared in *Slab*, *Eclipse*, *The Chaffin Journal*, *Primavera*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Westchester Review*. Her chapbook, *Journey*, was a semifinalist in the 2008 Black River Chapbook Competition. Her full-length play, *Mayday! Mayday!* received critical acclaim.