Le Spleen de Poughkeepsie

Joshua Harmon

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LE SPLEEN DE
POUGHKEEPSIE

JOSHUA HARMON

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Le spleen de Poughkeepsie

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Some of these poems also first appeared in the chapbook The Poughkeepsiad (The Greying Ghost Press).

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“The Poughkeepsiad” is dedicated to Hua Hsu.

“[What are the pitfalls...]” is dedicated to Paige Ackerson-Kiely.

The initial versions of “Two Pastorals (II)” were written in the company of Andy Axel, Carolyn Bergonzo, Kyle Holter, Brian Kim, and Danielle Unger—as well as the spirit of Max Lewin—and are dedicated to them.

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To the flâneurs of College Avenue, with thanks for the whisky and sympathy: Heesok, Carrie, Michael, Ann, Hua, Paul, Amitava, Halimah, Larissa, Jake, and, as ever, Sarah—
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—Charles Baudelaire,
Le Spleen de Paris
TWO PASTORALS
The automatic garage-door opener
lifts on a prospect of Poughkeepsie:
row of parked cars along curb, man
leaf-blowing each falling leaf,
sumac growing beneath the overpass:
if you’re not part of the problem,
you’re part of the lengthening
tragedy: we see all the others
slipped into the bright shapes of endeavor,
imprints snow slowly fills, but the stray
detours and workarounds of the secret
city inside the more obvious one
elude our plundered adornments
and church-bell quarter-hours:
on the outskirts of the absurd
attention to the material life,
of course the factories are empty
and the train line overgrown,
and the everyday fills the ravine
beside the highway: the passive voice
speaks on our winds and in the humming
of our truck tires, the delicacy
of Saturday-night videophoning
and bonfires across the valley
in woods past their peak
To Shop-Vac the sidestreet of one’s grass clippings
is to say I am dispossessed of a deeper fortitude
with which I might lose track of the beam or the bank
supporting the idea of deliverance from myself and other, similar errors:
later, the cruiser spotlights semi-suburban houses,
those dark alleys emptied but for early woodsmoke and diesel fumes paid on or before
this inescapable duty resolved shortfalls in neighborliness, and the engine running all night inside a garage does not kill the murderous rage you feel: the working life peaces out and declares its independence