

GERRY SHIKATANI / purse, porch, light

To look out the window, head slanted to the side, this feeling in the neck, the look outward angled ahead through glass.

I ride the bus & as often as I have through the decades, in the city or across province, state or country, the ride has inspired thinking, musing. Occasional notebook entries, a flurry of writing, a concept that develops.

Today I've pulled out reading material as the Greyhound pulls onto Charlotte Street and then out of Peterborough where I live:

Sharon Thesen's *The Pangs of Sunday* (1990), her volume of poems selected from past books plus new work. I flip through then land on page 89, a poem taken from her *The Beginning of the Long Dash* (1987). It begins:

You go to the Planetarium
and do some shopping
& then you have a coffee.

The close of the poem down to its end-word is something that has remained with me:

You take a dress to the cleaners
& then you catch the bus
and look out the window with your purse.

She brings a special allure to the single word, a particular, locating quotidian stuff of the material world on the page in the poem's music, tone, tempo. It astonishes—this ending on the word 'purse', this gesturing to what's held—money, chores, bother, and identity that is the purse.

It's a simple undramatic matter-of-fact phrase, no different in tone from those lines that precede it in the build of the poem. But that act of looking shimmers as stillpoint.

It's one of many quiet poems that keep instructing me how to look, how to attend to life. It's an engagement with our world of material wants and sometimes fulfillments, of leisure activity and attachment to the object-world of sensory gratification, sensory distress. Such engagement makes her one of a handful of poets whose books I choose to take with me on extended travels.

From book to book her language—phrasing and utterance—has a clarity and purity, unburdened as she in-scribes report, takes inventory of the daily action, the day's events. There is subtle dramatic movement in her naming and recounting.

How could I not live the attentions of the definite and indefinite articles of “A, an, the”—the brilliant title to this poem I'm talking about. Sharon gives great love and heed to each individual component of language—her listing of things conjoined by *and*, the soft regulated percussion of *and* presented alternatively with perfect timing revealing the nature of conjunction, addition, the further.

The title is also beautiful to behold. Naturally, I reference up north to Prince George and the exquisite *The the*—Barry McKinnon's book that constantly teaches me.

Back in this southbound bus on Highway 115, the same Thesen page, the compositional symmetry at head and tail with both *and* (and) ampersand on the page before me.

There's no Thesen grandstand speech on spotlight stage but instead my ol' friend engaged with the any ol' day sending out a steadfast glow that is deeply spiritual. I'm gripped by this, seduced by this. Here's no self-important expert colour commentator but the play-by-play as play-by-play of the day-to-day. These attentions turn on the porch light that enlightens the path with hospitality.

She's effortless with colloquial talk both outwards and internally, checking the self out. This is music to my ear, makes me her buddy—shopping, having a drink, or coming over to her place on a dinner invitation. Her diction comes in a voice that easily inspires and influences me: “heck” (“*who the heck am I anyway?*”) is that feeling I'll steal for my own work.

I've seen Sharon in Montreal when I used to live there—and in Vancouver when she used to live there.

“Gerry come with me to take a look at the [very pretty] yellow chaise [she's eventually to buy] at a smart interiors shop on René Levesque.”

Or

“Sharon, do you know that fabulous boutique in Westmount Square... is having a really good sale?”

On my trips to Vancouver we'd meet. There was a Saturday, just after she'd bought a Hamilton watch, I think on Robson (“NEW HAMILTON WATCH 09/07/94”). In Aurora, where gesture, angle, regard, stills...

And when I tilt my new wristband

Preceding this, such phrasing as

The dial of Being...

impinging

like Spirit. I heard the Past Life...

In Vancouver some years ago, we meet for coffee at a Kits café, outside in the morning sun—to Sharon, her poems are “small poems”—but I know how large a world she allows me to enter, how her luminous pieces, their exquisitely fine attention

to the tactile life, dwarfs the scope of the poems of many of us with our grandstand subjects and themes.

When Roy Kiyooka died, I felt stranded—in the east, far from the funeral and celebrations in his honour held in Vancouver. I imagined my friends, the gathering of the Vancouver arts community for whom Roy was a giant.

Then came *After Roy Kiyooka's Funeral*, first published if I recall correctly in a selection of writing by many of us in an issue of *Brick*, edited by Michael Ondaatje. Here it is in *Aurora*, in fourteen short lines, a perfect example of the gestural, the world of inanimate phenomena, everyday touching, grasping. The poem is an eloquent testimony to two words that Kiyooka would use in talk and writing: attention and astonishment.

I take a kitchen chair out to the front porch
and....

Further on,

... The screws are brass,
stiff, unused to suffering Then the...

Further on again,

a 100 watt bulb. The amber casing
back on with its old cheap bracing
screws. Now
my visitors. Now the path
is lit farther out—and
the way in brighter,
bigger.

Again the conjunction *and* (line 2) is perfectly positioned after going out to the limit of the front porch; again she invites her readers to respect the conjunction.

Or, notation in sync with intonation,

the screws are brass
stiff...

Sharon reminds us of the integrity of all types of words (*Then the*), her typographic composition sonically exacting in its repetition of *Now*.

Such attention is also the path to honour by naming (*My visitors*) that speaks of the spirit or radiance that is hospitality.

All the above and more are gloriously present in *gala roses*.

There is a majesty in the music through *gala roses*—it stuns me at each reading—as arriving on these pages, still down Highway 115, in Greyhound transit: *gala*, moving with its wonderful momentum, never strides into strident pitch or unnecessary percussion.

Such movement, intonation that we ride page after page, is remarkably fanfared before its first note and phrase: the facing left-hand page, the concluding words of the preceding poem: the spacious, expansive, and finely measured *Billie Holliday's Nylons...*

utter lyric, minimalist composition

nooses loop down

gather up the overflow

We carry this *overflow's* oh into *gala* as we do *purse* as we do a 100 watt bulb.