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**Rain through High Windows by
Edward Haworth Hoepfner**

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In “The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery,” William K. Wimsatt, Jr., conceives of “a scale of structures having at one end logic, the completely reasoned and abstracted, and at the other some form of madness or surrealism, matter or impression unformed and undisciplined...” According to Wimsatt, Romantic poetry is a step away from the logic of the neoclassical poets and “toward the directness of sensory presentation....” Two hundred years after the Romantic era and decades after a direct encounter with surrealism, it is fair to say that a great deal of contemporary lyric poetry has moved further on that scale of structures away from logic and toward the surreal. This change should be marked with the monument of a new label. If M.H. Abrams called the greater Romantic lyric a “descriptive-meditative” poem, then the more surreal, image-centered lyric of today is an “expressive-suggestive” poem.

The differences between the descriptive-meditative poem and the expressive-suggestive poem are as follows:
 —Whereas, even though it complicates its argumentation with the need to pose that argumentation as a quest, a gradual triangulation, the descriptive-meditative still retains many of the vestiges of logic—for example, its investigations into external circumstance are initial gatherings of premises from which the meditation follows—the expressive-suggestive does not so much argue as much as evoke and echolocate.

—Whereas the two elements of the descriptive-meditative imply separation between perception and thought, the elements of the expressive-suggestive are not so easily distinguished; joined by a pervasive participation, the mind and the matter of the expressive-suggestive are always at work on each other, making each other up.

—Whereas the descriptive-meditative is made up of images and insights, the expressive-suggestive is made up almost completely of images, but Poundian images, those already infused with thought (“an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time”).

—Whereas the descriptive-meditative moves slowly to

seductively persuade, the expressive-suggestive is highly mobile in its attempt to scintillate to hypnotize.

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In *Rain Through High Windows*, Edward Haworth Hoepfner often writes in the expressive-suggestive mode. While Hoepfner's work regularly—and, at times, quite engagingly—participates in the more mobile, more surreal promise of the expressive-suggestive image, it struggles when it comes to the difficult task of structuring those images, at times failing to fully enchant.

The use of the expressive-suggestive mode is absolutely fitting for Hoepfner. Hoepfner is a poet transfixed by transformation—often his poems occur in threshold spaces: at windows, in evening, between sleep and wakefulness—and the expressive-suggestive mode allows for easy movement, including dream-like digressions, in these typically reverie-filled realms. “Spring: The North Shore” employs a litany of odd transformations to evoke that season’s power to change: “Chilly gods are dropping crutches off / inside the pines, elk and sturgeon, / thundering mares with human eyes. // So the hatching leaves, in full sun...” The poem, “Reading Long,” employs the expressive-suggestive mode to register the quick changes in consciousness, the transports, that occur while reading: “All evening, while rain was trailing / fingers off the stern, I have gone on // reading, these pages, glass-bottomed boat, / peering down into a reef, the words / like brighter coral. It seemed that I was // not alone. The light dimmed, the book grew / large, floated in my hand and disappeared...”

The expressive-suggestive mode also works well for Hoepfner’s poems that deal with family as those poems do not retrace hierarchical structures of familial relations but instead enact the strange and constant recalibrations of selves that occur in the presence of significant others. More comfortable with the strange idea—“The Child is Father of the Man”—that Wordsworth argued for in his “Immortality Ode,” Hoepfner is freer to evoke it imaginatively. Often father and son find themselves in relationship in flux. “Rest” contains an almost Coleridgean meditation on a—sometimes—sleeping son; however, Hoepfner goes further than Coleridge in trying to express the strangeness of there being an other so intimately connected to oneself. “Rest” concludes: “. . . Still, he’s startled me / inside his bed, like this night we have, / as if I’ve caught myself punching // the car’s poor radio, and looked up / too

far down the road. He wants to know / if his dreams wake me,
 sometimes, ever. // If he cries out, I tell him, I don't really mind.
 / No, he means, not when he makes noise, / but like this wind,
 soundless at the glass."

The great difficulty in composing a successful expressive-suggestive poem is the arrangement of its images. Because the expressive-suggestive image is itself so complex, it is difficult to put those images together, to make its various glimmerings and refractions hypnotic. Hoepfner's poems sometimes suffer due to this difficulty; at times, their images shift and leap so much that their shimmering amounts only to lack of clarity. This difficulty is most readily apparent in Hoepfner's overuse of a circular structure. Although Hoepfner can use a circular structure's characteristic return at poem's end to revised, initial images to great effect—two of Hoepfner's poems, "Landscape Minus Figures" and "Parallelogram," combine the circle's geometry with different mathematics to create suspense and surprise—the sheer number of poems with circular structures seems to admit to a certain cluelessness about where else the poems might go. After a while, the circular movement seems forced, imposed. In "Eyelid," while on a plane on the way to the funeral of a friend, the poem's speaker describes the ascent through cloud cover into "a sudden brilliance, arctic waste" and then considers its surroundings and imagines the friend in it: "... But nothing lives // on this pole, and no one's dragged her out / some freezing blowhole. That's not her, // lying there, a long carnation on the ice." However, just as this meditation begins it is cut off. The poem turns suddenly to reconsider the airplane, coming to call it—after looking down at the frozen farmland and the city the speaker left which now seems like "a galaxy"—a "deep-sea thing that glows for hunger, / breathes great pressure, death-defying dark." But what's the point of reconsidering the plane? The plane has little to do with the emotional content of the poem, and the final lines simply contain a barrage of new images, foreclosing the poem's greater possibilities.

In one of the strongest poems in his book, "Texts for Wednesday's Class," Hoepfner both approaches a familiar topic, reading, and employs a familiar mode, the expressive-suggestive, in a way fairly unique for him. Rather than establish an occasion or a setting for the organization of that poem's images—a method of organization that can be used by the expressive-suggestive but is really the province of the descriptive-meditative—Hoepfner instead brings together, by listing, disparate images and uses the simple fact of their textuality as the organizing principle. Hoepfner's list is a small

collection of atrocities and accidents—hiding during wartime, medieval torture, a car wreck—made all the more terrifying in their reduction to the status of texts. Hoepfner, though, uses this state of things to advance a strong understanding of the job of the writer and the reader. He concludes: "... but look into the mirror hanging / from the visor hanging where the windshield was. / It too is a hole, through which we must pass our hands." Moving straight into his subject matter and revising his use of the expressive-suggestive so that it participates not so much in the logic of narrative as much as in the freedom of the list, Hoepfner consequently arrives at a new possibility: the possibility that the thresholds his poems are used to dwelling in might also be passed through. This possibility needs to be actualized by Hoepfner for his work to not repeat itself but to break into something new, for the sometimes too well-mannered poems of *Rain Through High Windows* to become instead, in Hoepfner's future work, constantly miraculous.