



## Steve Klepetar – Feature

### Five Poems

#### Entering Your Country

*As for us, we enter your country  
With our eyes closed.*  
-- W. S. Merwin

We enter your country  
with its razor wire and knives.

Clutching passports, we come  
upon your gates, and we smile

having learned  
that much of your language of sighs.

We dim our lights  
and approach as snow

piles against brickwork and wood,  
wind in our faces

even when we turn to hear  
wolves in the distance praying to the sky.

For miles now we have been blind,  
but we trudge on toward the sea,

its salt smell and roaring, its frail  
boats and mermaids and mythical whales.

## Next Door

The house next door is filled with holes.  
There are woodpecker holes on the outside,  
whole families of birds nestled in the siding,  
and inside are many white spaces  
that radiate absence: chairs that rock back  
and forth to the sound of a missing drum;  
a table bowed slightly with invisible food;  
walls with patches where trees and faces  
used to hang. Someone has fed the darkness  
with snow. At night the house hums, as if  
it were focused on some lonely task  
and couldn't remember the words to the song.  
A woman lives there with her dog and her silent  
ghosts, who drink with her in the living room,  
stirring their cocktails with moonbeams  
and ashes, tasting with tongues that flicker  
in and out like a signal dragged in from some  
distant tower in a land that drowned in tropical rain.

## Gentler Times

This is the world as we have made it,  
hoisted to the narrow top of a naked  
oak, tangled in a webbing of branches  
swaying wildly in the wind. The world  
is a balloon tugging at its string,  
a captive chained by the neck in a cave  
of ice and stone. The victims are always  
the same, barefoot and cold, bleeding  
and hungry and covered with lice.  
Always we paint them black, rub out  
their faces, cancel their names.  
Every time, the lions pace the arena,  
tawny and wild, circling their prey.  
Once the seats were filled with screaming  
fans, but we live, they say, in gentler times,  
and so we turn our heads, maybe write  
a check and watch the waters rise  
with a wary eye. There are whales, or used  
to be, and we keep a lookout for the dead,  
who float on the waters up to our decaying shore.

## **The Old Days**

In my father's time, you could see the world  
rushing past from the window of a train.  
It was so small, so round, it fit inside your coat.  
As he rode, trading news with friends,  
he felt it there, curling beneath his arm.

He could feel it breathe.  
Sometimes when he slept, he could feel its damp  
cottony dreams on the pillow at his cheek.  
But by the time he woke for breakfast, he was old.

By then he had forgotten how to laugh,  
and the beer he loved tasted like water or milk.  
He ate white radishes and sang to the moon,  
which stared down at him, glinting in the darkness,  
a phosphorescent tooth gnawing its way through the dark sky.

## **Cities of the Plain**

They have walked for three days, across mountain passes  
and down into the desert. The child  
sleeps  
in a sling across the man's wiry back.  
They have paused  
to rest and the woman is speaking  
to the stones, which gather as if she  
were a priestess with blessings to bestow.  
She is speaking, or maybe she sings softly,  
of rain and flowersd

that explode in her brain, a wild color wheel  
spread out among the desiccated plants.  
Everything she says whirls in the air, making the sky

brilliant and new. The child wakes whimpering.  
She nurses him as the sky burns.  
Nearby the man digs a small trench with a rusted tool.  
Water bubbles to the surface.  
He cups  
his hands and drinks, clear droplets  
adhering to his beard.

The woman touches him, then drinks  
until her lips redden. The child balances a pebble  
on his palm. He gurgles, a sound like water from a desert well.  
The past disappears. The future rushes  
to meet them, its fiery symbols  
marking their way to the cities of the plain.

**Steve Klepetar**'s work has appeared worldwide, in such journals as *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Chiron*, *Deep Water*, *Expound*, *Phenomenal Literature*, *Red River Review*, *Snakeskin*, *Voices Israel*, *Ygdrasil*, and many others. Several of his poems have been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize (including one in 2016). Recent collections include *My Son Writes a Report on the Warsaw Ghetto* and *The Li Bo Poems*, both from Flutter Press. His collections *Family Reunion* (Big Table Publishing) is forthcoming in 2017 while *A Landscape in Hell* (Flutter Press) was recently published.