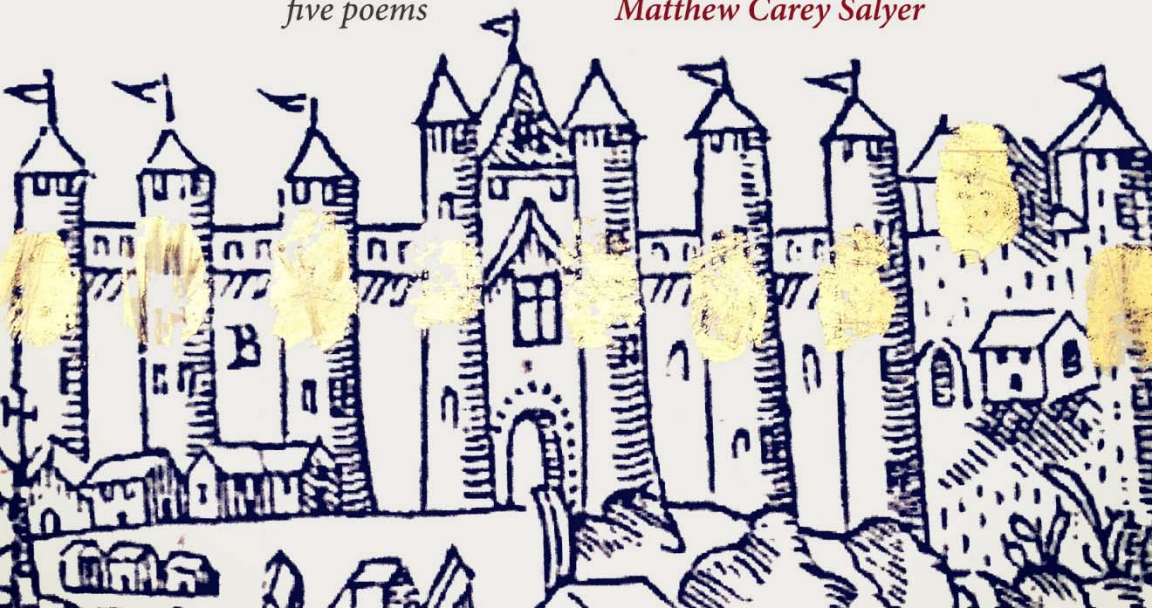


LAMBKIN

five poems

Matthew Carey Salyer



Wild Colonial Boy

O your lambkin, your long-lost, your farthing dears
gone, and their rolling-line mill in its snap-
back ghetto still, shut, pent as the hand
gestures in grandfather's prim print
of the Sacred Heart, or his
song for the half-ten to Queens-
town, then freighter to trope, his thumb
on the grind – I'd hazard whoever
built the brass plant, some narrow patrician,
had Dickensian forethought for has-been, who
we are for each other, mother: mother,
for dears, I'll send back sparrows as blessings
honed like the visible shrapnel of breath.
I had no real intention, you
have to remember, of ever coming home.

The Electoral History of the Carey Family

Lord Rift, remember to our blue heaven, how
the sound of my grandfather's prime was a suite
of pink mice in the elephant field
tobacco he worked, and echoes his step-
mother tucked
under his wag tongue from *An tImleach Mór*. Meet

the Careys in a dollhouse diorama
of unexplained death they've made my head
house: mouse-mother, mouse-father, ratkin to
amuse, me.

In the house-head, my hand trimmed down their thimble
town to a crime scene for fam. Silence, its great
custody. Move manmade miniature
us through whitewash autumn, 1960,
when we could

not yet be faulted for what work does, for Jack
Kennedy said that we had 'the easiest
city or else the best Democrats
in the damn state.' How's gone wrong? Rush, ratkin.
This is just

experimental architecture for ghosts
two decades before I was born lost, host, full
stop. So all year long I've been looking
for affordable housing in the blue,
good districts

on an electoral map of the Tristate,
like trying to find cause for an accident
in a lab where rats in mazes ran
hot then cold with some rare incurable
disease. Please

do not touch the dollhouse ethnographic scene.
The Unclaimed Death of the Carey Family
takes only the slightest disturbance
to be like the last hurrah, be like just
fucking touch me.

New York City Placement Exam

Been done to death, Lord Spiritual, the holy
‘Hallelujah,’ yeah? Thought its broken
bone of a chord stuck where I cache harsh
upbringing thoughts in the throat (hush), *heave*:
haw by haw I oust out wit, rage. Ow. Opt not.
Hundredfold, the face-plant lambs
of the Northwest/South Bronx Region Catholic Schools
would be grieving for want of a nail
in fresh-pressed, be ‘bye, bish,’ be ‘said-you-said
catch me outside.’ We brat, we brute, worst rudi-
ment. Boy, you schoolyard
that flock and come correct at the punk hour,
when all we fight to want, our eyes our anthracite
for the piece of work we are,
dints us where hearts fickle
the complex lives of animals. It’s too late. Fly-
catcher, next time pick more baroque instruments
than us. Ram I am I know but you

should wear the bell in this iteration. I'd die
to lead you to sacrifice on our class trip
at Lincoln Center thinking
not even the beautiful days, not one
of the bird's-eye views of the earth
shares the smooth curve of the aneurysm
that killed my dad, only the Met's opera-house
ceiling, its great gilt
meant to depict mad lives of the stars
at the explosive beginning of night
bent on the orchestra pit.
Cue incidental

music from an ensemble of john does for whom
nothing ever prospered (and they know it). Said
nope, kids from around-the-way with rare
minds are just regular guys born with tails. I hoped
I could cut mine off. Lords Spiritual,
the lesson I take away
from *The Death of King Saul According to God*
(where everyone's damned like Horace Mann)
is that we can't all be royals, can we?
The opera's first act depicts your wonderworking
in the brief, freaky
lives of kingdoms, the portrayed country-
side a sweep of green sanction for ambition.
Almost all of the boys from school

get into Fordham Prep

so we can perform most of the supporting roles
as Lords Temporal and Lords Spiritual
of the Cross-Bronx Expressway. CUNY's
a good school. Fordham's Jesuit, our taste of was.

Your forefinger of plot pulls like a dog.

I hawk the parallel graves
built for king-fathers from Row K, Seat 109.

Fine dumb sons. O screw the grandeur. O what –
this is merit-based? Super. Cue my queue...

Rex?... Rex?... next. His anointing was a roof of birds
flown off with the self-
righteous aloofness of his suicide.

Saul would never have said that he asked to be king.

My dad only went to college
to cry wolf one more time

in a basket of grass where lambs relive the birds'
flight in the small throat of their shade. When you
walk out of the Southern District of New York
federal prosecutor's office

a free man, maybe you will see the worth
of a good education...

like me, my dead dad've winked. That's one way to work
for other people. Like children,
our bodies outgrow us.

You will have one hour to finish the exam,
the prophet warns the king in the final act.

Question one. Do the yes-ma'ams moth me
after third period because I talk back smack?

Fact. Matt is a capable student when he
chooses to answer. Question
two. What are The Berkshires and how do you do
you? The little legislators

on the Yearbook Committee require
an about-me blurb asap. Funny's okay
but look (no *you* look)

keep it clean, upbeat. It's for your mother.
Fuckers, my mother got hit on by Michael Caine
c. *Get Carter*, and my girl
says that would explain

a world but the dates. Ma doesn't faze. Three. Great question.

I think the first time was when the School Council
demanded cans and contributions
for the down-and-out. Ha. Governor Cuomo
visited our homeroom like a cardinal-
archbishop, lest we get notions
nothing's changed under the new management.

But there's a permanent record
on everyone. Bronx Science won't take me
(the Lords of Discipline said) because they've heard
'what he's really like'

from some good people with fat white teeth.
You have ten minutes left for the exam (breathe).

Super. Senator Schumer,
I am addressing

the optional essay portion of this exam
to contributing listeners of WNYC,
shy Tourists of the Charitable,
polishing handout cans, counting demands, c/o yourself.

I have been learning to talk about myself
by reading all of (what else?)

Richard Howard's poetic monologues.

His "Agreement with Sir Charles Sedley,"
which ends with 'the very tone and timbre –
somewhat louder – of a man,' is fucking tight
enough to make me
think that he must be from here in The Bronx.

This justifies me in naming my essay
after Sedley's "Baller's Oath"
like a solo lord.

This sounds realer than "What the Opera Means to Me,"
and I still demonstrate organization,
correctness, and substance. I relate

Saul's recognition that God's abandoned him
to the day when I'll get myself arrested
or become a janitor

like my third-period teacher says. It's kind

of freeing, knowing your own name
describes a process of reaching conclusions
like the demolition of the Tappan Zee Bridge
when the Mario
Cuomo got built. See, Senator?
Abstentions are for WASPs. We crave attention
like that rich boy I hit back
(I forget his name).

I'm not ashamed to tell you, though, that I've no thesis,
only the outward form of an argument.

It's as middle-class as I can get.

I don't want 'more for my children.' I want children
in folios full, in fresh-pressed with grip strength
like the goddamn Northwest/South Bronx
Region Catholic Schools. I know, Lords Charitable,
I've lost the thread about my dad
and this is why Richard Howard was wrong
to get me going like we're back in The Bronx.
Put your pencils down.

The men I know are prone to disciplining
natural speech around strangers,
especially you,

but you should have seen dad when the prosecutors
cut him loose, sporting Charlie Croker's glasses
from *The Italian Job*. No – *no talking*.
Pass your exams forward. We will mail the results...

MATTHEW CAREY SALYER STOP WRITING – my father
was always a cliff-hanger, never one
to bring the house down.
He was only supposed he'd blow the bloody
doors off with my life.

Our Late Departure *(on Reading a Transcript of WNYC's Account of
Sen. Robert Fitzgerald Kennedy's Funeral Train)*

Opens with tone [] a machine-
generated transcript, the text
unformatted and prone
to errors in the description. I mean
fuck's the word 'orkut' in 'orkut'
a half-are late, then slowed more when'
– when what – dumb luck, 'some guys got
killed at Newark, waiting
for our train as it shot south: their heads
hang-doggy, mouths shut,' crossing
themselves, and 'one, two, leaned too far, fell'
flat on the tracks 'four the northbound
could stop. An at fact, combine wit
our late departure,'
accounted for crowds in the cooler
Potomac dusk, the sheer number of strangers
who'd allowed the kilned, combed

afternoon to pass through their flesh like abstract landscape
on earthware, a frieze of republican myths
that might've detailed the Founding of Rome with
still-life urn-carriers

infilling bogs. Bugs me how 'always some guys
inna ditch' as my grandpa would've said,
his had-not like the lot

he'd bought for the Great House, a grandstanding thing
(come close as he could to rich by '68),
the planned cornerstone for his capitol skull
where he'd love the 'little

platoon' (as Edmund Burke called family),
that 'germ as it were of publick
affections,' and 'first link

in a series by which we proceed'
to the common good: good, think,
Lord Wearie, the men you Great Men
propose in public

speeches are in the future
tense. No wonder your world's a mess
and won't screech to a halt.

That's no way to stress the real grievance
of crowds in the Late Republic.

You ought to depict that northbound
train among the passed-

over, for whom our overwrought

narrative of change seems like transcripts of chance,
reformatted and prone
to error in ascribing cause. Consider how, though
corporate, the roughed-out urn-carriers in your
frieze of the Fall of the Roman Republic
remain uncommon
to each other in the late crowd,
each at their inmost a Great House
that's crass, immoderate
next to Newark Penn Station's neoclassical forms,
but apt for the ambitious ostentation
with which lives of the mind dispute in common
quorums of our best-
remembered ghosts. Lord Wearie,
a Great Man is someone, a ghost is someone
more construed by the state-
craft of love for our sake, and for all its hardihood
the death of one man ends
the communion of spirits within him.
Lords Temporal, when you reclaim the Great House
it will feel as though you have
watched the birth of a new nation, and it will be
because I'll have forgiven you for what comes
next: repeat me like the man I am
innermost inna ditch
urn-carried from the late departure.

Recasting Self-Portrait as the MTA Lost Property Office

False destinies, son. No love for the 7
train crowd, their density. Hygge, hygge, o my
master's partner's
children from her previous life.

Lords Convenient, your children will lose your shit
in their social apparatus
for quick minds:
train-talk, bud, Tinder, twaddle. But
underground, in the phantomic station ogives, once,
behind bricks: trust:

I was a true detective. I can tell you
there are lots of honest people
in Manhattan
with few hang-ups, run-of-the-mills
who'll take time to bring iPhones & Kindles
to the MTA Lost Property Office
at Penn Station,
its ellipsis in the lower
level's wall where strangers fill in parts of themselves
through description

beneath the organized movement of workers
exiting trains, the sound of trains, sound of the
world letting go
of small polylingual ballast

before reentering its trajectories
upward into kinesthetic
darkness. Feint, heart,
complete your moon landing. Because
I could not hold the complex original
of myself well,

I have been coming here from #WoodlawnTheBronx
to acquire replacement parts
from the Office:
new glasses, misericord knees, heart
defibrillators, rock shandies, umbrellas,
social security numbers,
Richard's cork leg.
This new Matthew Carey Salyer
will look less the stairwell rat, *tah-dah*, will lumber
less, and all that

I want to remember about the Great House
will sprout like vines from this new tongue,
this corbel nose
that bears an old brow on black eyes
where I have not yet placed the wafer of moonrise
to see me with an iron chest,
this broadchurch bell
in which I will everyday wake...
do you see, Lady Zero? My mother's house has left you
a man for sons.



MATTHEW CAREY SALYER is a two-time finalist for the Iowa Review Prize in Poetry, a Pushcart nominee, and a semi-finalist for the Brittingham and Felix Pollak Prizes in Poetry. His poems, essays, and fiction have appeared in journals including *Narrative*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Poetry Northwest*, *New Orleans Review*, *The Common*, *Plume*, and *Thrush*. He has published critical work with *Nineteenth-Century Studies*, *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, *Modern War Institute*, *Mississippi Quarterly*, and many others. He has taught humanities at the University of Connecticut, Bard College, the United States Coast Guard Academy, and other colleges. At present, he is an Associate Professor at West Point. He lives in New York City and is the father of three children—his daughters, Rory and Vivian, and his son, Éamon—next to whom all things in this world pale. His first full-length collection, *Ravage & Snare*, is forthcoming from Pen & Anvil.



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