

The Great Wind *Norman Minnick*

How clean, how beautiful the great wind was. —Robert Francis

A great wind came and claimed everything.

I have stood in this doorway for years
looking upon its wake—amazed by what it took:

the car, the mailbox, the dog on his chain;
it came and took everything—

the neighbour, the neighbour's dog and the neighbour's tree,
the tree by my window and the owl who watched me howl in my sleep,

and all the birds in all the trees along the street. It took everything—
the road and the grass and the water from the spring,

the highway and the church and even the YMCA.

It was angry and came without warning—
took the seasons, the war, yesterday and tomorrow.

It came swiftly and took the clouds and the graves,
heaven and hell.

And sadness! It even took sadness!

But there was one thing left, clinging to the frame of the door,
having nearly gone unnoticed:

a wet leaf like the small hand of a child.

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Hebron —Irving Petlin



Revolution Pastoral —Irving Petlin

The Staten Island Ferry

for Marcus Garvey*

Afaa Michael Weaver

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Wooden floors, empty clam shell seats,
the pearls changing every half hour

popcorn in the space
lighted for stale corn
born again, cooked!
“get sustenance”
say the Garveyites...

in the deadness of heaven, so far, so far
away from the virgin darkness before Conrad—
now the ship moves, that raft, bureaucracy
the free ride

the black New York harbour
trillion trillion galactic gallons
lacquered licorice, dirty tongue
in a mouth full to spitting,
“bring back the photograph,
retouch the edges”
say the Garveyites...

“Sir, you are sitting
at an irregular angle. The tassels
of your Commander hat are
awry.”

No one knew the bill
for lighting buoys in the oceans, else
the sinking would not have sunk,
and the orderly return of the negroes
would have obviated the now old joke—
a bridge from Atlantic City to Atlantis
set aflame on both ends...
“a crown of golden fire for the middle passage”

Why raise the dead?
Kill the histories.
Why raise the dead?

Magic carpet on the water,
Chinese people hover, shield him,
drawn by whispers, codes, secrets,
a restless telepathy from immortals—
Father John’s prophecy.
“He shall sit erect on a free ride
to the rock.”

Black water.
Black water.
Black water.

*Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association with its program of taking black people “Back to Africa.” Some scholars believe his number of followers surpassed that of other twentieth century leaders. The ships he bought for the purpose of transporting people to the Mother Land never left New York’s harbour. His “Back to Africa” movement was a vital catalyst, lighting the hearts of black Americans. The joke referred to is vernacular, one that posits building a bridge for black people to return to Africa and, once they are all aboard, setting it afire on both ends.