

pops to the plug, & now it's Standard Oil's,
& my friend fills up in his turn, & is billed,

as the ancient forest pours through,
all that toucan sunlight & lily photosynthesis, roses
& pterodactyls that got me from here to you,
& vice-versa. At the crux of the grid,
someone somewhere drops these colored sponges
to claim whose power & dough is gissing forth

at any one moment. Basketballs parcel out
the lucre for what it's worth, stock broker by broker
all the parrot year, year after year while we all
drive our asses off to find the last shade somewhere.
Pop, it's pink. Pop, it's yellow, & what follows
is the color of a dead chameleon
against our particulate sky. Sort of an orange-citron.

BISON

I remember, on the shore of Lake Ronkonkoma
when I was a boy, with both hands
wedging sand aside, & for once reaching
solid bottom, & seeing, &
feeling with my fingers before the sand washed back,

a hoof-print I tried often again,
but couldn't rediscover what I'd seen,
that shape treble the width of a deer's foot
or the mark of Wenzel's curled-horn ram
in the soft earth of its fold, &

solstice came on, but I sensed, already, the essence
of what I've learned: that where I lived
the eastern bison, larger than the plains animal &
"very dark, many of the old bulls being coal black,
with grizzly white hairs around the nose and eyes,"

had once herded. In Pennsylvania Buffalo Hunt,
H. W. Shoemaker says that by 1790
the countless numbers of this species
that had migrated easterly from the Great Lakes
across New York to the valleys of Maryland and Virginia

had been decimated to "300-400 animals which sought
refuge in the wilds of the Seven Mountains."

These were slaughtered during the winter
of 1799-1800 as they wallowed helplessly in deep snow.
Two years later, a lone bull was shot,

the last seen in Pennsylvania. Records exist
of a few surviving longer: one killed

near Charleston in 1815, then
in 1825, a buffalo cow and calf were tracked,
sighted, & killed at Valley Head."...

These were the last of their species which
did not have as prominent a hump as those
west of the Mississippi, & showed less contrast
between the height of the fore & hind quarters, &
who knows what else? The last. As for me,

maybe the only living human to have seen & felt
the hoof-rint of the vanished beast,
I will never speak this aloud, anywhere, ever,
for every reason. & you, who, also among
the last of a species on this our confounded earth,

you, who, out of time, have foraged here among
the kindred spirits of poems
& their animistic shadows in the mind —
when you close this volume, its pages will fill
with sand over the hoofprint of the eastern bison.

— William Heyen

Brockport NY

CHORUS LINE, 1952

An eighteen-year-old boy from Texas is being
shown around Greenwich Village by a friendly
lawyer in his thirties. They have listened to
jazz at Jimmy Condon's and now, after midnight,
they are waiting for the show at a cabaret, a
narrow place with an elevated stage at one end.
The chorus line enters, prancing enthusiastically.
They sing fairly well, but as they begin to dance
the can-can, the boy thinks how different they
are from dancers he has seen in movies. They
are somehow ungraceful and coarse. Their fake
eyelashes flutter exaggeratedly, and beneath
black mesh tights their legs are pasty white.
A couple of them have calves and thighs that
are too muscular and heavy. The lawyer ogles
them, laughing and joking with a group at the
next table. Many of the men in the audience
whistle and jeer. One shouts repeatedly Show
me some ass! Show me some ass! The dancers seem
not to mind and strike poses like pin-up girls,
winking grotesquely and blowing kisses. The boy
is baffled. Earlier, the jazz was exciting and
new. But the dancers are disgusting. Something
is wrong but the boy can't figure out what it
is.