

BALTIMORE SUN

Simon Schuchat



Baltimore Sun
By Simon Schuchat

Neo-Mimeo Editions:2025

Copyright (c) 2025 Simon Schuchat
Cover Copyright (c) Alec Bernstein

Some of these poems have appeared in The Brooklyn Rail, R&R, The Nu Review, Beltway Poetry Quarterly, Julebord, and Terence Winch's "Pick of the Week" feature in the Best American Poetry blog.

To Steve Levine, Jim Hanson,
(the memory of) Steve Hamilton, and David Herz

Neo-Mimeo Editions
Nualláin House, Publishers
Digital Press Project
Inquire at
nuallainhousepublishers@gmail.com

BALTIMORE SUN

there's a passage in Mencken's diaries -
now, I think Mencken's a great writer -
so don't take this wrong -
anyway, he describes a
somewhat large
immigrant Jewish family
down the street
and how they inspire
in him
powerful feelings of disgust

and the thing is
my great-grandfather lived on that street
in Baltimore
with all his sons and some of their wives
we have the census records
we know how many were employed,
and I know from my uncle
how proud they were
to have Mencken as a neighbor

but I guess
since he called his essays
Prejudices
there's no call to be surprised
and anyway there could have been other Jews on
the street

POEM

You wanted to know the secret
You thought it was in books
You looked for it from teachers
You sought it in sex
You tried to find it with intoxicants
You looked in the mountains
You ran and swam and bent after it
The secret was before you
Whether you recognized it or not
The secret was insubstantial
Delicious forbidden free of charge
Money did not release it
Nor did it hide it
And the minute workings of the world
Only seemed to conceal it
When it was present and absent
Being a joke and a heartache
And a song outside the daily range of
frequencies
In the books the landscapes the bodies the
delicacies
Which you absorbed inhaled encompassed
In every language you could learn
Before you fell asleep
In the warm cloak of the secret

AFTER LI BO

Deep blue sky, ice mountains jutting upwards
Morning as you prepare for further travel
I recommend you have another drink
 text everyone you're okay
No cell service above Tengboche

WHO'D BE INTERESTED?

Now that Teddy is gone
Who can I tell about
The Mogen David on the primary schools in Nepal?

Who can I tell
Who'd be interested to know
The fine steel suspension bridges

Over the raging streams
Among the Himalaya foothills
Were all donated by the

Shanghai Hong Kong Baghdadi Jewish Kadoorie
family
In honor of the Gurkhas
Now that my uncle is gone?

SMUG HARBOR
after Philip Larkin

It's good
When you're old
To think of
All the self-destructive things
You didn't do
Because you were afraid
And all the pain
You didn't cause
By not
Fucking up others' lives
Despite all the
Self-pity
And obliviousness
That kept you
From blaming others
For all your problems
And the agonies
That came of
Thinking you had
A soul
That could suffer

THE MARTIAN

Jack Spicer thought he was a radio.
His poetry is terrifying, marvelous, full
Of portentous line breaks and amazement.
He notoriously thought female genitalia
Ugly, but then he seems to have
Felt the same about his own,
Probably unfamiliar with Georgia
O'Keefe. Undiscoverable
Charisma. It changes nothing. He died of
Drink, which as a scientific linguist he
Attributed to his idiolect. When he cried,
The angels heard, but did they know
He was one of them, or did they change the
station?

POLITICAL OPERA

Admetus tells Alceste
She can't exchange her life for his
Her life is his to dispose of
He says this as sovereign and as husband

She goes through with it anyway
Though Hercules
Mighty Mouse of his time
 'here I come to save the day'
Secures life for both

Gluck's 1776 opera
French libretto with
input from JJ Rousseau
A work which Franklin or Jefferson might have
seen

Topical allegory lost in the sea-breeze
Thoughts on power
Sacrifice for the sovereign a sacrifice for the
people
If the people truly want it

Admetus worries that his children will blame him
For taking away their mother
Merely in order to prolong his life
Never mind he never ordered it

POEM

This girl once told me I was desirable
It was great to be wanted even if
I didn't know why

It was long before I ran away
To join the circus, travel the world
And the seven seas

A different girl said, after I came
What about me
And a third asked if she was good

A guy I knew thought I got in my own way
And wished I could connect the dots
Back when I was "the baby elephant"

WHAT BECOMES A LEGEND

Joanne said Kathy wanted to be Lillian
Hellman. She would have been
A great Blackgama ad, nothing under the fur
Besides that little boy body. (I didn't know
Her when she lifted
Weights.). Her writing is totally great:
Schrodingers'
Cat, simultaneously serious and a joke. I heard
She burned through a lot of family money.
Inasmuch
As I have pretensions to being a gentleman
That's all I'm going to say.

THE UNDERGROUND
In memory of Paul Blackburn

The Washington Metro is not sexy
People read books like
The Secret History of Neo-Liberalism
They take calls from their realtor
The floor is a Pollock-inspired linoleum
It used to be industrial carpet perhaps
This represents progress
Occasionally tourist families include
A teenage daughter with legs that go all the way
up
But the suits with ID lanyards outnumber them
The air conditioning usually works
The robo-voice announcing the closing of the
doors
Has a vague Philadelphia accent
Stations are uniform and brutalist
Tall electronic turnstiles barely deter
fare-jumpers
Yes there are still teenagers sprawled on the
seats
The layout is not designed to maximize floor
space
You expect to find a seat
During the pandemic you expected to find a row
to yourself
At rush hour it gets crowded but never so much
That the masses are crammed together in heat and
sweat
As I said the aircon usually works
So much has been lost
Without anything having changed

THE PILGRIM

I visited the grave of Pablo Neruda
Like I went to the house where Borges was born
And the street where Kafka lived
The spot where Verlaine shot little Arthur
And the graves of Yeats and F. Scott Fitzgerald
Du Fu's thatched hut
And Kawabata's onsen
And the graves of Oscar Wilde and Ezra Pound
The room where Mayakovsky shot himself
And Pasternak's country home
The bar where Robert Benchley held court
And the place where Spicer drank himself to
death
And the trees in the churchyard
Honoring Berrigan, O'Hara and Auden

BALLAD OF TASHKENT

I went to Tashkent
Yes I went
To Tashkent
In the early years
Of this century

Timurid Tomb complex
On the outskirts of town

Green hills and flatlands
Surround the oasis

A massive Koran
In Kufic script
The Caliph read it
Most every Friday
Oldest Koran
In Central Asia

No more
Ancient mosque

On a hillside
Colossal billboards
For Barf
Soviet Detergent

Gynormous market
Uzbek Babushkas
Under plastic awnings
Selling tomato and cucumber
дружба народов

Friendship of peoples
Red and Green

Conquered by Czar
Flattened by earthquake
Rebuilt quotidienne
No more exotic
Than Scottsdale or Pittsburgh
Dusty and beige

Caliph is gone
Czar is dead
GenSec too
New Statues of Timur
Long green esplanade
No more Lenin
Modest Subway

Yes I went to Tashkent
That's what I saw

READING PARKER'S MELVILLE

Thousands of pages and pages
Almost day by day
Letters from everyone around him
Hardly any from him

(My wife's father's sister's husband's sister's
husband
Compiled the log)

A family of distinction

Almost Jamesian how one cousin
Has no idea
What her father did to his sister's family
Slow walking settling their father's estate

Everyone agrees the younger brother's second
wife
Was a self-absorbed shit
Though they never say so out-loud

The servant problem during the Civil War
Not enough Irish Marys coming over
To properly staff the house

It's not merely a lot of family business

Starts writing after everyone tells him
You should write down those fabulous stories you
tell

Of cannibals and naked girls
Probably to get him to stop telling them over
and over
But it turns out a grand success

Nine novels in almost as many years
A feverish pace
Though nothing hits the bullseye like the first
one

British reviewers didn't know
The tail of the tale of the whale
Was missing
And mocked him for an impossible narrator

It turns out
The late poems
Were taken seriously at the time
Though not particularly praised

As for Herman himself
No more queer than Hawthorne
(Whose great-great-grandson I used to work for
Have I ever mentioned that?)

He seems to have been a happy
If sometimes forgetful
Grandfather
And liked the outdoors aspect of his Customs job

And seems as well
To have been satisfied writing without seeking
past glory
Having once been famous was evidently enough

Though it clearly took time
To get there

Once his wife finally became rich
The marriage greatly improved

NOT BY WYETH

The world is a dangerous place.
Unknown dangers everywhere.
Known dangers everywhere.
Nobody can be trusted until proven trustworthy.
Nobody can be proven trustworthy.
There are many crazy people.
"There's a lot of bastards out there."
They must be avoided.
Walk on the other side of the street.

Memory weakens and fades.
The sense of smell is gone.
Perpetual heartburn.
Back pain everlasting.
Nothing tastes good.
Everything costs too much.
Nobody is at work anymore.
Nothing works right.
It's all a bunch of lies.
It just doesn't make sense.
I have already lost three inches and gained five pounds.

WHAT ME WORRY?

I've gone hiking in the valley of the shadow of
death
More times and more recently than I ever would
have expected
But it's a really amazing valley
Full of people you used to know
The landscape so varied
Despite any uniformity at the end of the horizon
More than one way to fall
Off the edge of the world
The views at the summit are memorable
Whatever route one took to get there
Not really race nor boxing match
It's a hike that valley
Some even make it before they're born
And others seem to never even set out

ABSENTEE BALLOT

I am not a serious person.

I didn't finish my Ph.D.

I haven't fixed the wiring in my apartment.

I never learned to cook.

I don't look for work.

I have tasted probably hundreds of craft beers and cannot remember which was which, or which tasted how.

I cannot distinguish among sopranos, or even tenors, despite having heard hours of opera.

Nor can I tell most Delta blues singers apart.

Also, I confuse Lohengrin with the Ride of the Valkyries.

I can't speak French.

I haven't been to the Grand Canyon.

I remember some of my dreams.

I can't remember the places I've traveled.

I don't own a car; I haven't driven a car in twenty years, except a few times on the Seattle freeway.

I pay attention to the financial news and do nothing about it.

I haven't balanced my checkbook in a thousand years.

I could have been a contender.

My papers are in total disorder.

I don't take notes at lectures.

I don't follow stories.

I only go to shul to say kaddish.

I do not contribute to politicians.

I lived in Japan and never climbed Mount Fuji.

I miss all the sales.

I have no children.

I haven't watched the news since Gwen Ifill died.

I eat meat.

I know nothing about wine.

I can't identify trees, flowers or birds.

My poems do not rhyme.

Simon Schuchat has lived in New York, Chicago, Shanghai, Tokyo, Beijing and Moscow, just to name a few. His translations of Chinese and Russian prose and poetry have appeared in various anthologies and magazines, as has his own poetry, which has also been published in five collections, most out of print except for latest, THE CENTOS OF SIMON SCHUCHAT, from Aerialedge Books in DC. According to Kathy Acker, "his poetry doesn't tell you stuff: it is consciousness." Soviet Texts, his translations of Moscow conceptualist poet Dmitri Prigov came out in 2020 from Ugly Duckling Presse.