

Blues

By Sydney Lea

—May, 2020

Another unarmed black man has been gunned down by police. Great cities erupt, but the *thin blue line*—what else?—is established to contain that predictable response.

Meanwhile, as daylight dies here in Vermont, I catnap on my couch, remote from mayhem and fury, retired, well-heeled, ashamed of my own comfort.

Half-conscious, I watch my mind stray from metaphoric to identifiable blue, like the wetland iris I beheld on this morning's hike; like the blue sulfur butterflies, hovering close to ground, arrived again with spring; like the luminous indigo bunting last week at our feeder, a miracle.

“Blue Monday” was recorded long ago by the late Fats Domino. I loved that tune in his rendition, and to think of it now, prompted by a mere adjective, is to lament the thrust of time. Of course. Yet I've largely been spared more epic sorrows.

My bourgeois woes are as common and small as many of the things I notice. This May, for further instance, the wild violets are rampant. Little things like that. Soon, the darkness will shroud the landscape and some creatures will search for refuge, while others prepare to wreak their violence. No, that expression doesn't ring quite true. What they'll do is what predators must do in the natural world.

On the far side of the ridge, there's a wailing train, a sound that has prompted music of a kind I dearly love. You know what kind I mean, though it's not restricted to the ingenious likes of Hank Williams, white Alabaman, who by the way, received his first

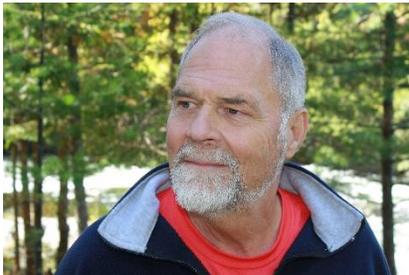
guitar lessons from black bluesman Rufus “Tee Tot” Payne. No, the blue in that sound is part of every stirring vernacular music America has ever engendered.

But of course there are larger blues. The sky, for the most obvious example. As its color recedes, I remember a grandchild clad entirely in blue last fall for Halloween. She wanted to *be* the sky. From her father she gets the African blood for which I pray to whatever God I can invoke that she and her brother and sister won't have to suffer. I shudder.

I try to will myself back into trance, but I can't. I want to dream up a blue that forever assuages, a blue in which I could paint the world.

Who in hell do I think I am? Whom do I help with my poetical fancies?

Through a screen, I hear night creatures begin to hoot and shriek. The dark is taking over.



Sydney Lea is 2021 recipient of his home state Vermont's most prestigious distinction for an artist: the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. (Past winners include luminaries from Galway Kinnell to Bernard Malamud, Grace Paley, Rudolf Serkin, and many others.) A former Pulitzer finalist and winner of the Poets' Prize, he served as founding editor of *New England Review* and was Vermont's Poet Laureate from 2011 to 2015.