

HUNG LIU

Fortune Reader, 2012
Oil on Canvas, 59.5 x 48 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

ROBERT HERSHON

Billy and Clark

Billy Batson the crippled newsboy
became Captain Marvel
simply by saying Shazam!—S for Socrates
H for Hercules, A for Albert Pujols
Z for Zero Mostel etc. and that always
seemed far more efficient than running
into a phone booth to emerge as Superman
Besides, there aren't any phone booths left
no place to leave all those green suits
Goodwill probably has rack after rack
of barely worn green suits but no takers

On the other hand
there are no more newsboys either
like the one in San Francisco who was shouting
The body's been found! The body's been found!
What body? my friend asked
Anybody, wise guy. The body's been found!

Superman and Batman and various clans of
specialized talents who can turn themselves into
fire or mercury or strawberry jam are still with us
avenging whatever the hell they need to avenge
but Captain Marvel and Mary Marvel and Captain Marvel
Junior are long gone, not killed by grizzled bad guys
but condemned by the courts which declared that the
Captain was a ripoff of Superman's copyright
and could no longer go streaking
across the skies in his orange costume

Actually they've been living in my basement
all these years, afraid to go out lest they be
zapped by the law. I join them from time to time
and we cower together around the old furnace
Billy Batson occasionally reappears but it's hard
to stand on the corner hawking CNN and Fox News.

Everybody's already heard all the news,
all of it, all the news

Robert Hershon's fourteenth book, *Freeze Frame*, is due this fall from Pressed Wafer. His most recent collection, *Goldfish and Rose*, came out in 2013. Hershon's work has appeared in *The Nation*, *Poetry 180*, *Vanitas*, and many other magazines and anthologies. He has won two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and three from the New York Foundation for the Arts. He has been co-editor of Hanging Loose Press since 1966.