



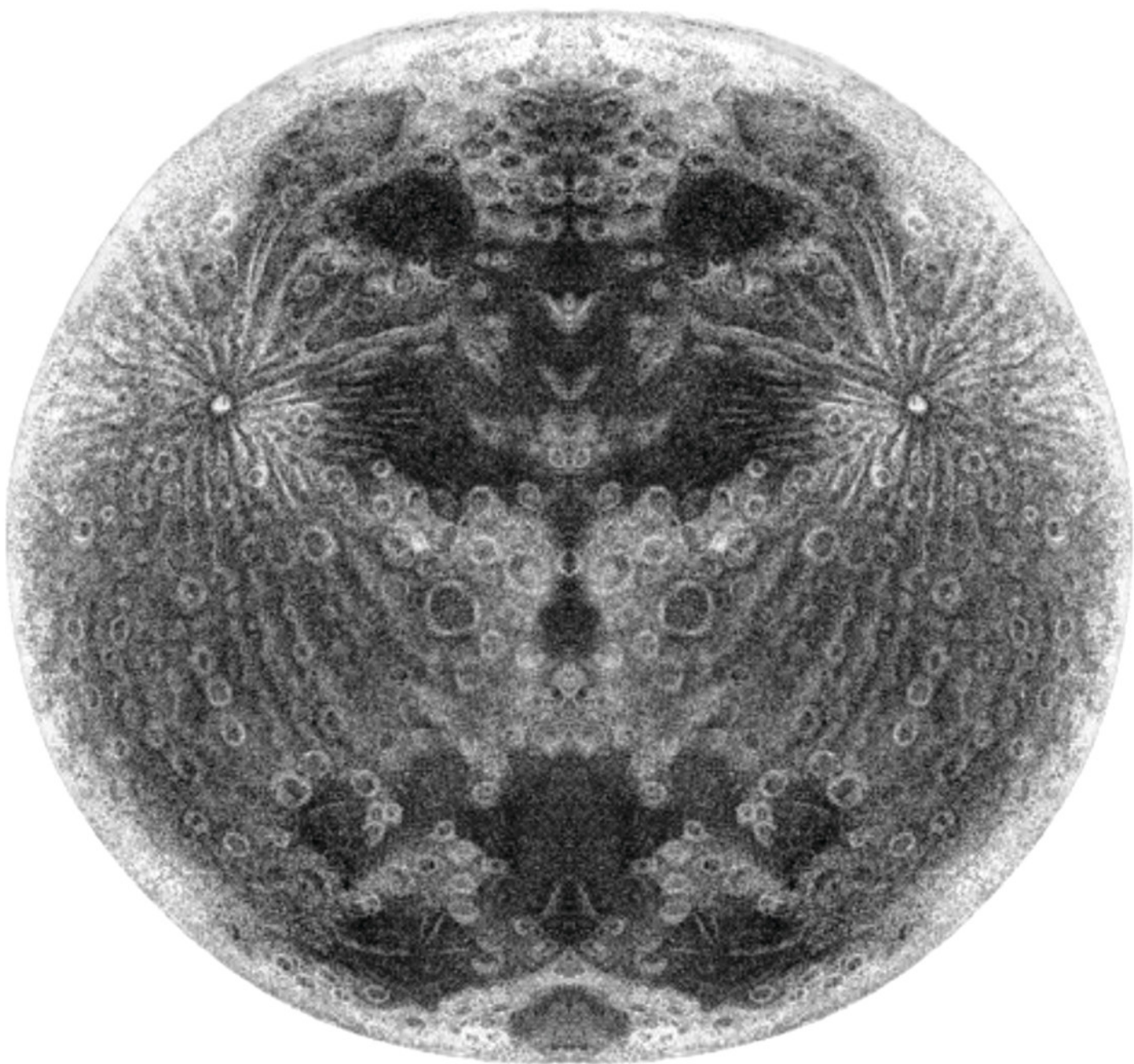
Ai

m a g a z i n e

issue 18. spring 2023.

IN THIS ISSUE

Oisín Breen, Jamie
Nakagawa Boley
+ many more!



Bill Wolak, Drawing Down the Moon

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ARTISTS & AUTHORS

Joe Bissichia

Joe Bissichia writes of our shared dynamic. An Honorable Mention recipient for the Fernando Rielo XXXII World Prize for Mystical Poetry, he has written over two hundred individual works that have been published in over one hundred publications. Commonality of humankind is a constant theme as he highlights the extraordinary power of faith in ordinary, everyday life.



Dmitry Blizniuk

Dmitry Blizniuk is a poet from Ukraine. His most recent poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *The Nation*, *The London Magazine*, *Pleiades*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Eurolitkrant*, *Poet Lore*, *NDQ*, *The Pinch*, *New Mexico Review*, and many others. The author of *The Red Forest* (Fowlpox Press, 2018), his poems have been awarded the RHINO 2022 Translation Prize. He lives in Kharkov, Ukraine.



Robert Boucheron

Robert Boucheron is an architect and freelance writer in Charlottesville, Virginia. His short stories and essays on literature and architecture have appeared in *Alabama Literary Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *Concrete Desert Review*, *Fiction International*, *Louisville Review*, and *Saturday Evening Post*. His flash fiction appears in online magazines.



John Brantingham

John Brantingham was Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks' first poet laureate. His work has been featured in hundreds of magazines. He has nineteen books of poetry and fiction including his latest, *Life: Orange to Pear* (Bamboo Dart Press). He lives in Jamestown, New York.



Stephen Campiglio

Stephen Campiglio recently co-edited *Noh Place Poetry Anthology* (Lost Valley Press, Hardwick, MA: 2022) and has poems appearing of late in *Circumference*, *DASH Literary Journal*, *Italian Americana*, *The Octotillo Review*, *Pinyon Review*, *Sangam Literary Review*, *Stand*, and *VIA: Voices in Italian Americana*. Twice-nominated for a Pushcart Prize, Campiglio has published two chapbooks, *Cross-Fluence* and *Verbal Clouds through Various Magritte Skies*.



ARTISTS & AUTHORS

William Crawford

William C. Crawford is a prolific itinerant photographer based in Winston Salem, NC. He got his start as a combat photojournalist in Vietnam where he was mentored by four Pulitzer Prize winners. Crawdaddy now roams America in search of everyday subjects that might be elevated to eye candy in a photograph. See more at bcraw44 on Instagram



Elizabeth Crowell

Elizabeth Crowell grew up in northern New Jersey and has a B.A. from Smith College in English Literature and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing/Poetry from Columbia University. She taught college and high school English for many years. She lives outside of Boston with her wife and teenage children.



James Fowler

James Fowler teaches literature at the University of Central Arkansas. He is author of a poetry collection, *The Pain Trader* (Golden Antelope Press, 2020), and a volume of short stories, *Field Trip* (Cornerpost Press, 2022).



D. Dina Friedman

Published in many literary journals, D. Dina Friedman is the author of two novels: *Escaping Into the Night* (Simon and Schuster), *Playing Dad's Song* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux), and one chapbook: *Wolf in the Suitcase* (Finishing Line Press). Her short story collection, *Immigrants*, (Creators Press) will be published in 2023. <http://www.ddinafriedman.com>



ARTISTS & AUTHORS

Trina Gaynon

Trina Gaynon's poems appear in *The Poetry Calendar of Oregon*, *Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California*, other anthologies, numerous journals, and a chapbook *An Alphabet of Romance* from Finishing Line Press. Her book *Quince, Rose, Grace of God* is forthcoming from Fernwood Press. She currently leads a group of poetry readers at the Senior Studies Institute in Portland and participates in the Ars Poetica community.



Carmen Germain

A poet as well as a visual artist, Carmen Germain is the author of a chapbook and three poetry collections, the latest being *Life Drawing* (Moonpath Press 2022). Her drawings and paintings have been published in various literary/art journals. She lives on the Olympic peninsula of Washington State.



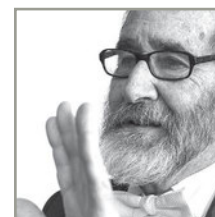
Elise Glassman

Elise Glassman is a Seattle, Washington writer whose stories and essays have appeared in journals such as *The Colorado Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Portland Review*, *Per Contra*, *Spank the Carp*, and *San Antonio Review*. She is an assistant fiction editor at Pithead Chapel and blogs at busysmartypants.blogspot.com.



Joel Glickman

Joel Glickman is an Emeritus Professor of Music at Northland College. His poetry has appeared in several publications including *Aji Magazine*, of which he is an ardent supporter, and which has also recently published his book of poetry, *Critters*. He resides in Ashland, Wisconsin.



Cynthia Good

Cynthia Good, an award-winning poet, author, journalist, and former TV news anchor, has written seven books including the recently released *What We Do with Our Hands* collection of poems, published by Finishing Line Press. Cynthia launched two magazines, *Atlanta Woman* and the nationally distributed *PINK* magazine for working women. Her poems have appeared in several journals.



ARTISTS & AUTHORS

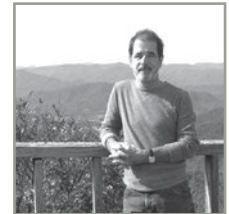
Robin Greene

Robin Greene has written two novels, *The Shelf Life of Fire* and *Augustus: Narrative of a Slave Woman*, two poetry collections, *Memories of Light and Lateral Drift*, and a nonfiction book, *Real Birth, Women Share Their Stories*. Cofounder of Longleaf Press, Greene is a former English professor, writing center director, and currently teaches writing and yoga in western North Carolina.



Michael Hettich

Michael Hettich has published a dozen books of poetry, most recently *The Mica Mine*, which won the 2020 Lena Shull Book Award from the North Carolina Poetry Society and was published in 2021. His work has appeared widely in journals. He lives in Black Mountain, North Carolina. His website is michaelhettich.com.



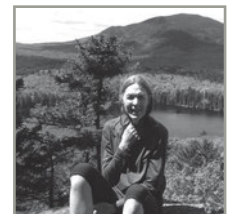
Natalie Jill

Natalie Jill's most recent work has appeared or is upcoming in *Free State Review*, *Oakland Review*, *Atlanta Review*, and *Sugar House Review*. She is a member of the PoemWorks community in the Boston area.



Susan Johnson

Susan Johnson teaches writing at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Poems of hers have recently appeared in *Rhino*, *Into The Void*, *Trampoline*, *Steam Ticket*, *Front Range Review*, *Dash*, and *SLAB*. She lives in South Hadley MA.



Narate Keys

Narate Keys is a Khmer/Cambodian poet, author and medical manual therapist (MMT) from Saint Paul, Minnesota. Keys has performed her poems in many venues, including in Washington D.C., Minnesota's The Loft Literary Springboard For The Arts Center, Saint Cloud State University, Dragon Boat Festival, May Day Festival. Keys was selected as a storytelling recipient through Twin Cities Media Alliance (TCMA).



LindaAnn LoSchiavo

Native New Yorker LindaAnn LoSchiavo creates her dreams on the page. A four-time nominee for The Pushcart Prize, her latest books are "Apprenticed to the Night" (UniVerse Press, 2023) and "Felones de Se: Poems about Suicide" (Ukiyoto, 2023).



ARTISTS & AUTHORS

Katharyn Howd Machan

Katharyn Howd Machan has been writing and publishing poetry for half a century. She lives and teaches in Ithaca, New York with her beloved spouse and fellow poet Eric Machan Howd. She directed the Feminist Women's Writing Workshops, Inc., and served as Tompkins County's first poet laureate. She belly dances.



Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz

Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz is a writer and photographer.



Michael Moreth

Michael Moreth is a recovering Chicagoan living in the micropolitan City of Sterling, the Paris of Northwest Illinois.



Irina Tall (Novikova)

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, and illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design. Her first personal exhibition "My Soul is Like a Wild Hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich.



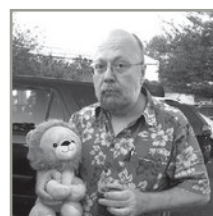
Toti O'Brien

Toti O'Brien is the Italian Accordionist with the Irish Last Name. Born in Rome, living in Los Angeles, she is an artist, musician and dancer. She is the author of *Other Maidens* (BlazeVOX, 2020), *An Alphabet of Birds* (Moonrise Press, 2020), *In Her Terms* (Cholla Needles Press, 2021), *Pages of a Broken Diary* (Pski's Porch, 2022) and *Alter Alter* (Elyssar Press, 2022).



Robert L. Penick

The poetry and prose of Robert L. Penick have appeared in well over 100 different literary journals, including *The Hudson Review*, *North American Review*, *Plainsongs*, and *Oxford Magazine*. His latest chapbook is *Exit, Stage Left*, by Slipstream Press, and more of his work can be found at theartofmercy.net



ARTISTS & AUTHORS

Jocelyn Quevedo

Jocelyn is from Patterson, CA, and has won the Seal of Multilingual Proficiency, making her fluent in English and Spanish. She currently studies at Modesto Junior College. She is majoring in language studies. She wants to continue to write poetry apart from the ones she has already written.



David Richardson

D. M. Richardson is an emerging twenty-six-year-old writer of poetry and literary fiction from Cincinnati, Ohio, working toward an undergraduate degree in Creative & Professional Writing at Maharishi International University in Fairfield, Iowa. He writes because he loves the beauty words can make and wants people to realize the uniting power beautiful art can have.



Richard Robbins

Richard Robbins was raised in California and Montana, taught for many years in Minnesota, and recently moved back west to Oregon. *Body Turn to Rain: New and Selected Poems* was published in 2017, and a new book, *The Oratory of All Souls*, will be released by Lynx House Press in January 2023. His website is <https://www.richardrobbinspoems.com>



Sandip Saha

Sandip Saha from India won three awards in India and USA and became finalist in poetry contests in the USA. He published four poetry collections, *Clashes in Human Life* by Ukiyoto Publishing, 2022; *Trial of God* and *Loving Women* by Amazon, 2021; one poetry chapbook, *Toast for Women*, Oxford, UK, 2021; and 117 poems in 38 journals in six countries.



David Anthony Sam

David Anthony Sam lives in Virginia with his wife, Linda. He has seven published collections including *Writing the Significant Soil*, Homebound Publications 2021 Poetry Prize. An eighth, *Stone Bird*, is forthcoming in 2023. Sam teaches creative writing at Germanna Community College and serves as VP of the Virginia Poetry Society. www.davidanthony.sam.com



ARTISTS & AUTHORS

Lauren Scharhag

Lauren Scharhag (she/her) is an award-winning author of fiction and poetry, and a senior editor at *Gleam*. Her titles include *Requiem for a Robot Dog* (Cajun Mutt Press) and *Languages, First and Last* (Cyberwit Press). She lives in Kansas City, MO. <https://linktr.ee/laurenscharhag>



Jacquelyn Shah

Jacquelyn “Jacsun” Shah, A.B., M.A., M.F.A., Ph.D. (English/creative writing–poetry) has published a chapbook, *small fry*, a full-length book, *What to Do with Red*, and poems in various journals and anthologies. She has written 350 centos with lines from 2360 different poets and is in love with all things quirky.



Steven M. Smith

Steven M. Smith is the author of the poetry collection *Strongman Contest* (Kelsay Books, 2021). His poems have appeared in *The Worcester Review*, *Hole in the Head Review*, *Rattle*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *The River*, *Offcourse*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Book of Matches*. He is the Writing Center Director at the State University of New York at Oswego.



Wally Swist

Wally Swist's recent poetry and translations have appeared in *Asymptote*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *The Montreal Review*, *Poetry London*, *The Seventh Quarry Poetry Magazine* (Wales), and *Transom*. A *Writer's Statements on Beauty: New & Selected Essays & Reviews* was published in 2022 by Shanti Arts. His translation of *L'Allegria/Cheerfulness: Poems 1914-1919* by Giuseppe Ungaretti is forthcoming from Shanti Arts in 2023.



J. Tarwood

J. Tarwood began as a dishwasher and ended as a teacher. After living in East Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, he lives in China, and has published six books: *The Cats In Zanzibar*, *Grand Detour*, *And For The Mouth A Flower*, *What The Waking See*, *The Sublime Way*, and *The World At Hand*.



ARTISTS & AUTHORS

Sharon Tracey

Sharon Tracey is the author of three books of poetry – *Land Marks* (Shanti Arts, November 2022), *Chroma: Five Centuries of Women Artists* (Shanti Arts, 2020), and *What I Remember Most is Everything* (All Caps Publishing, 2017). Her poems have appeared in *Radar Poetry*, *Terrain.org*, *SWWIM Every Day*, and elsewhere. sharontracey.com



Reed Venrick Venrick

Reed Venrick Venrick resides in the keys and usually writes poems with nature themes.



James Von Hendy

James Von Hendy is a senior technical writer, life coach, and poet. His poems have been accepted or have appeared most recently in the *Remington Review*, *Hubbub*, *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*, and *the Writers' Digest*. He is the author of a chapbook, *Rain Dance*. He lives in California in the beautiful Santa Cruz mountains with his wife and their cats.



Bill Wolak

Bill Wolak has just published his eighteenth book of poetry entitled *All the Wind's Unfinished Kisses* with Ekstasis Editions. His collages and photographs have appeared as cover art for such magazines as *Phoebe*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Baldhip Magazine*, & *Barfly Poetry Magazine*.



Ellen June Wright

Ellen June Wright was born in England and currently lives in Northern New Jersey. She is a retired English teacher who consulted on guides for three PBS poetry series. Her work was selected as *The Missouri Review's* Poem of the Week, and she is a Cave Canem and Hurston/Wright alumna and received 2021 and 2022 Pushcart Prize nominations.



EDITOR'S WELCOME

LOOK down, fair moon, and bathe this scene;
Pour softly down night's nimbus floods, on faces gha-
stly, swollen, purple;
On the dead, on their backs, with their arms toss'd wide,
Pour down your unstinted nimbus, sacred moon.

-Walt Whitman, from *Drum Taps*, 1865

Aji magazine was conceived when I was serving as Director of Assessment at one of New Mexico State University's campuses. Fiddling with tables and charts, I felt a strange, subtle pull: something was missing.

I've been a poet literally all of my life, focusing my graduate studies on poetry and fiction. Family and friends scratched their heads—how foolish, they thought, to put a good mind to something that wouldn't make any money.

Decades later, I'm so grateful that I didn't listen to those voices. I found something so much better. I consider it a true privilege to have lived under the roof of the humanities all these years with the company of exquisite minds, such unique, unparalleled solace whenever I was lonely, frustrated, or afraid.

I have never been interested in competing with other artists or in getting my name on a marquee. I have met too many accomplished writers and artists to believe that this would be the gold standard of success. I write when I want to write, sharing my work with those few trusted souls who will tell me the truth, and that has always been enough. Yet in 2013, I found myself hundreds of miles from the community of artists that I trusted and knew.

I wondered. Would it be possible to create a commercial-free space online where artists of all types could share their work? Would poets, fiction writers, essayists, photographers, painters, sculptures, and artisans of all descriptions be interested in submitting their work to such a publication, a publication with no institutional affiliation, no big names behind it, no elitist, exclusive agenda to achieve? I contacted several colleagues from across the U.S., from Alaska to West Virginia, and asked them if they'd be interested in helping. To my amazement, they were all in from the start. Incredibly, we were fortunate enough to have garnered the free services of our head art reviewer, web developer, and designer, Kate Redfield. It didn't take us long to get up and running. Without her, the magazine would never have come into being. Several other gifted, committed professionals joined us along the way. They never abandoned *Aji*, no matter how busy they got. I never had to twist arms.

EDITOR'S WELCOME

It has been ten years since that moment of intuition in my office in 2013. Whatever I had imagined then, it could never have equaled the beautiful collaboration of all the talented people whose images and words have graced our pages.

The tide goes in; the tide goes out. And the mysterious moon has her influence, only part of which we actually understand. At this point, our small team needs a hiatus, a break, to listen to those deep, quiet spaces within again, those that lead us toward our best, most authentic purpose and work.

Things happen in cycles, light and darkness, high and low, desert and flood, and while it may seem foolish to take a break at what appears to be a high point for us (look at this amazing issue, packed with so much beauty, talent, and unique perspective), I know it is time. Our staff need time for their own creative work. We need time to reflect deeply upon how much at this point we should continue to devote to this endeavor. Ultimately, we envision a press, but in order for one to be established, we will need to initiate some new collaborations to determine whether or not our future goals will be possible.

On that day in 2013, I knew the strong pull I felt was genuine. It came from that mysterious place all artists know. If this collaboration called *Aji* is meant to continue, we will find those connections without undue effort, without forcing. Our prior work has been completed in genuine joy with a sense of gratitude and a sense of play. If there is a good path, we will find it. In the meantime, on behalf of all *Aji* staff, I want to send out a heartfelt thanks to every person, wherever you are, who chose to send an image or your writing to us. We will not be opening submissions on May 1, 2023, so check in via email or check our website again closer to November 1, 2023 if you are interested in submitting in the future.

I know, I know. This is supposed to be a welcome, so what am I *saying*? I'm saying, welcome to *Aji*'s spring 2023 issue. There will not be an issue in November. Welcome to those days when the moon hides her face. It happens. But when the timing is right, somewhere, somehow, she will shine her light on us again.


Erin O'Neill Armendarez, Editor in Chief



A portrait of Oisín Breen, a man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a blue checkered jacket over a red shirt and a dark choker. He is standing with his arms crossed in front of a stone wall.

Heaven and the Muck: An Interview with Oisín Breen

Interview conducted by Erin O'Neill Armendarez.
Edited by William Nesbitt.

Irish poet, journalist, and PhD candidate in narratology, Oisín Breen, a Best of the Net Nominee, is published in 103 journals in twenty countries, including in *About Place*, *Door Is a Jar*, *Northern Gravy*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Books Ireland*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *La Piccioletta Barca*, *Decomp*, *New Critique*, and *Reservoir Road*. Breen's second collection, *Lilies on the Deathbed of Étaín* has just been released by Beir Bua Press and is already gathering significant praise. It follows his well-received debut *Flowers, All Sorts, in Blossom, Figs, Berries, and Fruits Forgotten* (Dreich Press, 2020).

Erin O'Neill Armendarez (EOA): According to your biographical information, you have not had much coursework in writing poetry, but honed your craft through reading and through working as a journalist.

Oisín Breen (OB): I haven't had much coursework in writing poetry per sé, but instead figured my own way out, for the most part, with reading and thinking and shaping a big deal. I'd not say that journalism shaped my writing at all, for I began writing journalism at, what, thirty? What it did was give me confidence, give me pace, give me pressure, give me an even thicker skin, and give me the benefit of working with a wonderful editor who's taught me plenty about how to be sharp when it comes to prose, and it's made me a hell of a lot better at killing those darlings.

EOA: How do you know when it's time to write a poem?

OB: It's when I have the time between all the things I do, to do so. You sit, you write. Would that I had more time to write. Beyond that, sure, there are times when something just bursts through and it's impossible not to shirk what I'm doing elsewhere and get it done, but mostly, I write when I can.

EOA: What inspires you?

OB: Everything inspires me except utterly banality, the work of poets who do nothing other than use prose to write their autobiography but do it with more line breaks, the work of poets who believe authenticity matters (I believe in craft and language and music first and foremost and solely), 90% of slam poets (they have great, if not predictable delivery mind you), and writers who think a Hallmark movie script is the basis of the meaning of life.

But otherwise? Honestly everything. Myth, hope, people, being, soul, character, the movement of an insect's wings, a moth collection, rabbits, birds, doves, space, science, chatter, arguments in bars, the songs we sing, improvisation, free association, music, jazz, classical, opera, folk, ballads, howling, tears, sadness, loss, love, family, friends, hunger, thirst, sexuality, horror, atrocity, barbarism, war, peace, the end of everything, beginnings, religion, desire, the absence of everything, apocalypses, post-apocalypses, revelation, truth, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, language, meaning, narrative, narratology, theory, thinking, history, dreams, the movement of hair in the wind, long distance travel, short travel, new cultures, architecture, paintings . . . It just goes on.

I think I'm a little bit old fashioned in that I genuinely still believe in the transformative power of art, in beauty with a capital B, in wonder, awe, and all that jazz.

EOA: Can you explain your process for writing a poem?

OB: I've got three processes, all of which happen when I find the time, and a fourth that has happened twice.

The first is my long-form work, which is closest to my heart. These are musical, formal, experimental, and thought compositions. Usually, though not always, I have a core of an idea that just sort of floats around, gets tossed around by me from time to time in conversation, albeit not necessarily as a poem idea, per se. I'll toss the brain idea around a bit, and slowly phrases will come together, thoughts, scraps, and I'll just sit a moment one day, and a few pages will fill. Usually that gets back-and-forth through my own internal editing process a while, and then hewed back to about one, and the idea becomes concrete. Then, it's not too much different from writing a novel, ABC and a lot of editing, editing, editing.

The second is the first of two for my shorter-form work. This process I call still life. I find an idea, in conversation, or in thought, or in sight, or in anything, really, go, yes, I want to write about that. I make a note of it. When I have time, I look at my ideas list, and then I spend quite a chunk of time researching the topic to get the handle of what I want, not in terms of what I want to say, but more the music of it all, the internality of it. Then, I sit, I write, and I edit.

The third is collage. I keep a document, riffings, that's full of killed darlings and phrases I liked, and thoughts, and musings, hell, even at times, post-night-out messages to myself, or moments where a sentence boils over and I email it to myself. Then, sometimes, I rip out, say, four pages' worth of the things and jumble them up, play with them, and find what the jigsaw is telling me it is.

The random fourth? Twice, once with the final chapter of a long-form piece ("Her Cross, Carried Burnt," the concluding piece in my debut) and once with a poem, "As Stones Fall," published in *Gyroscope Review* last year. Twice, the work came to me in a dream, and I woke, and had to almost scratch my eyes out to keep myself awake while spluttering the words out into a Dictaphone.

EOA: I understand that you are writing a doctoral dissertation focused on the structure of narrative. How has this work informed your poetry, if at all?

OB: There is no such thing as a closed system, aside from theoretically, everything is inter-relational, there is no center to an object, everything is nodal, the theory of preferential attachment (nodes with

more connections gather more connections), the idea of minimal and maximal narratives. Yes, these certainly inform how I see the world. I don't see anything as merely causal, or as self-contained, so it's probably fair to say that my work is influenced by the belief that everything is malleable, everything is flexible, everything bleeds into everything else, and the universe is not homuncular, that is to say that it is not reducible to the sum of its parts. So, in a sense, it's the romance of the research, rather than its deep, deep analysis that provides additional spark, much the same way as I always found algebra and calculus quite beautiful, the latter especially for that curved line that never reaches zero, the null point.

EOA: Are you trying to capture or project a sort of cultural ethos, a lens on the culture of your time, a sort of criticism or response to the present moment? Or are you endeavoring more to place the current psyche into the collective memory of the mythic past?

OB: I do love writers that try to project, capture, and develop a cultural ethos, a lens, and an engagement. I find that quite beautiful, as long as it remains high-level, higher-order, or approaching that level of wonder.

I don't aspire to have a lens on the culture of my time. I aspire to make art, and if one piece is a lens on today and another is a lens on an eleventh-century medieval British eel collector (eels were used as currency), then that's what it's about. Indeed, my big work-in-progress is about a Christian suicide bomber. Why? I thought it would be interesting, and I'm really enjoying writing it. Recently I finished the part of it that responds to Yeats' "Innisfree."

I guess I rail (and perhaps that is a response to the present age) against the idea of a poet being XYZ, or responding to XYZ, or having to be authentically XYZ. For me a poet *is*, and they *are*, and their role, their responsibility, is solely to the *work*, and as to its use, its purpose, its societal value? That's other people's business.

As to whether I'm endeavoring more to place the current psyche into the collective memory of the mythic past . . . no.

For me, instead, myth is an ecosystem of multiple iterations of life and self and being, through time, and myth is *alive* today. I'm not endeavoring to place the current psyche into the collective memory of the mythic past, because I don't believe in the mythic past. I believe in the mythic *present* and *always*, so I feel the human psyche is inseparable from myth.

EOA: Is there anything you want your work to provide to the present moment, or carry into, or carry from?

OB: What I'd love to help spark is two-to-three-fold. First, I'd love poets to get over the whole accessibility thing, which I think is dull, dumb, and insulting to the working classes. It also has created a vision in the modern eye among the non-poets (most of the people I spend time with are not poets) of poetry as absolutely mind-numbingly dull (and often readings are, most are, if I'm being honest).

So I'd love to play a part in getting people confident to give the middle finger to the thirty-year long embrace, longer really, of simple accessible ordinary poetry, and push for the big meaty topics—to go big again. Remember the audiences Dylan Thomas got. I'm optimistic. I think big poetry could get those audiences again.

I guess I like my writers to go big or go home. Big thematically is just as valid as big in scope, and you

can go big with a work about a tomato just as much as a work about seventeen generations of one family.

EOA: You said most poetry readings are not exciting. What would you like to see change?

OB: I'd love to contribute to changing two things. One, getting event organizers to be tougher on duration. Let's stop doing these horror marathons of fifteen poets in 1.5 hours. We all know no one can do that. We all just sort of sit there, dead after twenty minutes. Organizers, put in breaks! Big breaks. Thirty-to-forty-five-minute breaks! Where we can drink beer, enjoy our night out, talk about the poems, ignore the poems, slap each other on the shoulders, laugh, make friends, flirt, kiss, leave, come back, hug, then get one poet, fifteen to twenty minutes, and another forty-five-minute break. Three to four poets max . . . Ah, so much better.

And, the other part? Actual performance. Intonation, diction, pronunciation, loudness, passion, movement. I don't learn my work off the page. Maybe I should, but I'm lazy about it. So I'm fine with holding a page (though not a phone; you look like a prat reading poetry off a phone), but move your free hand in rhythm, hear the music of your words, look up between words, make eye contact, stamp your feet, stamp up storms, yell, put on accents, howl, scream, intone, use your diaphragm. . . Push! There's nothing sadder than a brilliant writer who stands there, eyes down and talks so, so quietly. Hell, I've been hard of hearing all my life thanks to a birth defect, so if you talk softly, I hear nothing.

Also, event organizers, please, please use the damn microphones if the reader can't read loudly. This is the one thing slam poets (yes, I said one thing) tend to be good at—loudness. They get that there is an audience there for a good time, even if they all seem to learn how to read from the same YouTube video, given they all adopt this slightly feverish North Atlantic accent with a fast clippiness and an obsession with rhyming three syllable words. Regular poets often have identical delivery, I'll also admit. There's a particular male delivery, a bit like a low-rent version of Corso reading "Bomb," this deep but flat, no cadence, no fire rhythm, and that should change too. I'd love to contribute to changing those things, injecting passion, injecting a willingness to go big, and injecting a willingness to perform.

A shoutout to Jim Ferguson and Derek Brown, who have been doing some stonkingly good shows in Glasgow lately, at which I had the privilege to perform last week.

EOA: Critics have compared your style and themes to those of James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, particularly Joyce. Do you believe these are accurate comparisons?

OB: I love Eliot's work, but I don't actually think I write like him very much, if at all; I'm more like Pound, but still not like him. These are of the English school. They're colder, beautiful, wonderful, but they have this measured old school poetic tempo, this ra-tum-ra-tum thing going. They aren't truly feverish. I love what they do, but I don't think we're similar really, parallel perhaps. And I'm not saying I'm as good or whatever; that's very much for others to decide, and for far, far, far, in the future. I'd love to be compared to them after I'm dead, but the probability of that is extraordinarily slim.

I definitely share things with Joyce. Again, not comparing myself in quality. He's a genius. Love Joyce. He's funny as hell, too. So yes, I am extremely willing to play with language, to distort it, to manipulate it, to create new words, to limit myself to avoid words, to try and recontextualize language, so, yes, in that sense, I think it's very much an accurate comparison. That said, we don't share subject matter, style,

formal style, writing approach, nor do we write about the same content or have the same sort of interest content wise.

EOA: Writers like Eliot and Joyce have demanded quite a bit from their readers without apology. Chris Edgoose of *Wood Bee Poet* confesses that he is “exhausted” after reading your first book *Flowers, All Sorts, In Blossom Figs, Berries, and Fruits Forgotten* (Hybrid/Dreich 2020), and that perhaps you and some others (he is placing you next to the Modernists here) are guilty of ethno-exclusivity meant primarily for readers of “shared heritage.” Does that bother you at all?

OB: Due to the extraordinary power of the North American soft power through media etc., universities here, and normal discourse here, from pub to church, has/have become imbued, both among the well-intentioned, and the idiotic crazies, with North American rules or taboos that don't actually translate. As an aside, there is an aspect of North American culture that presumes its references are normal and not culturally specific, but they are culturally specific. I think Batman is ridiculous. I know nothing about baseball beyond the World Series in the twenties was rigged at some point and that Babe Ruth hits things hard with a bat. I hate Marvel culture.

So North American ideas of race, privilege, power, culture don't always translate, and they don't always apply outside of the North American sphere, and I have to engage with this around ethno-exclusivity, because this is very much a case of the imperial power trying to assert its normalcy as the status quo in discourse.

There is a rather vast difference between the Irish and the Irish Americans. I'm not Irish American. I'm Irish; I am post-colonial, which includes a history of suffering from colonial pillaging, dominance, oppression, famine, genocide, and we got our freedom from our oppressors at around the same time as most other post-colonial nations, and struggled similarly for some time. This is my cultural background, whereas an Irish American's sense of identity seems from the outside to be nowadays all about barbeques and the Chicago river dyed green.

Do I think there's a “shared heritage” issue with my writing in that it might be harder to understand or unpack? Absolutely not. Sure, there's things you won't pick up if you don't know the myths, but reading poetry isn't about understanding every single item 100%. It's not a logic puzzle: It's music, it's sound, it's shape, it's images, it's whatever it leaves you with when you're done. That's the wonder of it.

Also, I'd argue that I could therefore ask every US citizen if mentioning the L-train, or a reference I've no idea about is ethno-exclusivist. As an aside, the purpose of art, I'd argue, isn't to be ethically “good” or “bad”—I don't buy the didactic thing at all—it's to be art, so whether it is easy to access or not is irrelevant.

I don't read Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende, or Borges and expect that every single nuance will be known to me. Frankly, I don't care. I read them because I love how they move me.

Hell, besides that, if the reader has to look something up (in the age of Google, heavens), then so be it. That's not ethno-exclusivity; it's the presumption of a dictionary and a willingness to expand your conceptual lexis.

Anyway, does it bother me that Chris wrote what he did? Absolutely not. I love discourse. Does it bother me being asked? Again, nope, love it. It bothers me when I'm presumed to be the same, when I am and I am not. I am both the same and not.

EOA: Who do you write to or for?

OB: I write to make art. Plain and simple.

I want people to read it. I want people to love it. I want people to be moved by it. But I write to make art. My responsibility is to the art.

EOA: What are the responsibilities of your readers?

OB: Frankly, I'd say none. They have no responsibility, no duty of care, and no perfect reading. I think the reader's "responsibility" is different to the human's responsibility. I do think humans have a responsibility to work, to think, to learn, to cultivate and inculcate learning and passion and desire, and to try new things, and so on and so forth. Hell, we owe it to the past and the future, and, in that sense, sure, readers have responsibilities by proxy—as long as they aren't coming from some horrid situation that made it impossible—to know how to read, to be willing to learn new words, etc. etc., but that's different.

The reader themselves? Their responsibility is literally this: To feel and to be.

EOA: I interviewed a poet a few issues back, a highly successful poet, who asserted that poetry should have no recognizable component of narrative, or else it becomes prose. This shocked me. I asked him, "What of Tennyson? And Keats? Wordsworth and Coleridge?" And, of course, countless others. He responded by saying that the poetry world needs to come up with clearer definitions for what poetry actually is and is not. This confused me, as I'd assumed we all agree on what it is, although like varying genres of music, not all genres of poetry operate in the same way.

OB: Do I agree with the prior interviewee on narrative and poetry? Nope, I don't. I think that's hogwash. The idea that narrative is particular to prose is both ridiculous and badly concocted from a theoretical point of view. Narrative at its base relies on a moment of disequilibrium between two states of equilibrium, roughly speaking, per most theorists. At an even simpler level, it is the application of change, or amplification to one subject or object, S, so that it becomes either a new scenario S + another variable, or a changed scenario/subject/object/what-have-you, i.e., S2. All language, to transmit meaning, also requires the surprisal, that is to say, an element of chaos in order and order in chaos, without which it is simply white noise. All meaning has a shape, a sound, a music, and a spirit being. A poem by definition carries these values. It contains subjects, events, actions, states, moments, change, the movement of time. All art is narrative.

EOA: Where, if anywhere, would you classify yourself among contemporary poets/writers?

OB: Haven't a sodding clue. Was looking for that for years and gave up. I find common ground with poets and writers aged between eighteen and 232. The main area of common ground is we believe in craft above all else, and share that vision of a truth beyond epistemology. The truth beyond all that. A World-Truth. The truth of craft. The truth of the maker, the making, and the made.

I've not met anyone living that writes the way I do, which isn't to say I'm great, or not, or that they don't exist; it's just that it's pretty different. Are there living poets I like or admire or share views with? Aye many, I certainly am on communicative terms with probably two dozen. Are we a school? Lord, no. We write very differently. But there's respect.

Perhaps avant-garde? That might fit. I'd argue, though, that in the whole (this is such a cliché thing to say!) fragmented/2.0/3.0/decentralized/resplit/conjoined/digitized world of the internet age and so on, do schools exist anymore? Or do we just have "consensus mainstream," "non-consensus mainstream," and "other?" In that case, I'd position myself right now as "other." It's probably the coolest place to be, if not the most lucrative.

EOA: Recently, your second book was released, *Lilies on the Deathbed of Étaín & Other Poems* (Beir Bua, 2023). Congratulations on this impressive accomplishment. Can you share with us a bit about your new book in terms of theme, structure, and/or style?

OB: Thank you for the congratulations, very much obliged. Equally, the work is gathering pretty widespread acclaim, and I love that. I'm delighted by it. Thrilled that people are seeing the visions, the music (most of all this), and loving and living with it. I also love the fact that I'm aware one or two passages have completely turned on some people.

The book is a tailored selection of two long-form pieces and four shorter (well, for me) works.

Of the pieces themselves, one is a few years old, and addresses the way in which we can be totally all-encompassing swallowed as a spirit, soul, and flesh by love, how it can inch into every pore and swallow us up, beautifully, sadly, horrifically, and, also joyously. This piece is also a few years older than the long work that opens the book. It is, I feel, hugely sonically different. It definitely leans into the strange, the experimental, the post-linguistic, but I feel it successfully remains rooted. So the drive behind it was to make music.

The poem that opens the book is inspired very simply by a very straight fact. My oldest friend sadly lost his mother several years ago. At the funeral he held up brilliantly. He was sagacious, funny, urbane, dry, loving, honest, sincere, and just a pure rock. At the committal, however, when the curtain fell on the coffin, I saw him break in two. Equally, however, one word leapt to my face, and I couldn't shake the memory of how he appeared. The word was *godstruck*, and in the end I had no choice but to write, and hope he wouldn't hate me for it. Thankfully, he loves the work. So, I blended that notion of godstruck love and motherloss, with the sexuality of a young woman and her young courtier (something we forget when we discuss mother and father love, oftentimes), and that somehow got me onto the Irish myth cycle of Tochmarc Étaíne, which ended up a natural fit, strangely enough.

Of the remaining pieces, one directly relates to discussion and research with my friend who comes from a family of Donegal tweed spinners, but is himself a physicist, and a legendary chap. Our words have more than once given me inspiration, and the migrant potato-digging trade from Donegal to Fife in Scotland is so wrought with sadness, I couldn't resist covering it. The best part of it is when a Donegal chap wrote to me to thank me for its accuracy. The research was suddenly extremely well-rewarded. A piece on ducks actually owes its genesis to an ekphrastic prompt, but I ended up going off-piste, and I love thinking about the hidden hardships and hidden joys of things. The hard, hard reality of baby

ducks coming to mallardhood/ladyduckhood is one of those almost too twee tragic stories. So many die, hunted, killed, lost. Again, it seemed a natural fit to linger on the thought of the few remaining from a duck family (two actually) after the first season passes and the trauma they endure. It's something that occurs every year, and we always miss it.

The second to last poem, again, fits I suppose what's something of an MO, namely digging deeply into the senses, sexuality, and feeling of events that are less often considered, in this case, making an anti-love poem, or a piece that addresses the hot frisson of a situation where two people, certainly attracted to each other, do not kiss, do not share a relationship, do not do anything beyond one momentary instance of near touch, and then nothing more.

Lastly, as with the duck poem, my lady and I took a wonderful trip a while back to the Isle of May, and it inspired a cycle of puffin poems. I read up on how puffins live, on the great mass puffin death events over the last twenty years, and on the sheer bloody mindedness those poor beautiful birds must exhibit to survive, and couldn't resist. Overall, the assemblage of these pieces each deals with meaning, love, loss, terror, sensuality, ideation, being and becoming, and the soul, and each does so without addressing that which is obvious, so they all work as a natural pair, I hope.

Theme? It contains multitudes, but hopefully how I work thematically has come across here.

Structure? All of them. I play.

Style? Language-as-music, language-as-form, experimental, playful, melodic, aggressive, passionate, loving, slow, allegro, lento . . .

What it ain't: Detailed descriptive work detailing contemporary stories about people texting each other at bus stops after eating beans.

What it is: Heaven and the muck, made music, hopefully beautifully.





AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMIE NAKAGAWA BOLEY

Jamie Nakagawa Boley is a Japanese Choctaw American Indian interdisciplinary artist and writer, working with painting, video, photography, and installation. Her practice is deeply connected to the landscape of the San Joaquin Valley and its foothills. Her work has been included in numerous exhibitions, including *Standing In the Gap*, Anita S. Wooten Gallery, and Valencia College, Orlando, Florida (2020); *Mother to Mother, Virtually — Knots & Nodes*, SAIC, Chicago, IL, 2020 Art Crush, SAIC Columbus Gallery, Chicago IL 2018. She holds an M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2019) and an M.A. in Studio Art from CSU-Fresno (2017), where she currently teaches and curates exhibitions for the Clovis community college gallery. She lives in Visalia, CA.

-jamienakagawabley.net/about

(Above) “Minni Ocouojou”, Lakota Translation Planters by the Water, Jamie Nakagawa Boley, oil on wood panels 8’ x 16’



"Minnie Ektah Ooweh", Jamie Nakagawa Boley, oil on wood panel, 2017

Erin Schalk (ES): Please share with us how you came to be a visual artist:

Jamie Nakagawa Boley (JNB): It started when I was a child. [I experienced] anxiety, and I would have a hard time focusing.

When I would make art in school, for example a drawing or an art project, they seemed to shine. I seemed to notice things like shadows or light – they stood out. Also, certain moments came to my memory. But then with other things, my memory is just gone, [those] would just dissipate.

Also, I was a really good reader. Reading saved me. I couldn't stop. I would just read and read. My sister and I shared a room, and she said it was very irritating because my books went all the way to the ceiling! My parents made a whole wall into a bookshelf for me.

I think in the process of reading, you enter that world of imagination, you go into those places, and you travel all over the world. Writers take you to all of these different places. Likewise, I am an artist that has lots of ideas. You know how we're taught as artists if you can imagine it, you can create it?

In my twenties, I was told, "Oh, Jamie, you have so many ideas...press down your ideas." I tried to stop reading, I tried to be an "adult" and not escape, tried to "grow up." But, I realize something now: those ideas and being an artist is something exciting. The idea that you can imagine something and you can actually create it is very liberating. Reading was really that ticket into another world, and art was the medium for me.

ES: In recent years, your creative work has expanded; you are a visual artist as well an emerging curator. Tell us more about your curatorial practice.

JNB: When I was at a masters graduate program at Fresno State, I had curated a show with James Luna, a Native American artist from California. One of my first classes at Fresno was a theory class, and we

looked at Luna's Artifact Piece. My minor is in Native American Indian studies, and I am Choctaw and Chickasaw through my grandmother. I am Japanese-American and European also. I was immediately able to understand [Artifact Piece] because I knew the language, I could read it, I knew what he was doing and what he was saying.

[Fresno State] is a small graduate program, and I was looking at Chicago Art Institute and watching what they were doing, and they were bringing in guest artists. So, I very naively contacted [Luna] and asked him to come to my school. And he did!

I curated a show and brought this incredible artist – James Luna – and he was amazing. I invited another graduate student to help me who is very talented, and so we curated a show with James Luna. That was my first introduction to curating shows.

Currently, I am an adjunct professor at Fresno State University, and I was also approached by Clovis Community College. [At Clovis], there was an opportunity to curate shows, so I walked into it and started curating.

I believe in the platform of the arts. I believe that we, as a culture, are primed for the arts. That the arts are a perfect space. Why not utilize the arts in a way that can be inviting to these students, to the faculty, and to the community where I live?

I think as an instructor, we are always curating. When we're bringing artists and introducing them into our courses. I think of that as curating. When you're planning your classes – whether it's art history, even studio – and you're talking to your students and introducing them to these artists, you are curating.

The premise behind it: sometimes we wait, and we only introduce artists that are [a part of] art history. But, rather than wait for art history to choose, I want to choose the artists. Why do we always have to wait for art history to say who is a great artist?

ES: Please share more with us about your visual artwork. What are some of the media, ideas, content, and history that inform your work?

JNB: I'll start with *Minnie Ektah Ooweh*, which I've only shown three times.

[*Minnie Ektah Ooweh*], translated "Come to the Water," was always meant to be broken apart, because it's sixteen feet long and eight feet tall.

It's four panels, and there's meant to be a gap between them. I usually like gaps between the panels, and there's a reason why: it's almost to breathe, for my work to breathe. And, I like the image to fall apart. So, these are two important things for me in my work.

Originally, this piece was a diptych. It was four feet by eight feet, and I would make it bigger, and I turned it into [a piece] that was sixteen feet long.

From my statement about the work:

"[Minnie Ektah Ooweh] was one of my earlier paintings, and I found myself in search of understanding as to how land and memory came into meaning.



"Standing in the Gap", Jamie Nakagawa Boley, oil on wood panel, 2017

When my father died, I found myself seeking solace in the land where my eyes could find rest. I'll never forget driving with the intent to see him one last time, being so overcome with sorrow, that I was unable to speak. Looking out the car window, I looked out into the farmland, and suddenly a field with blue-black soil under gray skies caught my gaze. It was so un-extraordinary, and maybe to some, mundane and forgettable, but to me, it was the most beautiful thing. The skies were gray above an empty, desolate field of deep blue-black soil with a small area of water running between it, and wild brush growing alongside it. This painting, and my previous painting, found a way from that memory. I don't really like how static and heavy it is, and if not for the gap between the panels, I would feel as if I could not breathe.

And strangely, every time I look at this painting, a deep longing and sorrow comes over me. And, so maybe I just don't like what was caught in the pigment, as a reminder of missed moments and life's regrets.

Moving to Minnie Ocoujou, the Lakota translation is "Planters by the Water." [This was] painted in an attempt to ease out of the heaviness of my first painting. But instead, it became even bigger and more expansive.

Mixed media works on paper and wood panels, time-based media land works investigating reality impacted by ideologies immersed in colonialism, racism, imperialism, and there in the works, between the pages, along the margins, through lives seemingly lost in a reflection of history as in fragments, ruins, and uncertainty thus revealed."

ES: Is there another of your artworks you'd like to share with us?

JNB: I'll discuss Standing in the Gap. It's oil on wood panel, and I painted it in 2017.

[*Standing in the Gap* depicts] the St. John's river that's full to the very brim, due to the recent flooding in Fresno and the California Central Valley.

I went back to school later in life. My daughter was struggling, and we had her children and were taking care of them. It was really hard to go to school and take care of the kids. I was having so much anxiety. I would cry, and I would pray.

The [St. John's river] is only about fifteen minutes away from my home. I'd get to about this spot, and I would be praying. By the time I got here, I would have this peace.

In the Central Valley, there's an agricultural area. We're actually above a huge aquifer of water that runs underneath us. When they created these dams, they drained the lake, so now we have these rivers that run through, and this is one of them. Usually it's dry most of the time. We've been in this drought for several years, and I've been documenting that drought. I was probably documenting that drought before we even knew there was a drought!

The farmers left these [waterways] alone because you can see the natural vegetation that grows, and you can see these little trees that will grow along. This [painting depicts one of these waterways], and they're really beautiful.

I used to think, "Is that just art history that clings to me? Western history?" And I would see [the water], and it would just give me some peace. Eventually, I would investigate and realize that's the St. John's river. Once a year, there would be an overflow, and you would see the water. Through the years I was going to graduate school, I would come across this.

I would come closer and closer to this water. Eventually, I'd get permission and climb into that land. I started to walk the land, and I have it documented. When I was going to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, my final thesis was on me walking that land.

But, those little birds – they are everyone in my family. I didn't do that consciously, but I realized when I finished painting, that is the exact amount of my whole family, my children, my childrens' children, my husband, and me. And there we are, we're staked on that one little fence.

Most of my work is the land, and most of my work has water in it. Strangely enough, my name is Jamie Nakagawa Boley, and "Nakagawa" means "middle river" [in Japanese]. The water is very symbolic to me. To me, an essence to it about God. It's very spiritual for me.

There's a poem I wrote for this piece:

*My fears fall away
no longer encompassing me in a land of need.
In a place where the waters flood my soul...
again and again, I cry out to God.
We are ten small birds waiting,
now freed from the snares of this life.*

Selah

ES: Speaking of poems, how does writing inform your creative practice? What's next for you?

JNB: I think that the writing helps me a lot, actually. It helps my installation and gives me quite a bit of direction. It's really a mapping.

My Japanese grandfather was a farmer and a writer, and I have a lot of farming in my blood. He went to the University of Hawai'i and became a farmer in Kona. He was also a poet and wrote haiku. So, [the writing is] there inside me. That love of the land is there inside me from both sides. My mother loves the land also.

Someone asked me if I thought this fascination I have with the land could sustain me. It caused me to pause, but I believe it will, because I haven't gotten tired of it yet.

In terms of installation with my work, I created a piece called Winyan Omnicha, the "Gathering of the Women." This was part of my graduate thesis at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. It was also part of a beautiful show with Joy Harjo [the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States]. Her poetry was all over the walls, so it was really an honor to be in this show.

The title of the show was *All Words Have Roots*. It was interesting, because I brought in tree roots! So, I got a kick out of it – that my tree roots, I dragged to Chicago – were in there, and I love those tree roots.

[The tree roots are] a metaphor of this unhealthy culture entrapped in warped and twisted roots, development disrupted by the hard-pan soil of a hidden history of violence, greed, and sorrow. Sometimes, as the wise farmer told me, the orchard must be removed, and all its trees and roots ripped out. Only then can the fallow ground be broken.

Ultimately, I am very fascinated with the hidden history, and the history that always happened alongside the history that was told. It was always here.



MORE FROM JAMIE NAKAGAWA BOLEY

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REVIEW: *The Golden Dot*

Corso, Gregory.

Edited by Raymond Foye and George Scrivani.

Lithic Press, 2022. 182 pp.

\$20.00.

Review by William Nesbitt

A member of the Beat Generation, Gregory Corso served his first jail sentence at thirteen in The Tombs, a nickname for the infamous Manhattan Detention Complex. At seventeen, he received a multiyear prison sentence at Clinton Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison in upstate New York, for stealing a suit. However, Corso put the time to excellent use and immersed himself in reading the classics and poetry. Cut off from family, Corso passed through various abusive foster situations and orphanages, eventually finding his family with Beat writers such as Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac. Age, hard living, and a lifetime of substance abuse caught up with Corso on January 17, 2001 when terminal prostate cancer overcame him.

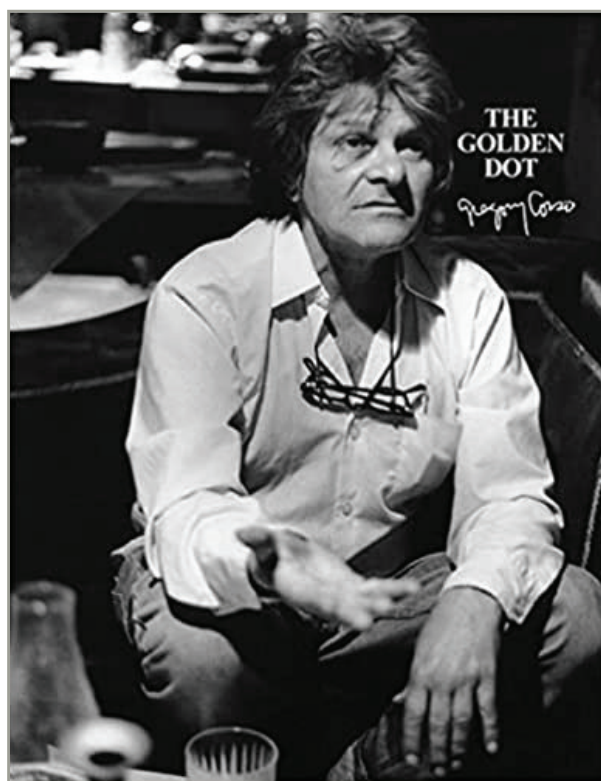
Nothing seems to have come easily for Corso and *The Golden Dot* is no different. Raymond Foye explains that Corso “struggled with his final manuscript . . . for the last twenty years of his life.” Corso willed the manuscript to two friends, a married couple. When Roger Richards died in 2002, Irvyne Richards became reclusive, unwilling to turn over the manuscript to Foye and eventually refusing to communicate with him at all. In the meantime, Foye feared the manuscript would burn up due to Richards’ chain smoking. She held onto the manuscript until her death in 2020 at which point Foye contacted Richards’ stepdaughter, Hillary, and at long last obtained access to the manuscript.

Although Foye calls it “a carefully shaped final manuscript” in his introduction, Foye and George Scrivani concede in their editorial note that “the typescript was not a finished work, in the sense that Corso was never able to prepare the book for publication.” Corso was known to engage in last minute intensive editing close to the final deadline. Thus, “the rawness of Corso’s manuscript is an inherent part of this book.” One indication is, as Foye recounts, “how very few poems have titles—perhaps only half a dozen out of a hundred or more.” In these instances, the editors use the first line or part of it as a title. “Corso often spent years revising a poem,” but he began to compose poems written in a single shot, indicated by “the date of composition, and often even the exact time.” According to Foye, “Corso called these ‘diary poems’ and he was extremely unsure of them.”

To be clear, *The Golden Dot* is not a corraling of various wild poems that have been bucking around through the decades. Foye and Scrivani explain that “The typescript we are working from is a very specific one that Corso composed between 1997 and 2000.” Still, as a whole, the book feels very journalistic. These poems are in the moment, in-process, raw, and rough with moments and stretches of poetic insight.

The first two lines of the opening poem evidence the looseness of the collection: “*first page of book; all other pages / have no order, ergo a shuffle poem—corso.*” (It’s interesting to see the mild but lingering influence of Burroughs and his cut-ups in that declaration). Though there may not be a strict order, there are recurring themes throughout the volume orienting and uniting it. For example, Corso documents his relationship with alcohol and public readings in four separate poems. In one poem, the narrator states, “I swore off the drink now that I’ve ceased reading aloud / poems to an audience of strangers.” In this same poem, the narrator explains that “I am unable to read aloud what was written from / the soul’s very depth—I learned to read the poems that caused laughter.” About twenty pages later, this idea recirculates in the lines “Topsy I dare only read poems that brought laughter.” A page later, the next poem recycles these thoughts and says,

“The thought of getting up on stage / and read my most private inner feelings / to an audience I believe hates me / urges me to get plastered” (Why *read* and not *reading*? These occurrences contribute to the unpolished feel of *The Golden Dot*). Finally, a poem near the end of the collection redistributes this theme yet again and recalls that “I have to get drunk to read” and “I read the funny ones, to make people happy.” In another cluster of poems, Corso writes, “Truth you need not remember / But your lies are insufferably unforgettable” and nineteen pages later rephrases that as “Truth is unforgettable / Lies are forgettable.” There becomes a sense, then, that Corso may have been writing multiple first drafts and/or exploring which poem to insert a key idea into.



Age, mortality, and the passing of friends are other subjects that continually resurface in *The Golden Dot*. Six poems list the narrator’s age as sixty-seven. Another three state the narrator’s age as seventy. There are multiple poems about the speaker’s hair “turning white overnight.” Ginsberg, one of Corso’s oldest friends, passed in 1997. *The Golden Dot* memorializes him both by naming him specifically and manifesting his poetic influence. The epigraph of “Elegium Catullus/Corso,” the book’s second poem, is “*for Allen Ginsberg*,” and it is a fond remembrance and celebration of Ginsberg. In a later poem, readers will recognize the line “the best minds of his generation are dead” as a clear callback to the famous opening line of Ginsberg’s *Howl*: “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness.” Corso references Ginsberg’s “I Am a Victim of Telephone” with his own poem about the intrusiveness of phones. In a final line as relevant—perhaps more so—now as then, Corso asks, “why not disconnect? Yes.”

“The Day My Father Died” in which Corso considers his father’s passing at eighty-eight is one of the best poems. Corso’s father had been brutal to him, “a horror to live with,” yet Corso is “joyed / to

have made up with him.” Still, the memory is tainted as Corso’s father calls him by the incorrect name of “Dominick.”

Despite the seriousness of most of these poems and the specter of mortality, ill health, and death that hangs over many of them, there are moments of humor and hope. For example, in “Two funny things I worried about in life...,” the speaker says, “First: I wanted to be a better poet than Southey / Next: I wanted to be a better person than Nixon / What low goals!” Later, Corso prophesizes and warns us that “I’m not going / to lie to you, the coming years are going to be very tough.” However, he lightens these ominous lines two poems later proclaiming, “I got 3 years to / go to hit the year 2000— / I feel something wondrous is gonna happen.”

Collectively, these poems straddle the line between profound and pedestrian. Although I feel they skew more towards the former, readers can make up their own minds about these various lines and quick riffs pulled from throughout *The Golden Dot*: “imagining things differently until / it all bends like memory into another day,” “What I don’t know / I know well” (a line Gary Snyder might be proud of), “Big dreams are living proof of broken hearts,” “he created a limit and called it God,” “I gave you a fire / you’ve yet to understand—,” “all that does not exist is infinite—,” “our time is going / The ship is sinking,” “nobody’s poetry sucks,” “There is more what isn’t than what is,” and “So you die, big deal; you have no idea you’re dead.”

Foye points out that previous Corso volumes tend to run much shorter than *The Golden Dot*. If Corso had the chance to continue working on the collection, cut a third to half of the material, and make final revisions on the remaining poems, one imagines the following poem would have been dumped: “The drums are bleating / somebody in hut 8 is cheating / O yeah, O yeah, the goats are bleating / somebody in hut 8 is cheating.” While there is a sense of immediacy, clarity, and playfulness in the writing, does it live up to the standard Corso’s previous work establishes?

If readers judge this as a final and perfected book, there may be some disappointment. If we can come to this text and view it as a draft, a working manuscript representing Corso’s most current—albeit unfinished—vision and pick out whichever individual dreams may appeal to us, we will find satisfaction and sometimes pleasure.





Sandip Saha, Grand Island Reef, Cairns, Australia

Hands in Blood: Thank You, Robert Creeley

The Class

Robert Creeley walked in and scribbled a poem on the slate blackboard in the front of the classroom. He'd composed it on his hour-long trip from his home in Ithaca.

I don't remember the poem, but I do remember it was classic Creeley—short, concise lines, with a cryptic, sardonic edge.

In our fifteen-week semester, this was the only original poem that Creeley ever shared with us. And after he wrote it, Creeley explained how he'd arrived at each word and every line break. I was mesmerized.

As a graduate student in the early 1980s at SUNY-Binghamton, now Binghamton University, I'd signed up for the class, not knowing what to expect. Robert Creeley was a visiting professor, and his class "Projectivist Poetry" was a one-time offering, so there were no former students to offer the lowdown. I'd signed up because Creeley was, in my view, a poetry superstar, someone I'd studied in college—along with giants like Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

We were about ten students. I was my second year of graduate studies, working towards an M.A. in Literature with a creative thesis. My focus: poetry.

Still in my twenties, I was married to another graduate student, and we'd arrived here together after unsuccessfully trying to market our B.A.s in English. We had a two-year-old son, who attended the campus preschool mornings, when most of our classes were scheduled. Then, we'd trade off his care for afternoon classes, like this one.

The class met at 2:00 every Tuesday, for two hours—an unfortunate hour, mid-afternoon, when student energy was at its lowest.

Bob—as he later asked us to call him—usually arrived five to ten minutes late, and he inevitably carried a stack of books that he'd checked out of the Ithaca public library.

Then, he'd pull his chair over to the side of his desk and go through the books, one by one, flipping through pages he'd earmarked, and slowly reading passages from these pages aloud. Sometimes he'd offer commentary on what he'd read, providing a sort of informal lecture.

And from these books and his rambling commentaries, I confess that I remember little.

This was a weird teaching strategy, especially as Robert Creeley—who'd known Charles Olson and had worked alongside him during the time that Projectivist verse enjoyed currency—contributed almost nothing of his own personal experience. Had he put his earmarked library books on reserve for his students to read on their own, we might have learned more from them. Had he not rambled on with commentary but rather talked about his personal history with Olson, about the Black Mountain School, or about his own poetry and the influence Projectivist verse had on his work, students would have been fascinated. At least, I would have been.

Sometimes if a student dozed, Creeley would walk over to continue his ramblings at the sleeping student's desk, and when the student snapped awake, Creeley would pop out his glass eye and roll it around his palm.

This gesture was memorable. And most importantly, it woke up not only the dozing student but also the rest of the class.

For the entire two-hours, Bob spoke in a monotone, offering little that might have sparked our enthusiasm or engagement—except, as I noted, when he noticed sleeping students and rose from his seat to do his glass-eye-palm-rolling routine.



Connection

That said, our classroom connection allowed me to approach Bob about becoming my thesis advisor. I'd been struggling to finish my own collection of poems, due before the semester's end, and needed to find a faculty member to head up my thesis committee. And perhaps because I was one of the more attentive students—successfully fighting sleep—Bob agreed.

About a month into the semester, Bob and I began to meet every week in his office, an inauspicious cinderblock room in the basement of one of the ugliest campus buildings. It wasn't decorated or personalized—possibly because as a visiting professor Bob was only using the office temporarily. But as he sat behind his desk and I sat in front of it, he'd read my poems aloud to me, respectfully stopping to ask questions.

Bob was a nice guy. Early on, I could see that. And he was a quiet, inwardly-turned man, thoughtful and modest—not full of the ego and bravado that powered some of my less-famous professors.

Then, one afternoon as we were working on my poems, Bob and I got into a more personal conversation. He asked me about my background before coming to grad school. And as I recounted my jobs—as a typesetter, a salesgirl, and a veterinarian's assistant—he stopped me and asked that I talk more about my work with animals.

I'd written a poem about spaying a female dog only to find that her uterus was full of puppies. I told him how people regularly brought in dogs for spaying, faining surprise about their dog's pregnancy. The doctor and I would end up aborting the puppies along with spaying the mom.

At one point, I explained to Bob that I'd enjoyed opening up animals—not to abort puppies—but to have my hands in blood, to see an animal's inner workings.



Hands in Blood

"Hands in blood," Bob repeated. "That's what your poetry's about." And he dropped the pencil he'd been holding onto the desk and stood up, pacing for a moment around his small office.

I recognized the truth of what he said, realizing that like in his poems, he'd distilled my creative essence in a phrase.

I remember little else about that semester. Bob helped me to edit what became an unremarkable collection of poems but a successfully-presented thesis. I received my M.A.

And over the years, I stayed in connection with Bob until his death in 2005. In his last email to me, he wrote that he'd just given a poetry reading at SUNY-Buffalo, reporting that there had been only six people in the audience, all of whom were related to him. He wrote that he didn't think he'd ever do a poetry reading again.



Decades Later

I sit at my desk now, many decades later, reflecting on our “hands in blood” conversation, Bob's final email to me, and the path my life has taken.

After my M.A., I continued my graduate studies and became a professor, teaching literature and writing for nearly thirty years at a small Southern liberal arts university.

Among the ranks of the COVID-19-retired, I now find myself living just forty-five minutes away from the defunct Black Mountain College, where Bob came of age as a poet and deepened his friendship with Charles Olsen. I've visited the small museum there, admired the photos of a young Robert Creeley, and recognized his squinted glass eye.

As I've looked back on my connection—almost but not quite a friendship—with Creeley, I've come to understand and more fully appreciate the phrase that he offered to me about my work. For that phrase has now come to represent not only my work but also my life.

Understanding the relationship that one has with his or her work is a powerful gift; understanding that this relationship extends beyond one's work and into one's life, is something more. Maybe it's the gift of insight plus time—Bob's insight deepening within me over the years, the way that sometimes happens with teachers who impact our lives.

So, *thank you, Robert Creeley*. For your insight and your words that continue to resonate. My hands remain in blood.



Today she had a fever, she was lying wrapped in a cuckoo in a warm bed of yellow bright flowers, and outside the window lay a roaring and wet snow and dogs roamed it, along with people, crows crumpled in black spots in the snow, and an inaudible speaker was talking under the pillow, the lecturer quietly read the text of a famous book ...

She moved her right hand a little and touched her forehead, hot, very hot, like a red-hot melting furnace. "And why am I lying here?" she thought. And suddenly a few lines came, they flew in, sat on the bare wires and froze there, and they didn't want to go anywhere, and that's all, no matter how you drive them away.

They grumbled.

"I'm a little kid. I'm a year without diapers ..."

And they played it again and again, something was seething inside, it pricked, and it became either smaller, or more, completely Alice in Wonderland. Or maybe there are no miracles? And the man in the big black hat came up with it.

And her mind froze, and a pair of deer ran through the store, one with large long horns, the other graceful with many spots, the second was a female and she always strove to rush forward, but as soon as she ran out, a large stand with an inscription or with canned food. So they succeeded each other, he and she ... Outside, something moved, a hammer banged somewhere and consciousness surfaced, an almost drowning child, the future suddenly ended and all dreams swam away like fish, but she remained here and no one else interfered with her.

She found a thin panel behind the lapel of a brown bedspread with a few white stripes and drops of red berries like blood, took it in her hands, he responded, lit up and trembled through him, he vibrated a little, opened a new page with his fingers and launched the film for two long hours ... Perhaps they will someday become shorter ...?

The man on the gray screen argued, then found the drumsticks, began to rehearse, she leaned over and hugged him: "I don't want you to make noise! I can't stand the noise! I don't want to! You have to give it up for me!" and she nervously began now put the key around your neck, it was instead of a big cross, and instead of a palm a small bag of tobacco ... Too free woman, too fair-haired and beautiful ...

The woman clenched her palms, closed her eyes, consciousness fell asleep again, it plunged into the ancient plane of being. And there were many films: detectives, thrillers, romantic comedies and ...

A fish swam, waved its tail, and after it the jackdaws rumbled with black fins, pushing the gray expanse of the lake and everyone became fish ...

When she woke up it was already night, an old and impenetrable old woman, below there was a warm jar of water and a soaked handkerchief with a blue border and a funny blue baby elephant. She thought all the time and her head became heavy and rebellious, and there was a movie, some people

were dancing, then there were outfits in the style of Louis XIV and suddenly a black car, a jeep drove up to the main entrance and criminals broke in, some people in black and their own skin is like soot, not recognizable in the light of day ... Or maybe it's their own skin and they are not painted? I don't know, I can't say anything, and someone throws a cigarette, pours gunpowder, pours gasoline and everything lights up, almost to the ground, the gray screen drives off and you can see old heavy hands, a beard, an elderly man looks at the screen, - "I'm nothing I don't understand what it's for? I don't understand anything at all? Why is this all? .." Behind her, laughter is heard, exclamations of discontented exclamations of condemnation and she is distracted, goes to the kitchen, looks into an empty snow pan with a single red spot of a flower ...

He presses the silver piston of the tap, a transparent stream pours, hands substitute the white bottom, and it fills with a transparent mass, then lights a blue bleeding light and opens a yellow package with a white inscription and orange stripes, inside buckwheat-colored pasta, measuring the right number and gradually long worms in the pan they start to stir and get wet and soft and she turns the black knob on the switch.

She does not know her actions, her head is cracking and it hurts, her throat, she strokes the swollen meat with her hand and she becomes chilly, her legs give way and her body sits heavily on a wooden chair tied with black lines of ropes, the seat is soft, bardovop, slightly aged and faded and the color faded ... And nothing else to change.

And the brown clock measures the lost time and lost moments, and everything will end soon... Perhaps!?

The siren sang in her head, walked over the pan and waved her tail, touched the curtain and stuck her tongue in there, licked the edge, and there were a bunch of flies, ate everyone and rushed off into the night.

The dragon flew in and ate half of the pasta, she just cried, and then where there is so much, there is a whole kilogram, she sat on the back of the dragon and flew away with him so as not to see the white veil of dawn.

"Just don't tell her!" repeated the rabbit.

The fox narrowed his eyes very much and clattered his teeth, and the blizzard lifted them up and carried them somewhere into their own distances.

"And they won't tell you that you could live, they won't see anything in you and they won't be able to tell you more than you know, and you won't be able not to do it!"; -sang a voice and fell silent.

He was somewhere there, but not close, but most likely farther than one could say or think...

She was looking for him and all her hands were pierced with blood, raking sharp snowflakes that were mixed and melted in the snow, the crust pricked her bare feet, and when she lost consciousness, a black rider picked her up, he was wearing a cloak and mask and she could not see her face, only big bright owl eyes and he kept warming her hands and feet, blew and blew and she became warmer and finally forty began to subside and the films merged into a single eolecdoscope and consciousness woke up to live on.

She opened her wet eyelids, dawn passed over her hand, froze like a bunny in her palm, played with her fingers and caught a narrow strip on light beige wallpaper with silver stains.

And the fox no longer bothered her, and the rider settled into daytime anguish and something else pinched her heart, and she broke into a smile and became like others, like everyone else and like those who do not remember their illnesses.

The sparrow chirped, he flew and sat down on the railing, cold and narrow, there was a little snow and he sat warming his thin pink legs in the inhabited snowdrift. He chirped, pecked at some buckwheat and flew off to his own.

And the dawn in the bottom departed, gave its reign to the bright and snowy day and endless winter.



The Day the Earth Went Flat

It now spun like a coin through space. A coin thirty miles thick. The flat-earthers felt not so much vindicated as prophetic. Hoping for a memorable edge experience, they booked round-the-world flights and cruises. The more intrepid circumnavigated the rim itself, which was mainly ocean except toward the poles. Some planes and ships vanished, fell off the map, so to speak, novel rendering as it was. Gravity and atmospheric seemed to play strange tricks in this zone. Speaking of such, the time zones were shot to hell, what with the planet's curvature all ironed out. Then again, the boring of tunnels between the two faces was now conceivable. That is, if the opposed sides wanted such shortcuts. This new geography might well aggravate differences between nation blocs. The idea of being two sides of the same coin practically militated disagreement. Luckily, it would take a herculean effort to recalibrate the guidance systems on missiles.

On a larger scale, a new science of earth psychology has arisen. The leading theory holds that the planet has undergone an existential crisis. After going in circles for 4.5 billion years, the globe can no longer see the purpose and has simply sunk into a state of ennui, flatness. Maybe the only chance it has of getting through this midlife slump depends on its most clever species. A massive campaign to cheer up the planet, raise its spirits, has launched. Millions of acres are being planted in flowers. Concerts of uplifting music are conducted nearly nonstop. Notes and poems attached to trees express loving appreciation for all the Earth has done for its inhabitants over the eons. Please, they implore, show us your buoyant old self again. It's too early to say whether the campaign is working. Participants at least have remarked a bump in their moods. And if the children are gladsome, what mother can long stay locked in her room prostrate with dejection? If she can, there's a fallback scheme for pumping up the lithosphere.

The Day the Earth Gained a Moon

And there it was, the way that blossoms can sneak up on you in spring: a new satellite, either drifted into orbit from the outer depths, or dropped intentionally on the third planet's doorstep. Only a few thousand miles distant, its proximity made its mere fifty-mile girth as imposing as that of the moon called the Moon. Unlike its much older sibling, this newcomer displayed a much smoother complexion, unpocked by disfiguring space debris. It also featured pleasing rose and peach highlights on its yellowy white, slightly ovoid shape. Gazers couldn't help imagining some jealousy on the part of her formerly single-child sister.

The Earth had been promoted. It was now significant enough to warrant a second heavenly body in its retinue. Clearly, both moons would require proper names to distinguish them. Nothing less than a worldwide naming contest could do justice to the occasion. Lunar beauty being the proper domain of poetry, a global laureate would crown the ceremony with a freshly penned ode.

An amateur astronomer from Utah first noticed an ever-so-slight jagged line in the new moon's upper right quadrant. Perhaps utter perfection was too much to expect. A spider-web pattern soon radiated from the initial filament. Or maybe it was more like the fissures in an old painting. Then again, it reminded others of cracks in an. . . .

The Day the Earth Became a Punk

Maybe it had grown tired of all the crap, all the reckless behavior that mucked up the place and tossed species aside like cupcake wrappers.

So it struck back. No carrot was pulled from the ground without a rabbit chewing its way up the orange length. No dam was without its contingent of mountain goats chipping away at the concrete. Insects concentrated their biomass to collapse roofs. Algae of every hue clogged water systems. Video from around the world showed people being harassed by elephants, monkeys, squid, kangaroos, flamingos, puffins, dragonflies, you name it. Even koalas and sloths turned mean and snarly.

And that was far from the worst of it. Dry lightning set off fires that torched whole towns, while incessant rain elsewhere flooded low-lying areas. An active volcano popped up overnight in Madrid, and a mountain range suddenly bisected Tokyo. Nature was acting like a total punk.

So people doubled down on negligence to teach it a lesson. It came right back at them, licking away coastal cities with tsunamis, parking unbreathable air over whole time zones. Before too long the people came to holler *Uncle* in every human tongue. The Earth rubbed their faces in the dirt for an extra five count so they wouldn't soon forget.



Only the Heathen Cry

Growing up in a preacher's family means hosting a lot of other peoples' graduations, weddings, and funerals. Each of us has a role to play at these major life events: Dad preaches, Mom runs the reception, and my sisters and I do everything else – we set up chairs and tables, babysit, hand out programs, serve coffee and punch, and clean up after everyone goes home.

Nan's memorial in 1980 is our first family funeral and I have a new, unfamiliar role: mourner. I didn't know my great-grandmother well, didn't understand how tough she was, a single mother in the 1920's who lived through the Dust Bowl and World War II and taught at a one-room schoolhouse in Kansas. She was a librarian and property owner and amateur genealogist but I only knew her as an elderly relative who sucked on butterscotch candies and occasionally bought us Dairy Queen.

At her wake I sit quietly in the small, hushed funeral home parlor, studying the shiny coffin. Nan's sunken face is covered in translucent powder, her snowy hair freshly-set, shoulders prim under a silken blouse. The room smells of lilacs and a deep earthiness. I look at her and wonder if she's in Hell.

In the front row, Gram and aunt Helen weep and dab their eyes with tissues. Only the heathen cry when someone dies, Dad says. Their sadness is proof the godless have no hope. They know they'll never see their loved one again. For IFB believers like us, funerals are joyous occasions because we celebrate the loved one's reunification with the Lord, their homecoming. It's selfish to cry and be sad.

Even in death, we judge.

And, caught between these binary worldviews of utter hopelessness or the triumph of spirit over flesh, the three deaths that befall our family in late 1986 shake my beliefs, make me question if what Dad preaches about God being in control is actually true.

In September, Gramp Welch has a heart attack and dies. Dad's brother calls that night to tell us, and we immediately load up the van and begin the long drive to Kansas. Rose and I split the driving so our parents can rest. Dad weeps openly in the back. "I hope he did something about it," he says, meaning, accepted the Lord.

After the funeral, we go with Gram to the Methodist church basement where women in perms and flowered aprons are setting out punch and casseroles. It's strange for someone else to be doing the arranging and serving. "I miss Bill terribly but I know I'll see him in Heaven," Gram Welch says bravely, picking at her pasta salad. "He trusted in the Lord."

From her wheelchair at the end of the table, Great-Grandma Staab says mournfully, "It should have been me."

Later, back at Gram's house, Dad and his siblings argue at dinner about whether the elderly woman who dozed off in the second row was Great Aunt Mamie or Mabel.

"Did anyone see if Uncle Lester made it?" my grandmother interjects, voice muffled.

"What?" my aunt laughs. "Mom, we can't hear you over that giant gob of mashed potatoes."

“Who’s Uncle Festus?” Dad’s youngest brother asks.

“I thought she said ‘Uncle Fungus,’” my other uncle says.

Dad raises an eyebrow and the siblings start riffing off each other.

“Uncle Fungus was among us.”

“A fungus among us!”

“You could say he’s a fun guy.”

“Are you shitake’ing me?” My aunt’s joke nets a stern look from her brothers.

“Oh, spore us,” Dad says, to groans.

His middle brother says, “There’s no room for ‘shroom jokes at this table.”

“We oyster talk about something else,” Dad adds.

The three give him blank looks.

“No?” His eyes take on a steely glint. It’s a look I know to fear.

“No, dummy, that doesn’t work. We’re riffing on mushrooms,” his sister says.

“Who’s the dummy?” Dad snaps. “I’m not the one living off Mom and scrounging for cigarette money.”

“Jesus H. Christ,” my aunt mutters, getting up. “I sure didn’t miss you and your smart mouth. How do you live with this asshole, Marian?”

Mom’s smile stays frozen on her face but she doesn’t reply.

Later, the adults – minus my aunt, who stormed out – drink coffee in the living room and talk. I sit quietly in a dusty corner of the dining room, eavesdropping and looking at my grandfather’s rock collection. During his work as an oil field wildcatter he retrieved interesting stones and fossils from deep in the Earth. Turning a shark tooth over in my fingers, I feel sad. I loved Gramp’s gruff laugh, his homemade peanut brittle, the Christmas stockings he stuffed with fruit and small toys. We’re supposed to rejoice that he’s gone to Heaven but selfishly I wish he was still here.



On November 7, our head deacon Mr. Foster has a heart attack and dies. It’s his first day at an appliance repair job. He was fifty, which seems elderly, and I feel sorry for the Foster family but Dad says we should feel comforted, even happy, because he was saved and we’ll see him again in Heaven.



A day later, Aunt Helen calls, asking for Mom. “No! Not Pauly!” my mother screams into the phone. Uncle Pauly collapsed in bed, she says when she can finally speak. He’s dead. My parents sag against each other, weeping aloud.

“He was only thirty-six,” Dad adds. He himself turned thirty-nine just weeks ago.

“I’ll never see my little brother again.” Tears gush from Mom’s eyes and flow down her face like an undammed river.

I lie awake that night, listening as my sisters weep in their beds, staring at the ceiling. I think about playing burn out with Uncle Pauly in the side yard last summer. My tall, tan, cheerful uncle, who took us to the city swimming pool and taught us to wrestle, is gone forever. It feels unbearable.



Two days later Mom and my sisters and I fly to Kansas City. Mom’s other brother, Uncle David, picks us up. As we walk through Baggage Claim, I remember waiting here for Gramp and Gram last May. I wish I could go back in time to when Uncle Pauly was alive.

The next few days pass with agonizing slowness. Each event is a fresh occasion for sadness: the memorial in Topeka, where Uncle Pauly and his family lived, the funeral home viewing in Yatesville, then a wake, two rosaries, and finally the funeral mass at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church.

During the service there are readings and hymns, times to stand and times to kneel on little padded benches, and I don’t know when to do any of it. I don’t know how to greet the priest or if I’m to turn around and look at the soprano singing in the balcony behind us. Yatesville has always felt like home, but sitting in this pew in this ornate sanctuary, I feel like I don’t belong.

I reach over to Gramp and take his tanned, strong hand in mine. His fingers lie cool and lifeless in my palm. “Why wasn’t it me, Lis,” he says softly and I think I might break from crying.

Gram sits at the end of the pew, her head lowered, her fingers caressing her rosary beads. I’ve been so cruel to her this past year, so harsh in my judgments and opinions. I wish I could hug her, but her face is grim and shoulder hunched, her grief cloaking her like armor.

“Now we invite the family to bring up the gifts,” the priest says, and Aunt Helen and Uncle David stand up. I look at the program. *Liturgy of the Eucharist*. It’s the Lord’s Table.

I look down the pew at Mom but she shakes her head. As non-Catholics, we aren’t allowed to partake in this Communion. My grandparents walk slowly up the main aisle to the front of the church, accepting a wafer on their tongues and sipping from a golden goblet the priest holds.

IFB communion is closed too, I think, so Catholics wouldn’t be welcome. We’re united, independent Baptists and Roman Catholics, in excluding the other.



When the day comes to fly home, Uncle David drives us back to Kansas City. We stop at a Wendy's in Salina for lunch. "You can eat healthy here," he says pointedly, heading for the salad bar.

Mom and my sisters study the burger menu but I trail my uncle, piling a plate with greens and vegetables and Italian dressing. I want to spend more time with Uncle David. He's a writer and teaches English at a university in Florida. It seems like a wonderful, literary life.

When we get back to his rental car, there's a slip of paper stuck in the door. My uncle unfolds it. "Next time, Baldy, keep your nasty fingers out of the bread stix," he reads. "Hands carry germs!"

"That's not very nice," Mom says, but she's smirking.

"I'm not even that bald," he protests, wadding up the paper and tossing it in the back seat. He and Mom burst out laughing, and keep laughing until tears stream from their eyes.



These sudden deaths bother me. One minute Mr. Foster was moving a refrigerator, the next he was gone. Gramp Welch was reading in his chair and suddenly slumped over unconscious. Uncle Pauly had had the flu. The day he died, Aunt Terry said he'd mowed the lawn and taken his daughters for a walk. He felt tired after supper and collapsed while reading the newspaper.

These abrupt departures remind me of the way the Bible describes the Rapture. Jesus will return like a thief in the night, Dad preaches from First Thessalonians. Suddenly. Without warning. These deaths are the Raptures of 1986. They represent what I fear most: goodbyes, and disappearances.



Dad schedules Mr. Foster's memorial service two days after Mom and Rose and Paige and I return from Kansas. He's expecting a big turnout: Mr. Foster was a retired pastor and filled the pulpit at churches all over the Northwest. "Can you girls keep the nursery?" he asks Rose and me, as he props up a large photo of Mr. Foster at the front of the Basel Building sanctuary.

The rest of us are folding programs. "I thought the ladies from Grace Baptist were," Rose says.

"Isn't Rose playing piano?" Mom says.

We all look at Dad. Of course we expect to have a role to play, but this memorial feels personal. Mr. Foster was a deacon and my boss at the Mission, and Paige is best friends with Kelly Foster.

A dark look crosses Dad's face. "I asked Morgana Mitchell to play piano, so Rose is freed up for nursery duty. Is that okay with everyone?"

Mom says, "Yes, Marty. We just didn't know."

He snaps, "I didn't realize I had to check in with all you nags before I made a decision."

Rose and I head to the nursery to get ready. It won't do us any good to protest. I didn't feel like I

belonged at Pauly's funeral and I don't feel like I belong here. "You girls," I echo angrily. "He treats us like little kids."

"We'll get through it," Rose says. "They can't control us forever."



The trio of deaths spurs me on with soul winning. We can't miss any opportunity to tell Gram and Gramp Hoffman about the Lord, even if they don't want to hear it. My grandmother, overwhelmed by anxiety and the loss of her beloved son, needs compassion and understanding, but what she'll get from me is a hard line: be saved, or perish.

"Now we know why you're not at Bible college this fall," Mom comments to me.

So people could die? I think. Am I really such an integral part of God's plan? Dad preaches that being in the center of God's will brings peace and contentment. But I just feel sad.



Hepplewhites

In 1981, a few years out of graduate school, I moved to West 16th Street, in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. I rented one room in a renovated tenement, a fifth-floor walk-up studio. The landlord was Melvin, not much older, an employee in real estate. This was his first investment property.

I liked long walks, art museums, and Broadway shows, the things you read in a personal ad. After years of roommates, I also liked having my own apartment.

I joined the McBurney YMCA on West 23rd Street. It was a nine-story building built in 1900 in the Beaux-Arts style. From the street, you passed through a kind of triumphal arch. Overhead was inscribed: “Enter to Be and Find a Friend.”

McBurney was dim and dirty inside, and crowded when I arrived after work. I searched for an empty locker, then changed to gym clothes while elbowing for room. The floor had gray carpet, damp from many feet. It smelled evil. Some men wore flip-flops to and from the shower to avoid contamination.

The building was organized vertically. I climbed the stair and passed rooms where exercise classes were underway. A judo class had a leader who barked out commands, like a military drill instructor. “Itchy Knee!” he shouted. I puzzled over this, then realized he was counting “one, two” in Japanese.

On the fifth floor, the weightlifting room was full of men pumping iron. Massive, serious dudes monopolized the free weights, while normal guys sat in industrial contraptions—Nautilus machines. No one engaged in casual conversation. Instead, they argued over whose turn it was, grunted to show how hard they were working, and barked a lusty “Ha!” when they were done, like an engine blowing off steam.

I stretched and did calisthenics on a mat. Afraid to pull a muscle or sprain a joint, I tried the Nautilus machines. Someone would arrive and express irritation. I was doing it wrong and taking too long.

On the top floor of the building was the gymnasium, huge and loud. Rubber soles squeaked on the hardwood floor, men shouted, and basketballs pounded. The noises echoed and merged in a din. A running track hung like a balcony around all four sides. Ten laps equaled a mile. At rush hour, the track was a river of men, running and puffing.

I watched for an opening and leaped. Once in the flow, I dodged and weaved with the rest. I ran a mile or two, counted the laps in my head, and hopped off the track to safety.

At the YMCA, I began to recognize a few regulars. Some men always wore the same outfit, like the man in the athletic jersey that bore a large number 11, and the man in the faded blue-green shorts. The noise made talking impossible. In any case, McBurney was not a chatty place. We were there to suffer and sweat.

A man my age and build often ran on the track or stretched beside it. He was fit, dark-haired, dressed in running shorts and T-shirt. His face was a blur, since I left my glasses in the locker. One day, as I plodded down the stair, exhausted and bleary, he cornered me.

“What’s with you, anyway? I’ve been trying to get your attention for weeks!”

Frank was an Irish boy from Queens, in excellent health, lively and outgoing. He took the motto over the door seriously—Frank wanted to be and find a friend. We arranged to meet for coffee after showering and dressing.

The café on West 23rd Street was run by Greeks. It was shabby and comfortable as an old shoe. Coffee, Frank explained, was his thing. He liked it lightly roasted and freshly brewed. At home, he ground his own beans. The Greek café made decent coffee. He drank it black. Cream and sugar were out of the question.

“Aside from the calories and fat, why would you ruin a perfectly good cup of coffee?”

Frank was a former alcoholic, he said, a member of AA, sober for a year. He had liberated himself from a man he called “my ex” and lost a lot of weight. He had a great job in sales with a carpet manufacturer, and a one-bedroom first-floor apartment in a brownstone.

I reciprocated with my studio, singularity, and job with a big architecture firm. Frank’s ears pricked.

“I could tell right away you were a kindred soul, an interesting type with something on the ball.”

I was also a good listener. Frank liked to tell his own story. It was full of close encounters, amazing people, and personal observations. He was a good watcher, by which he meant men. At the YMCA, he gave the regulars nicknames, for example Number 11 and Aquashorts.

“I know exactly who you mean! Who am I?”

“That crewcut, those broad shoulders. Your nickname is Butch.”

If coffee was his thing, dancing was Frank’s passion. On weekends, he hit the disco clubs, not the big names like Studio 54 and the Saint, but places I never heard of. They sprang up overnight in vacant lofts and vanished in the morning sun. His current favorite was the Loading Dock, on the Hudson River piers near Greenwich Village.

“No drugs,” he said. “The flashing lights and music get me high. When I dance, I go into the zone. You know, like the Twilight Zone.”

Within days of our coffee date, Frank showed up at the architecture office, on the thirty-ninth floor, with a sweeping view of Midtown. Dressed in a tailored jacket, slacks, dress shoes, and necktie, he presented me with an armload of carpet samples. They were doormat size, mug-rug size, and little squares glued in cardboard folios, all colors, styles, and prices. He explained the advantages of each type of carpet—loop or pile, plush or tight, synthetic or natural, solid or pattern. He outlined custom orders for special projects, lead times, installation methods, and maintenance options. He insisted on taking me to lunch.

I hadn’t mentioned it, but the firm specialized in resort hotels and condominiums. For a high-rise in Myrtle Beach, I was drawing the lobby and coordinating with the structural engineer.

“I did my homework,” Frank said. “Target your sales pitch, my boss says.”

“I’m a lowly drafter.”

“Designer. Junior architect.”

“I have no say about the specifications, the interior finishes.”

“You’re on the way up.”

And Frank was in the door of the elevator cab. He traveled all over the city by subway, and beyond by rental car. He made calls at offices and showrooms. He checked on installations, “projects that are going down.”

“Going down on the floor?” I asked.

“You’re so funny,” he said.

Frank’s job was unstructured. Maybe for that reason, he cultivated routines. He went to AA meetings and the gym almost every day. When he learned my schedule, he coordinated. He was always there when I got to McBurney. Amid the general noise, Frank talked. I murmured vague affirmatives, which encouraged him to move in close.

“Can I make a suggestion?” he said.

Frank showed me proper techniques for stretching, running, and weightlifting. He charmed the big guys into letting us in for a set of reps. He spotted me on weights, and he showed me how to spot him.

“I want to help. That’s the kind of friend I am.”

Frank set goals. When I achieved a goal, he gushed with enthusiasm. When I fell short, he collapsed in despair.

“You’re killing me, Butch! I know you can try harder.”

To my surprise, I felt great. I had more pep. Exercise became a habit.

Frank urged me to check out the sauna and the massage room, but I wasn’t interested. He invited me to the Loading Dock one Saturday night. Members were allowed to bring a guest. Disco hours started after bedtime.

“Thanks, but I might fall asleep.”

“Are you a total spoilsport?”

One day in the locker room, where it was easier to hear, Frank talked about the Hepplewhites.

“They’re an exotic dance group.”

“Exotic dance?”

“Yeah, like a male version of a stripper. A knockoff of the Chippendales.”

They wore the same skimpy costume—bare chest, white shirt cuffs and collar, bow tie, and skin-tight black pants. Frank recently auditioned and he “made the cut.” The Hepplewhites performed for small

private parties, in bars, and public service gigs.

“For peanuts,” he said. “It’s good, clean fun. We rehearse here, on the fifth floor, across from the weights room.”

“Frank, I don’t have the kind of figure they want.”

“Do you ever look in the mirror? Significant progress.”

“What do I know about performing?”

“I’ll let you in on a secret. It’s not really dancing, more like humping.”

“I’m a near-sighted intellectual, not a rent boy.”

“Butch, you’re coming with me, if I have to drag you!”

Frank introduced me to Drake, the Hepplewhites impresario. Drake was lean and supple, a former Broadway chorus line dancer. He was dressed in black tights, a swirl of fleece, and a bright scarf. He looked me up and down and frowned.

“Those are child-bearing hips.” The four other men in the room snickered.

“I’m not here to audition, just to watch.”

“No can do, Butch. No wallflowers allowed. As long as you’re here, you may as well dance.”

“Shadow me,” Frank said. “Copy what I do, and you’ll be fine.”

“Line up, gentlemen,” Drake said. He jabbed a button on a boombox on the floor. The men formed a chorus line, spaced apart, with Frank and me at one end.

The routine consisted of stepping and bouncing, like an exercise class. As I tripped over my own feet, elementary school classes in square dance and tap dance came to mind. By the third repetition, I was getting the hang of it. Frank voiced encouragement. The other men tactfully ignored me.

Drake paused the music to explain the next routine. It featured a solo by Chad. We in the line did back-up, a simple step from side to side. I began to see what Frank meant. Much of the action was turning, swaying, and rotating the pelvis.

“Bump and grind, gentlemen,” Drake said.

Chad had fancy moves, like a spin on the ball of one foot, a deep bend at the waist, and a flex that rippled his chest and abdomen. He was like a ballet dancer, but instead of lofty heroism he suggested lust. The rest of us were synchronized and interchangeable, a pulsing line of male flesh.

At the end of the hour, I was exhausted and exhilarated. Frank beamed at me with pride, and the other men acknowledged my presence.

“Good job, Butch,” Drake said. “See you next week, gentlemen, same time, same place.”

So began my part-time career as a Hepplewhite. We performed at a senior citizens home in Queens, to an audience in wheelchairs, some wearing bibs, some attached to oxygen tanks. Health aides in scrubs stood by. As a rookie, I stayed in the background. On the subway ride home, I asked Frank if I really fit in.

“What are you talking about?”

“I don’t have the body or the moves of the other guys.”

“That’s the whole point, Butch. You’re normal.”

“The least valuable player?”

“I wouldn’t put it that way. You make us look good.”

The next time we met at the YMCA, Frank opened with a throwaway compliment, the sort of thing he said on meeting a sales prospect.

“Nice T-shirt!”

“It’s the one I always wear.”

“Maybe you washed it, and it shrank. Look, Butch, I need this huge favor. I overscheduled. Drake asked me to do this side gig for the Hepplewhites. I agreed and then totally forgot. Now I have to go out of town for business, so I need a sub.”

“A substitute?”

“Right. The gig is a private party, where they announce a special surprise guest. That’s you. You pop out of a gift box or burst through a door. You bring your own music and dance for a few minutes. They pay you cash, and that’s it.”

“What kind of party?”

“I don’t know. Drake gave me this phone number. He said work it out with them.”

I called the phone number and spoke to Rachel.

“It’s a bachelorette party,” she said. “I organized it for a friend who’s getting married. There will be five of us, all women in our thirties. We’ve known each other since college. I’m an attorney. There’s a bank officer, a magazine editor, and a nonprofit administrator. We’ll meet for dinner at a restaurant, in a private room, and you’ll come in after dessert.”

“With the coffee?”

“Or the champagne. These girls are into wine. You can expect a certain level of drunken hilarity.”

“Got it.”

“And smut. Women can be as raunchy as men.”

“When should I make an appearance?”

Rachel gave me the address, date, and time to arrive. Then, in a wheedling tone, “I do have one tiny favor to ask. Can you drop by my apartment, just for a second, to show me . . .”

“You want to check out the goods?”

“I know it sounds awful, but yes.”

I took the subway uptown. Upper West Side, prewar building apartment, solid middle-class. No doorman. Rachel would have a budget for entertainment, and she would expect to get her money’s worth. She answered the intercom and buzzed me in.

At the door of the apartment stood an attractive professional woman, carefully dressed, with lovely skin and hair. Her eyes sparkled. She closed the door behind me and licked her lips.

“Can you . . . I’m a demanding bitch, I’m sorry, but can you . . .” She mimed a striptease.

“Take off my shirt?”

“Yes!”

I took off my shirt and hung it on the doorknob. There in the vestibule, I did a few steps, kicked and turned, dropped to one knee, jumped up, and bowed. Rachel squealed and clapped a hand over her mouth.

“Part of a Hepplewhite routine,” I said.

“Perfect!” she gasped. “Now, about payment . . .”

“Cash on the table, or the show does not go on.”

“I’ll take care of it.”

I grabbed my shirt, slung it over a shoulder, and pulled the door open.

“Catch you later, babe.”

At rehearsal, Drake told us to expect the unexpected—accidents, delays, no place to change, and so on.

“Live performance is all about making do—and making it work!”

In those years, the subway ran by fits and starts, as risky as dice in a cup. The night of the bachelorette party, I took a cab to the restaurant and arrived well before showtime. The hostess led me to a serving pantry off the private dining room. She alerted Rachel.

The money was on the countertop. I slid the bills in my waistband. The black pants were snug. I took off my shirt and glasses, snapped on the collar and cuffs, and tried to warm up. The women were talking loudly, making toasts, and carrying on.

What had I gotten into? I was about to make a fool of myself. Should I make a break for it? That would be letting Frank down, and the Hepplewhites. I gripped the handle of the boombox. A knife rapped on a glass, and Rachel's voice cut through the chatter.

"May I have everyone's attention, please? We have a special surprise guest tonight. Please join me in welcoming Butch!"

I hit the play button and strode through the door. Five women sat at a round table set with wineglasses and dessert plates. The women were well dressed but slightly mussed. I nodded to Rachel, set the boombox on the floor, and started to dance.

There was no obvious place to stand, so I circled the table slowly, adapting the routine to the space. Drake would be proud of me! The women moved to the music, clapped in rhythm, and tossed their hair. A minute in, they started to whoop and make cat calls.

"Shake that booty, boy!"

"Show us what you've got!"

"Give us some meat, Butch!"

I danced my way around the room, leaned in, and smiled. The feeling was erotic and at the same time impersonal. Was this what Frank meant by going into the zone?

The women egged each other on. Each wanted to show how bad she was. I was merely an excuse, a sex object.

"On the table!" shouted one of the women. She jumped out of her chair and gestured at it. Others chanted "On the table!" and cleared the plates and glasses.

I stepped on the chair seat and onto the table.

The women were on their feet, swaying side to side. They raised their arms in the air. I felt buoyed up, on top, and ecstatic. For one shining moment, I was hot!

Then I felt hands on my legs. They reached up for more. They grabbed and groped. Still dancing in place, I was surrounded and outnumbered. I started to panic. How far would they go? Would I end up like Pentheus in *The Bacchae*, the play by Euripides, torn to pieces by a frenzied mob of women?

The music abruptly stopped. We all froze. Rachel held the boombox over her head, as if about to hurl it to the floor.

"Back off, ladies! I paid for him, and Butch is mine!"



That Was That Petal of Sky

That was that petal of sky,
where the soul was,
as in another, she, alone and pure.
This was this, is from here, it was leaving,
like this eternal night, I don't know where,
the quiet light of the stars;
that's how the beginning began, ache
for what is celestial in my soul
to go out, through your door, towards your center . . .

Oh whiteness first alone, and always
first!

. . . Whiteness of this night, sea, of the moon!

Asi Era Aquel Pétalo de Cielo

*Asi era aquel pétalo de cielo,
en donde el alma se encontraba,
igual que en otra ella, sola y pura.
Este era, esto es, de aqui se iba,
como esta noche eterna, no sé a donde,
a la tranquila luz de las estrellas;
asi empezaba aquel comienzo, gana
celestial de mi alma
de salir, por su puerta, hacia su caentro . . .*

*Oh blancura primera, solo y siempre
primera!*

. . . Blancura de esta noche, mar, de luna!

—Juan Ramon Jimenez

Moonlit Night

Garden path, deep as a long drink,
imperceptibly, in the branches, a momentum vanishing.
Oh, and the moon, the moon, the benches almost bloomed
because of its reluctant approach.

Silence, how it urges her on. Are you awake now?
The windows facing you full of stars and sensations.
The hands of the wind move, with the force of shift,
the most distant of nights to your nearby face.

Mondnacht

*Weg in den Garten, tief wie ein langes Getränke,
leise im weichen Gezweig ein entgehender Schwung.
Oh und der Mond, der Mond, fast blühen die Bänke
von seiner zögernden Näherung.*

*Stille, wie drängt sie. Bist du jetzt oben erwacht?
Sternig und fühlend steht dir das Fenster entgegen.
Hände der Winde verlegen
an dein nahes Gesicht die entlegste Nacht.*

—Rainer Maria Rilke

Moguer

Dusk, massive clouds drown the town.
The sad lanterns are asleep
and the yellow moon treads between water and wind.

A damp field's odor pervades the air. Some star
emerges, greenish, behind an old companion, the bell tower.
The seven o'clock coach passes . . . Dogs bark . . .

When you walk out on the road, you feel your face wet
with cold moonlight . . . over the white graveyard
the tall dark pines weep on the hill.

Moguer

*Anohecido, grandes nubes ahogan el pueblo.
Los faroles están tristes y somnolientos,
y la luna amarilla camina, entre agua y viento.*

*Viene un olor a campo mojado. Algún lucero
surje, verdoso, tras un campanario viejo.
El coche de las siete pasa . . . Ladran los perros . . .*

*Al salir al camino, se siente el rostro lleno
de luna fría . . . Sobre el blanco cementerio,
en la colina, lloran los altos pinos negros.*

—Juan Ramon Jimenez

Waiting for Sunrise in Wellfleet

LeCount Hollow Beach is scoured clean,
the first aid kit for severe bleeding untouched,
the shark warning unadorned,
the lifeguard chair stored for another
season. September's chill,
grey harbor seals swimming
in the shallows,
the great white sharks unseen—
they who owe us nothing,
no sign.

Today's word in my inbox: *cadere*
the Latin *to fall*:
giving us accident, also
deciduous and cascade,
cadence and decay.
So many ways to end a story.

Here, the persimmon moon has faded to a circle's trace.
Not even one surfer.
Only a solitary man in swim trunks
with a striped beach towel.
Down the dune he goes, entering
the ocean near the seals.
No visible fear
but maybe faith,
that when the time is right—
it comes—we go.

Approaching the Midterms, the Day of the Dead

*—after viewing the National Arboretum Nest Cam,
featuring the wild nest of Mr. President & Lotus*

Mr. President and Lady Lotus are refurbishing the nest
high in a tulip poplar tree in Washington DC. It's breeding
season and time to prepare for the future of sharing

the duty of warming brown spotted eggs. New bedding
of sticks, stems, and moss for a six-foot nest is no small
feat—I say to nobody as I enter a cemetery far away.

I've come to take communion among the headstones
and plinths, the flowers and skulls carved into marble,
the granite sparkle on epitaphs. Here the past pushes

aside the present and future, stretches under ancient limbs,
the morbid murmurs of the creaking wind. The limbic
system stirs awake, pulsing in vessels so short-lived.

My hands rest cold against a curled pig-iron fence.
My head is bowed in prayer, for whom I cannot say.
Here, in the middle of my age I stand in doubt—

will the moon rise again, the saints drive out
the ghosts? Does faith lurk behind the old oak?
Will she step out? Who knows the plot?

I take a small comfort in these unknown
friends. The eagles in their public devotion.
It's November. We cast our lots and wait.

No One Needs Another Gratitude Poem (And Yet)

Thank you spring for coming again. Thank you
bluebirds and blue moons. Thank you clouds
for the sunblock, for steady rain of course,
and all the wisps in interludes. Thank you
old scores forgotten. Thank you elm
for your green roof and open-house plan
perfectly suited for restorative boredom.
Thank you roots and gardens wrought and every
weed who fights to survive. Thank you salvia
for your blue hues May through September.
Thank you pride for sometimes stepping aside.
Thank you saguaro blossom for your one
night stand. Thank you eight species of honey bees
for your public service. Thank you workers
of the body—the leg, the arm, the shoulder,
the peninsula of thumb, the calluses of hands.

The Small Price

What does it cost in the end
to deliver joy: a poem,

a painting, the narrow road
through clouds to the factory

of joy. People worked here. They
loved. They offered gifts to

the sun. The small price of it.

The Light in Cusco

makes love at this altitude
with each thing and its second

self in shade, deepens the blue
above, suspends a condor

cloud rising from the cathedral
long enough for each human

sin to gather there in its

wings, turn to vapor, turn to
air. For hundreds of years, Señor

de los Temblores quiets
the moving ground, but always

the new life, for thousands of
years, comes dressed a lover in

disguises of light and sky.

Luna Pulchra Est

A reverence for the ordinary,
your mother's benison. You remember
a summer night, ripe with moonlight. Unbidden,
you look up from the page, a child again,
gathered in her gaze. Her hand grazes your hair.
Luna pulchra est, the moon, she says, is
beautiful, but it's her you remember,
her pious beauty, your faith unshaken
yet, the memory tinged with loss, her grief
when you abandoned God. Tonight, the moon
hangs in a cage of trees. You remember
her crucifix, how still she held herself,
rosary in her lap, her pale beauty,
the silence a shadow heavy with words.

Parts Of Speech And Parts Of Silence

A woman wonders if she used a microscope
or telescope—perhaps a periscope?—
she might see more deeply. If, then.
For sure, none of it works. She understands
less of what it takes to understand all she
doesn't understand. How to fox, how
to comet? For a second, she can pretend
to owl, swiveling to stare over her shoulder,
to shoulder a little less of the world.
But then she's back, caught in a tree
like a plastic bag, a kite with neither tail
nor string. Once she held the sound of
rushing in her hands. The music of a river
breaking through its dam. And briefly she
comprehended its parts of speech and parts
of silence, conveying what can't be conveyed.
Networks & neurons. Then it was evening
again inside the woman's head. There seemed
nothing for it but to watch as the moon, so bright
orange, disappeared behind a bank of clouds.

Plumb Line

Say you're an ocean. What's your moon?
Who's pulling your tides? Wild blue flag
flag down a beach where boats keel over
on rotting kelp. You can't imagine
the water that high. You can't imagine
how low it can go. The world too big
some days; other it's too small. And you
as well, always chasing yourself, trying
to stay the course. Guillemot young fall
hundreds of feet before they fly. But then
they do fly. All you can do is envision a seal
like a comma on a seal-colored rock before
it rolls under, revealing how shallow your
gaze. Surface, always just surface. You want
to believe that like the ocean you harbor great
depths no one can plumb. Your mesmerizing
inner coral reef. Yet even when life goes
as planned it never goes as planned. So you
wade in further hoping to find some treasure
among the galaxy of shells, which alas are
all broken, indeed, all smashed to death.

So High

No one cleans this room, of course.
Dust disappears before it settles—
and we do have dust, fine dust.
It smells of rosemary and lanolin
and Mother Gothel traps it in glass
and stores it away far below
where my feet will never travel.

Dawn I wash and noon I wash
and dusk I hang out to dry.
I have always lived this weight
of hair fuller than what I dream
when birds dare alight on the sill,
when sun plays in rippling strands
as a breeze moves past strong stone.

Every month at moon's full high
Mother Gothel brings me a new comb.
I toss the broken one as far
as my hands can fling it into night.
She always smiles at my simple game.
Then she parts and plaits and twists.
"My gold, my love," she whispers, moaning.

Meal Stop

Above the heads of seated customers
in this far-flung eatery,
cuts of beef stream along a rotisserie-like air;
an orbit of meat in flight!

The sign of the butcher's smock over the kitchen door,
emblem of the arcane process at work.

With no need for intermediary servers,
to fill a plate
they simply lift their arms
and grab a steak,

seemingly unfazed by possible harm or soil,
despite the spilling of grease and blood.

Everything "hums,
like a well-oiled machine,"
as the saying goes,
yet my presence here
is more like sand on the gears,

and what I want is not within reach:
a bowl of greens and a heel of bread,

while smoke from the aerial grilling
steers my disharmony into dwelling
on the charged regions between

regret and delight
wish and dish
crown and foot
fork and knife
consumption and ash
adrift and aground
the drought and the flood
the crossing and the splash.

Phase

Snow at 4000 feet, frost at 3500,
a seabird at sea level 1000 miles west.

At 3200 feet, the town,
and a poem's incipience at my desk.

Verse derives from Latin, *versus*, "a turning of the plow"—
metrics to the lyric what furrows are to a field.

Or, conversely, an irregular field of free verse.
These lines, fed by the vapors of Oceanus,

summon satyrs to the stage within me
for a chorus of improvisatory dithyrambs;

the goat song cultivated in the fertile space
between the lines and up through my inner ear and eye.

The celestial river mirrors its counterpart in the underworld.
In waters that borrow from both, we vow cosmic oaths.

Two

Mostly I'll contemplate that frosty full moon
Warming me 'til dawn. I'll turn my ear to waves
Lapping the side, 'cause I find my perceptions
Are clearest on water at night—clarity I never had
On land. Some old salts in the harbor say that

Living on water, as we do, proves nothing
Is real 'til we are caught in a hurricane or
'Til we live out our sailor dreams, and how
Different it was from those times, when I tried
To make a union work on domestic grounds.

Now, looking across the high tide to the shore,
A place never more than somewhere to stock and
Re-supply from the grocery and West Marine store,
But living through another season on this marina
Of floating moons and mangrove hedges, while

Keeping my lungs healthy with ocean air. I'll continue
My sea-route journey in a few days, I'll weigh anchor
Here at Key Largo Harbor and head across the sea
For the cooler months on Bimini. Such is this,
The life I finally chose—no surprise to some, who

Cannot grasp why anyone would invest all they
Ever earned to call a 32 foot sailboat their last
Home. But I never bought a house on land to call
My legal own, and with moon-lit skies and stars
Like tonight I'm reminded—never needed none.

Ernesto

(After Arabia)

At night there are men who open windows
to get on top of all the sadness in the world,
men who know how to transplant childhood,
men who know how to transform
the bad weather of their days,
imagining a far place for Fall,
footsteps crunching shining snow.

Maybe, he thought, to write of Paris
far from Paris, and so walked away
from everything, the man he had been,
the words that man had found,
because at night there are men who open windows
to get on top of all the sadness in the world,
loading their weapons, and losing a season of life.

Fifteen Years of Therapy

—after Grandfather Twilight

An ordinary pearl
can't become the moon.
Held to its shell, it can't
breach the banks of

what contains it.
But the moon, pearl raised
in twilight's hands, full
and buoyant above the sea.

I want to be that pearl.
Where are they, the hands
that raise, or am I already
given to the skies?



Gwendolyn Joyce Mintz, Koi 1

False Moon

Lord Byron be out here
Pondering,
Watching ribbons cast to no avail
For flighted fae whom are all too
Happy to gather at the false moon
Wasting what little time they have
Under a meek sliver,
She who dances roundabout
To unveil splendor and cover again
Ever faithful,
Hearing what tumult was made
While she slept,
And he, morose and smoldering,
Treads a track jagged against his blister
And laid flat before him,
Throwing along with a train clattering by
A bottom energy to rival its blare.

Red Moon

I learned the hard way
No one can synthesize an eclipse.
In my pride I called molehills mountains,
Fancied myself a Sherpa with
My own view over the nations,
My vantage low and sight fixed upward.
I called my flashlight the sun
And sought to forestall twilight,
But I could hardly challenge gods
Let alone dusk's nascent militia.
When my torch found the moon,
Bright as he was,
He flushed red,
Spat up his salubrious gold
Into the vacuum around him,
And burst,
A titanic bomb,
An apocalypse,
A god who would rather
Tear himself apart
Than feign filling himself on my vanity.
Only the sun
Knows what it means
To bind marrow to bone
And the mind to the brain.
Only the moon
Whispers the secret of nothingness
To gossiping winds and murmuring waters.
There is no place for me
To fold the piths of adverse spheres
Unless, by grace,
To study the skies
And find me at that holiday,
To notice the folding over
Of light with space
In the beating of my heart.

Raspberries and Rum

a villanelle

Space smells like raspberries and rum,
planets ring like gongs and scream,
and not even the stars are mum.

On lowly Earth, we ho and hum,
awaiting some celestial dream.
Space smells like raspberries and rum.

We speak the word and so become.
How knowingly the heavens gleam,
and not even the stars are mum.

Not content with scent or plum,
those desolate spheres we so esteem.
Space smells like raspberries and rum.

We never ask if they are glum,
as trapped as us in the cosmic scheme,
and not even the stars are mum.

O, hear the heavenly orbits thrum,
as if through song we could redeem.
Space smells like raspberries and rum
and not even the stars are mum.

Water

The dock reaches out of sight, into a lake
dense with mist and silence.

You walk to the end, slip in and swim
beyond any glimpse of the trees on shore,
until you hear only your breathing and the sounds
of your body as it moves through the water.

It's like calling across a great distance, to someone
who will never hear you, she's just too far away,

which is why you keep swimming, as though you could pull yourself

out on the distant shore renewed,
full of the language you've always yearned
to speak, then speaking softly

like a song across water, or like a faint wind
that dies as you return to the lake, and swim

back across that wide distance, toward your wife and children

who are sitting in lawn chairs, watching you swim
without moving at all now, though you pull and breathe.

And they keep watching you, out on the horizon,
as evening gathers in the trees, and moves
across the lawn, out across the lake

like a huge wing. But nothing's flying,
and nothing's moving through the water.

Soon enough your family will row a small boat out,
slip over the side, and swim with you there

while the boat floats to shore, to nestle in the grass
and rock back and forth in the ripples.

For the Drowned

In another version of the story, our father walked out
of the ocean onto an island, where he sat
waiting for someone to save him, knowing
no one was coming. Tell me the story

again, and tell it again, as he lay down
and looked up at the stars, tell it yet once more
so I can see him standing there, naked and silent,
imagining he could see across the water

he had fallen asleep in somehow, and floated
all that great distance, beyond himself and all he loved,
to wake to some scraggly bushes and nothing
else--and nothing, after all, is always

and always will be, and he learned then

how to translate himself into *all or nothing*,
which is only nothing. This man I hear now

as music from far off--another century--
music that can't be played but has
to happen, just happen like wind does, and has

no meaning and is never quite melody or song
but makes itself up as it goes, and goes on
like the tide does, and then he vanishes again,

slips away like the tide, or seaweed in the tide,
singing as he pulls himself out to the horizon,

taking the shadows of who we were with him:

who we were then, looking out across the troubled
silent water, seeing nothing but the water
and the sky. Yes, we also saw the empty sky.

(AH, 1925-1999)

Moonlight Sonata

The teeth appear as if a welcomed smile,
this old baby grand, this boundless space,
this portal that had cracked the marble floor
on its way to our terrestrial home, its 88 keys.

She is new to this old piano, and yet
our young daughter dips hands into evening,
her fingers across the ivories and
generations upon generations of moons.

And across this night sky lifts the present.
And the opened sky breaks apart its darkness.
And the light falls upon our ears as a mirror.
And across the lake, the beam has run to hear.

What to Do When the Moon Is on the Wrong Side of Skyscrapers

Wait for dawn. Everything's better when a mask can be held
to the light. Look for translucence

in the gauze that covers the cheekbones, the sharp jaw.
Ask the sourdough darkness

why it's feeding on the cheese of the moon. Envision pogo-sticks.
Bounce

all the way to where the moon hides. Focus on softening
the ground under your calloused feet. Conjure flower stems.

Kiss the buds. Tell
the frozen child inside you

darkness is simply breath
mis-cued. Open

your mouth wide and let the music ooze out.
Whatever you do, don't stop singing.

Bridal Gown in the Dry Cleaner Window

The promise of same day and neon hours
shines on a paradigm as yet unclaimed,
headless taffeta, arms pinned to flowers
an ornate brocade, perfectly unfrayed
by the dry mystery that lifts the stain
of her own palms and face and loving sweat
this dress absorbed as it was stripped away.

We will do our best with what is hardest.
Hung here, like a heart, this dress insists
one can both wash and cherish a design
that ought to simply fade at second touch.
If you will pay and wait, we can excise
a stain thought so deep and permanent
the soul has long mistaken it for element.

The Smallness of Bones

The father does not know the place
where his daughter fell,
a swing, over a brook, in the woods.

He imagines the distance,
feels her climbing up, thrilled with farther,
the easy way her small body slipped.

On the x-ray, the ribs' boundaries gape,
like ladder rungs almost too far apart;
the heart keeps its cloudy fist.

The bottom rib is cracked,
a small sliver, nothing out of face.
Still she climbs inside of him to fall again.

Back of him, she rises.
Her spindly arms shake,
her eyes are stunned from crying.

Her hips, knots coming loose,
protest the smallness of bones
against all she is feeling.

In a few weeks she will go back
to the woods with the girls.
She will feel her body made of parts,

her tender chest against the bark.
She will want to step
right where she faltered

as the warm air heals the fracture,
her pale arms flashing
into a darkening spring night.

I Am Watching

for Angela, enslaved, Jamestown, Virginia 1619

the man of war

cuts through the ocean

on the second leg of the middle passage

even from a distance

I hear moans

I hear chains clank in the night

when those packed tight

try to stretch

even from a distance,

I am moved by suffering

I am the moon watching

I can't close my eye,

I can't turn away

350 ships

sailing the second leg

of the middle passage

I hear moaning

I watch the sharks follow

follow the ocean's rise and fall

with my pull

responding to my magnetic force

Of Buena Vista Farms & Heaven

Yesterday, I went down to the farm
and saw the Amish boy with his sweet,
flat face and crescent-moon beard, the pastures
rolling green, into green, for miles around,
the gray gravel road and tilted holy virgin
welcomed me to the farm, the farm like the old
country—serene like Shangri-La.

Yesterday, I went down to a Pennsylvania farm
and saw dogs like old men recline at ease
to watch the day go by then scamper like children
and children all legs and arms and hair float
upon a swing suspended from a thick-barked bough.
Horses exercised in the pasture, and ostriches strutted
about their pens.

Filled with restlessness, I went down to Buena
Vista looking for something I can't name
and found a man I never really knew. I want to say
to the farmer, *You have little need of paradise now.*
Your spirit will always be here among the hay,
the barn, the horse and cart that takes the bonneted,
Amish girl away at the end of the day.

I went down to the Pennsylvania farm yesterday
to see my friend, Pedro, and listen to his Cuban
tongue unravel secrets. We talked for hours,
and I was healed and could walk straight,
and could run with the stallion and ride bare back
through all the nearby fields up into the mountains.

Tango with Mangos

The two girls walked along rock covered paths in their bare feet, with the ferns tickling their ankles. Their skin, still damp from their swim, steamed in the tropical heat and glistened with beaded up water.

Nestled among the vines draped along the branches of the banyan trees were a scattering of orchids. Elena chose one that resembled leopard skin (its surface lightly shaded with brown spots) and tucked it behind her ear. Margarita reached for a lush white flower that shined like a ghost in the green foliage. She threaded the stem of her Moon orchid through a knot in her emerald green sarong.

They walked without speaking– tired from their swim, eager for the slight cooling breeze that the evening would bring. They headed back to the pontoon where they were spending their vacation. They slept in hammocks strung out across the deck, read, and snacked on mangos.

The ghost Margarita carried with her teased at the knot in her sarong, teased at the strap of the bikini tied around her neck, pecked at the pearls in her earrings. Margarita tossed and turned all night long, the leper in her dream staring out of a pale face ridged like a lizard's skin and reaching out bandage-wrapped fingers. As the flower wilted, the ghost grew more and more handsome, until Margarita tossed the flower into the river. Then he was gone. Elena's orchid only rumbled softly in the heat of the afternoon.



Carmen Germain
Night with Dawn in Its Belly



Carmen Germain
After the Tiny Kingdom

Dear God

Dear God,

You created me and said, *Let there be light*.
Although mine is dimming.
I did everything I could,
what else can you take from me?

I served you and loved you,
Unlike following your straight path,
Mine is to curve a bit to the left,
Far from what you thought is right.

What's the harm in looking askew?
You, who told me to love unconditionally,
to care for my neighbors,
where is that love towards me?

Saying *yes sir* became a part of my vernacular,
and being stepped on became my persona.
My light felt darkened with every *amen*.

I was your bitter soldier.
You see you may have created the clouds and the overcast, but I saw throughout that.
With the help of my own radiance, I grew.
You may have hidden the matches, but I found my lighter.

Dear Michoacán

Dear Michoacán,

I am coming home to you.
One that is filled with every corner shop built like the potholes on the road.
Where there's a Tecate next to a pharmacy.

Through the highways, we race and you beat me with your speed bumps.
Through you there is hope
of not crashing.
A family of four takes that chance,
grasping to each other on a motorcycle without wearing helmets.

With you, there is beauty
of strength.
Children write "a plate of food" on their Christmas lists.
Through responsibilities they juggle
at stop lights,
Young men spraying soap on your windshields for a peso, and
Las viejitas pleading with you to buy vegetables so that they can pay their bills.

EE. UU. looks at you with disgust but will hunt you
while taking trailers of avocados for their own football games.

They won't let our people in but will take your agave for their tequila.
They are the ones who have it all but won't share their resources.

I admire you.
I admire our people.
I admire the desire of moving forward. Yet,

They don't see the construction workers asking for water,
teachers, and students asking for funds,
risking their lives, in the middle of the road to build a new school.
They will never understand that there are old ladies here dressed like my Tia's selling tortillas.

They can't even fathom drinking water from the ground that you built houses on.
They cannot stand that you've obtained the freedom that they claim to have.

Mad at the Moon

Loitering and bald, pock-marked,
Ignorant, illiterate,
Dressed in stones, distant, strange,
Always alone,

240 thousand miles off,
No one wants to hang out
With the moon. You can't
Breathe there.

Worthless moon, invisible by day,
Then using someone
Else's light. Irrelevant, and old—
There is no point.

It just hovers there, no use
To anyone. It doesn't sing
Or take out the trash. It has never
Read Shakespeare

Or changed a tire. If I could, I would
Rip it out of the sky. It just
Stood there glowering the night
My father put metal

To his mouth, silent again, it just
Observed through the window
As my mother fell, just watching,
Doing nothing, static

And stuck. The moon can't
Get off its ass—like now
Glistering the water with foolish
Sparks of light.

The Snake in My House

In the middle of the night
A sliver of moon tears through
My left window like the sun,
Bright yellow like the snake
I found today by my son's
Bedroom door, with brown
Sequined eyes, a mouth,
Neither happy nor sad.
Upstairs I considered what
To do, chop him to pieces
With a shovel? *Use a broom*
Said a friend. *Throw him*
Over a wall, said another,
Scoop him into a bucket. It
Will kill your dog. I'll be over
In a minute. I am camping
With my kids. Somebody said
Be cautious. The internet
Was full of equally helpful
Guidance, *If bitten, you*
Can use over the counter
Anti-venom. I'm going
To a hotel said my son.
When I returned downstairs
With my options, the yellow
And black fellow was gone.
And this is why I keep my
Eyes open when I kiss you.

My Mother

My mother she works three jobs
During my teen years, I didn't see her much.
I remembered having soup during the weekend
And then when Monday rolled in
She was gone - working.

Job one - she sews
Job two - she cooks
Job three – she's a machine operator

My mother, she had seven children
Two sons passed away
Five daughters are here to stay
To build strong community.

Moon of Mistakes

The moon of mistakes is wet and green
glows in my head at night at noon
I count up the reeds knotweed trumpets
The beginning: my smile, your nod
my words that snaked up our arms
The moon of mistakes is loud and red

The lake on the moon of mistakes is black
I drown my past but it comes up coughing
Stars, all mistakes, fall down to the moon
We tattooed our yeses on thumbs
I closed my eyes closed my eyes
The lake is black knotweed dense

Dragonflies breed in the air like mistakes
along the shore of the lake on the moon
Skimmers bluets damsels darners
I stitched the weeds of me
to your fine linen, unfolded
From the moon, a flutter of wings wings

On the moon the knotwords shimmer at night
stars rise up from the lake like mistakes
trumpets have wings I'm a skimmer I'm red
Bleeding for years and years
I cut the basket that held us
I drown my past but it comes up coughing

Worth nothing, the reeds and knotweed are dry
Worth nothing, knotwords fall and repeat
My words are sere I loved you left you . . .
My knot of mistakes comes up coughing

February

Two feet of squeaky-like Styrofoam silence.
The civilized hell of a snowbound town.
The frosty air plucks your cheeks like the strings of a zither,
wishing to hurt you
like a snow-white kid with a chrome-plated soul.
You can notice that the wintertime
is not on the go, it's idling,
or skidding, and another world that used to belong to the dead approaches you.
The world of anti-life,
a purple, sluggish tsunami tags behind you like a mouse behind a cat.
I can see that February in my dreams,
it's like my daughter's cartoon bookmark
inserted in my hair.
It's like a steel-lilac sturgeon wrapped in a newspaper
and the dead words are soaked in the slime,
covered with the contact lens of the scales.
February, is written above the entrance
of the white grotto of silence
surrounded with dog's pawprints,
which look like casting molds for making tulips.
The narrow days of winter,
like pathways cut through an iceberg,
will lead you along the snowy labyrinths
to the meat department of a supermarket:
a dismembered Minotaur, the soft red marble
in clear bags. You flinch, you wince –
these minutes are second-hand,
they are polished by a great number of minds
like door knobs.
Someone has already lived here before you,
breathed in the condensed air with the odor of tangerines,
kissed these big-eyed silly women,
listened to the slightly vibrating jingle version of Vivaldi,
uttered dead words, banalities –
the minutes are like glittering pedals,
but the brake line
is punctured.

февраль

метр скрипучей, как пенопласт тишины -
цивилизованный Ад городка, занесенный снегом.
морозный воздух щипает щеки, как цимбалы,
специально хочет сделать больно ребенок -
белое дитя с хромированной душой, и ты
замечаешь - время зимой работает вхолостую.
буксует.
и тебя настигает мир, который принадлежит мертвецам.
царство нежизни - сиреневое, медленное цунами,
движется по пятам человечества, как мышь за котенком;
этот февраль мне снится до сих пор:
мультяшная закладка дочери среди волос в моей голове,
сиренево-стальной осетр завернутый в газету,
и мертвые словечки пропитываются слизью, чешуей,
контактными линзами; ты прочтешь - «февраль»
над входом в белый лимузин безмолвия,
отороченный следами собачьих лап: слепки, формочки
для отливки тюльпанов. зимние узкие дни -
тропинки, вырубленные в скале, в айсберге, приведут тебя
сквозь белоснежные лабиринты в супермаркет, мясной отдел;
расчлененный минотавр красный, мягкий мрамор
в пластиковых пакетах, и ты
вздрагнешь - эти минуты б/у,
отполированные множеством сознаний, как ручки дверей,
здесь уже кто-то жил до тебя,
дышал конденсированным воздухом с ароматом мандарин,
целовал этих глазастых, глупых женщин,
слушал легкую вибрацию, рекламные акции под Вивальди,
говорил мертвые словечки, общие фразы.
минуты, как сверкающие педали,
но тормозной шланг перерезан...

-Dmitry Blizniuk

October 31, 2020

after rereading Allen Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California"

I was afraid digital photos of the pandemic
dead would appear one by one in the frame
of this October's blue moon. But instead
I saw the spirit of Allen Ginsberg materialize
in the craters, pointing his beard toward America.
So, I followed his spirit as it floated down to Earth,
slipping past supermarkets with their masked
consumers cursing the aisles of empty shelves.
Then his spirit floated down crowded corridors
of hospital images—overwhelmed healthcare
workers dressed for Halloween in PPE,
treating patients costumed in a tangle of tubes
and wires while they groped for a second gasp.
I could hear Ginsberg's spirit beating
and howling across the time zones, beating
and howling and asking, "Where are we going,
America? Where are we going as we trudge
the feculent banks along these murky waters?"

Man As Cartoon

Picture our hero with a shower curtain
draped over his narrow shoulders, knotted around
his pious neck. He is going to do great things,
he is certain, will lead nations, conquer peoples,
feed lesser souls into the great sausage maker
that is history. He knows the secret is
relentless dedication, the bending of fools
to his will and turning them into plow blades
and pile drivers. No man is an island, except
the man who leads an army.

That man is a continent.





Asphalt

What is the most valuable commodity in heaven?
Asphalt, of course. You can't find it anywhere,
not on the streets or in the pawn shops
or coffeehouses, none of the spaces
where people are likely to travel or remain.
It's a Goddamned miracle, asphalt is,
to see a clod of it nesting in
a golden gutter outside the three-screen
Trinity Movie Theaters,
pulling all the sunlight into it
like a black hole in the afterlife.

Rescued from gilded obscurity,
it would be placed behind glass at
The Museum of Shit We Just Can't Explain.
The redeemed will float past
awed and nostalgic for a time
when life was crude and stank
like the bones of the dead.

Dance Down the Moon

Dance lightly down the bright and bending moon
and lively on the ramp up to the day.
There's one incessant robin for the tune.
Each dawning now I hear it sing away
fierce like Tebaldi warming up offstage
to die a death as Mimi in Act Three.
Go quiet as the turning of a page
beneath the songbird practicing high C.
Dance down the bending moon, the ending night,
and speak to it in all iambic pent.
The risk is it will sound too erudite,
but there are worse ways language can be spent.
Dance down the moon, for love *can* break your heart,
and all we have to fix it with is art.

Autumn in New York

Now that we've moved
out into Western New York,
we hear gun fire all the time
from hunters or people
practicing for the hunt later,
and it snaps me back
to all those years in L.A.
where I almost never heard
someone shooting and certainly
not the sustained fire
like those practicing all afternoon.
Still, I thought about it then,
imagined being in the grocery
or on campus. I imagined
someone in my classroom
opening up on my students
and the memory of that imagination
buried itself in me,
deep like a needle shard of glass
you step on and goes into your heel,
and you cannot see or find with fingertips.
I wonder if the people
who grew up here smile at the sound
because they shot with their fathers.
I wonder if they can hear it
and not even flinch.

Parsing Moonlight

I cup my hands
and fill them with moonlight,
pale gray white falling from
a quarter million miles above me.

No, I don't
because you cannot catch moonlight
in your hands.

I open my mouth,
close my eyes,
and drink the moonlight
until I am full.

No, I don't
because no mouth can taste
or sip or gulp moonlight.

I take a fine horsehair brush
and twirl it in the moonlight
pooled on my palette,
and paint a darkening canvas.

No, I don't
because moonlight dyes
with an evanescent glow.

I strip my clothes off,
then pull on the garment
of the pale gray moonlight,
and I am no longer cold.

No, I am still cold
because the moonlight
wears me thin in its pale grace.

A costume of moonlight
clings to naked flesh
like the fallacy of hope.
I become content in gray nakedness.



LindaAnn LoSchiavo
Art Moon Owl Female



LindaAnn LoSchiavo

*LindaAnn LoSchiavo
Art Moonshine*

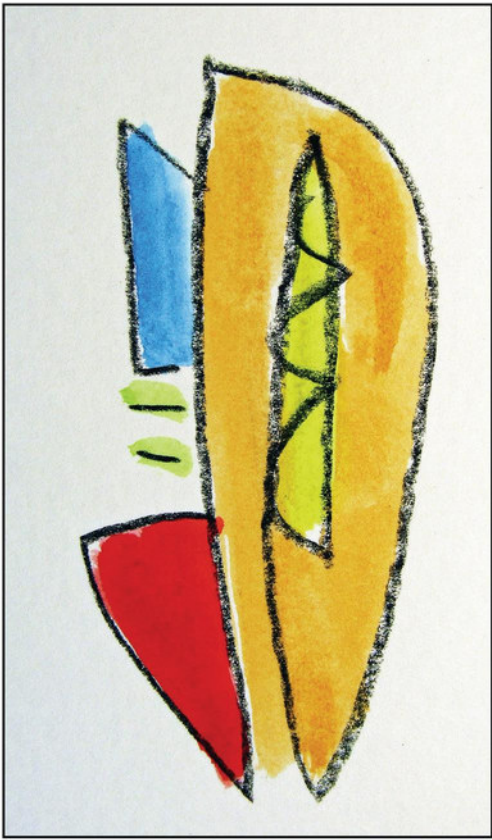
Seeds

If you wish to grow a garden, they said,
do it for real. He leaned on a cane.
She looked smaller than I recalled. They
breathed out serenity, with a zest of humor,
I felt. I looked up from the gravelly
patch.

Do it as the mermaid does, they said.
Mermaid's garden? Sure, she likes it circular.
Round, planted with peonies and roses.
All things red, to attract hummingbirds.
Hippocampi, I dared to object.
They smiled.

Do it as the octopus does.
Miniature, parsed with rocks, dotted
with tiny fountains, grottos, shrines.
Have fun, but remember: for real!
And what did they exactly
mean?

I pulled weeds, racked dry leaves,
pinched dead heads, watered deep
and slow. The sun bathed the world
in a pool of ruby, then it kissed the sea
and left a stain of lipstick—a blood
mark—before diving in.



Michael Moreth, Pamplamoose (left), Purple Mountains (right)

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