A Year at the Academical Village: Poem Series

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Kenan Fellowship

Summer 2014
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Fall Semester
KINE 1000:

Wake up.
Ease into your consciousness
Feel your back against the mattress
Your sitbones and shoulder blades protrude
You are lying flat.
Shake the lead from your bones
Beat the sand from your eyelids
You were in a world, already forgotten
Now you are here.
Feel the morning slide through your nostrils
The air is cold,
The room is cold,
You are cold.
You have spent 18 years a tuber, undercover
Sprouting aimless tendrils towards the future
It is time to wake up.
HIST 1010:

The purple shadows of slaves
haunt cobble pathways,
between columns,
stretch out across the lawn
like wine stains we’ve called watermarks
and treated as tradition.

Our china cracked
And repaired with gold.
Augmented,
despite our faults.
RELG 1702:

Ritual spaces
Frat houses, churches, a variety of places
We congregate and worship
This God or that
White dresses, black skirts
Khaki pants, button up shirts
Trade stained glass for laser lights
Sunday mornings for Friday nights
A golden altar, a silver keg
We pass these cups
Drink this juice
Confide that we need the flesh
Whether it’s Eucharist or a woman’s breast
We do this tonight
In practice
For morning and a day
Mourning in the day
For things we shouldn’t have done last night.
It’s a new religion
The college plight
An existential crisis
And a continual fight
Knowing that we do these things in tandem
And sometimes they look the same
Cognitive dissonance in our brain
Are we Paul or Saul?
All we know is this:
When it comes to the fallen,
We’re the very best of them all
So drink motherfucker,
in the forgiveness of sins
Drink motherfucker,
for the resurrection of the body
Drink motherfucker,
for life everlasting.
Drink.
Amen.
Next week we’ll do it again.
When people first hear about the inevitable heat death of the universe, they tend to think of the sun exploding, of macro-level global warming, and the recreation of a fiery hell. They don’t realize that the universe is steadily cooling around us.

We spend all of our lives generating heat. Destroying things to build cooking fires, killing things to consume them, and using that energy to work, to plow into the land and watch steam rise from our bodies in the early morning. All our existence is a burning.

People like to believe that the universe will come together as a series of individual parts, amalgamate to create so much heat, that the cosmos implodes. As if a match could strike against itself.

But that is not the case, despite our efforts, things will still cool. No matter how much heat we create, in this lifetime, the universe will cool, until everything ends, like a flame blown out.

Moksha.
I wear Lacoste polos and boat shoes
I dress and act and walk and talk
Like the rich white kids from the suburbs
Who live at the end of culs-de-sac
Where the road stops short as if to say
“It doesn’t get any better than this.”

In reality,
I’m just one of many children
All driving adult bodies
Through this circus of society
Careening towards our own destiny
Inside these ill-fitting skins

We’re like wax figures
So real, it’s uncomfortable to stand next to us and know
We’d melt underneath a magnifying glass.

Yet still
I wear a snapback
Step over a sidewalk crack
Down Rugby Road
Where every Thursday night the same story told
UVA ID, 21, allegedly.
8 boys in the same getup
playing flip cup
looking at a girls butt
they wouldn’t turn down for what
like an astronaut
with an unrealistic plot
head in the clouds
as you look through the crowds
At the girl in the sundress
And the girl in the sundress
And the girl in the sundress
We’re all just looking for someone to impress
Who?
These people all look the same

But they’re beautiful and they’re confident
Somehow we think that makes them better,
So we blend in, dress like them
Try not to offend

I twist myself into knots
Till blood wrings out
Make a sculpture of the man that I’m trying to be.
I can’t tell you if it’s an idol or an effigy
Spring Semester
When babies are born they only have two natural fears. Loud noises and falling. That’s what makes love so messy. Because you are, invariably, falling. The truly terrifying thing is, once you start falling, you’ll never land. Have you ever noticed no one ever lands in love? They fall. All you can do is fall. This is because love is what fills black holes. So when you experience love, that feeling of your gut sinking is a black hole, pulling you closer. It is a black hole, letting you fall in.

As you start to sink, you blush. You look at the one who just pushed you into this vortex of destiny with insatiable eyes, and you turn red. You turn red because the gravitational forces of a black hole are so strong that they actually constrict the light around you until all of the wavelengths are shortened from the long rolling frequencies to the kick drum of crests that beat in time with your racing heart. You will turn redder and redder until the light emitted from your body turns infrared and radio. Until you can only be perceived in the static between love songs that your want-to-be-lover is listening to while hopefully thinking of you.

But sometimes the person that you fall for stays in your life and as you fall, the two of you become closer and closer even though your feelings aren’t reciprocated. If this happens, then in your eyes, they will turn blue. Because as you fall farther and farther into this black hole called love, only the bluest waves of sadness escape. It’s the same reason for the color of the ocean and tears and blue notes in jazz, because those solemn blue waves pierce into the deepest of things. And so your lover will turn blue, like they’re frozen over and cold-hearted, not because they rejected you, but because they didn’t follow you into, this black hole that they put you through.

Now, when you fall in love and you feel your insides contort as though you are being pulled into yourself like an emptiness waiting to be filled. When you find love like a vacuum. You can fall at the same rate.
NRSE 3410:

An amputee of war
I wore her on me like a phantom limb.
A subtle reminder that I’m less without her
That a part of me is missing,
I know it, I can feel it,
I can reach out and try to grab it
But nothing’s there.
Just empty air,
and pieces of what once was
that I can’t pick up with this ghost for a hand.
A hand that I wish I had, that I long to touch
That I used to feel on my chest with every breath
That moved in and out.
A hand that slid across my body at night
That I could feel the next day on my skin
Pulsating like a wave
That goes in and out
Dancing across my body
I can feel the touch quiver with heat
As it passes through this arm
To this leg
To that muscle
To my back
Up my neck
And on my lips
I still feel it.
Coming in and out.
Every morning I wake
Lay there and wonder
When did I lose it?
What was the battle?
Where is the bullet wound?
For how long and why did we let the gangrene of our own greed spread
until we couldn’t save it?
Should I have known that the lawyers would have to come in like doctors and saw everything in half?
You keep the pinky and the ring finger
I’ll have the thumb
The doctors took the index as their fee and you already gave me the middle one
Now all we have left is the palm
It can live with you and visit me every other weekend
I’ll look at him and wonder what could have been
If there was a way that we could mend
But I know that together we would only bend ourselves into a fist
An angry knot we swore not to become
Knots tied by threads
Laced in and out
Knots in our legs as our hands held tight
At night when you heard thunder
You used to bury your face into the crook of my arm.
It never woke me.
Now when lighting strikes
I hear gunshots and mortar shells
Laughter from water pistol fights and wedding bells
They haunt me all the same.

The youth of love and war is far too quick to touch and let go.
Son, if I could go back and hold her once more, I would.
And with both hands I would have never
Let go.
ECON 3500:

Consider Margaritaville
an economy
With an indivisible good
Named Stacy
Assume two consumers
Garrett and Kurt

Now Garrett has merit
And Kurt can’t hurt
So Stacy has options
Which helps,
Because she’s kind of a flirt

But the night is moving on
People are steadily hooking up
Search cost is high
And the opportunity cost goes down
With every emptied cup
If Garrett and Kurt
Both pursue Stacy
While drunk and hazy
They would both fail
And look quite dumb
This is, unfortunately,
Their Nash Equilibrium

Luckily, this is an iterated game
So the two don’t need to fight
Kurt can wingman Garrett
And they can switch roles tomorrow night
When the girl will be named Macy or Casey or Tracey
And most likely in a dress that’s all black and lacey
They will only grow their production possibility frontier
Because the parties will keep coming, as long as they have beer
The return,
  Setting aflame the ankh and asklepian
Watching the world turn orange, darkening
  Crushing ash and decay underfoot
Fuel for the coming spring
Where we will dig our father’s land
  In search of treasure
And find it in our labors

We are Perceval’s wasteful sons
Sailing on a windblown second chance
  Working through winter
So the once wounded world
Can give rise, and birth again
The thirsted rain, the squalling dove

Crack our heads on Lapis Noster
Bring forth Medusa and the olive tree
Stretched limbs, carrying the weight
Of a one eyed man with a broken side
  If it bares no taqsh
Then thou shalt cut it down
For it wastes the water of the well
And listens patiently, as the infant Mencius cries

Spinning threads of gold and melting wax
You will have no golden thread or odor
What’s essential is now; lay down your flowers
Under oath and aegis,
  To the village,
We return.
There’s an old story at UVA: Two fraternity brothers went streaking at about 2am, and, in their drunken stupor, decided to walk it in for the last leg. Audacious as they were, they walked along the brick path beside the lawn rooms and not up the lawn itself. At this same time, a Dean at the University left a dinner party in a pavilion that had gone late. The Dean walked out just in time to see the two, very drunk, very naked students. Without the blink of an eye, without a word of admonishment, the Dean said, “Boys, the difference between streaking and public indecency is a matter of pace.” And so the two took off.

Many seem to think that the tradition of streaking is…barbaric, and I’m inclined to agree. Many think that it has no place at such an institution, that it serves no meaning or purpose and should therefore, not be welcomed. However, for me, it is a bond that tethers our common meaning, it is a piece of our community, it is a tradition far older than its practice.

I often like to think about the evolution of the search for meaning.
Of how our troglodytic ancestors came to believe in something greater than themselves.
I can imagine a great war between families.
One tribe: a group of individuals, each fighting for survival.
The other: a society, ardent to preserve its race.

I wonder who the first martyr was,
The first Neanderthal to intrude the path of a spear
To knowingly appropriate the strike of a mace
that had been meant for another.

I like to think that there was, immediately, a moment of silence
As all parties were hit with the gravity
of what had just been done.
As they tried to comprehend
how and why, and what it meant

I like to think that he was the first of us to understand.
That through his sacrifice, his tribe won the war
That they idolized his death
Marked his grave with stones
Told stories of his valor,
Inadvertently formed a religion

I like to think that he was the first Christ
That he taught the world to look beyond itself
To not just care for one another
But to believe in something abstract,
Religion, community, art, ideals, love, virtue
They were all born in that instant
As the caveman lay dying,
I like to think that he was able to glimpse into the future
That he could see communities come together
The proud execution of revolutionaries
The plight of the lonely scientist,
dedicating his life to cure disease
The toils of Camus,
struggling with the absurd.

What once was an anomaly
An incomprehensible act
Has become the very crux of our society
We all strive to live outside ourselves
We search for meaning
And impulsively care for others
We have names and places for those who don’t.

The sociopaths, the criminally insane,
We lock them behind steel gates
And still, we sympathize for them
We say, “something is so fundamentally wrong with them,
they don’t know better.”
Who would have thought,
As the caveman lay dying,
That this would be the turning point for humanity.
That we would never be the same?

We live in a world, driven by abstract meaning
We form universities
Based on common ideals of knowledge
To improve the state of the world
To propagate intelligence and compassion
We form communities of trust and learning in action
All around abstraction
That there is more to life than our own experience
That we must find and spread this notion
Meaning

We admire those who give their lives, their money
For the sake of our inherited tradition,
If successful, we become them in turn,
But we forget our savage hero
The naked, ursine man
Who set our lives in motion
We think of ourselves
Above him
But when we wake
Cold at night
we do not think
As enlightened men
How and why heat escapes our bones
We pull our covers up
And slumber on
Instinctually,
We are the same.

On certain nights
We gather with friends
And remember this forgotten ancestor
We hoot and we holler
Expose our skin against the cold
Feel the grass between our toes
As we find clumsy footing
On sinewy legs.
The same that bore our ancestors
That push us ever forward
Towards sobriety
Towards wisdom
We fade into the distance
Allow our supple cheeks
To jostle - in the face of the past - we return
to embrace our own barbarism
Acknowledge that we have not changed
We have only become more so
This sprint, is in remembrance,
an aching tendon stretched through time
the first leg of an evolutionary race
There is a difference between this and indecency.
I promise you, it’s more than just pace.
Appendix

ENWR 4400: Metaphors [Annotated]

The return,¹
Setting aflame the ankh² and asklepian³
Watching the world turn orange⁴, darkening⁵
Crushing ash and decay underfoot⁶
Fuel for the coming spring⁷
Where we will dig our father’s land⁸
In search of treasure⁹
And find it in our labors¹⁰

We are Perceval’s wasteful sons¹¹
Sailing on a windblown second chance¹²
Working through winter¹³
So the once wounded world¹⁴
Can give rise, and birth again¹⁵
The thirsted rain,¹⁶ the squalling dove¹⁷

Crack our heads on Lapis Noster¹⁸

¹ Beginning of a new school year
² Egyptian symbol for truth
³ Symbol for science; Was combined with the Ankh to make the symbol of the lamp which is commonly used for wisdom
⁴ Burning; Changing of the seasons
⁵ Maturation; leaves turning brown; black ash
⁶ We must walk over our past lives and former knowledge to go forward
⁷ Trees grow from their dead leaves, knowledge builds off itself
⁸ Aesop’s fable
⁹ Many treat education as a means only to a pecuniary end
¹⁰ The real reward in the pursuit of education is the actual knowledge gained in the process
¹¹ Prodigal son
¹² Something Ulysses was denied by the Gods, but was nonetheless given, undeserved, to Percival and the prodigal son
¹³ As the seasons progress and we find failings in our ability to produce knowledge we continue to strive forward.
¹⁴ Fisher King; a world that has been harmed by our the winter of our intellectual pursuits
¹⁵ Male and female aspects of creating a new generation of knowledge
¹⁶ The Wasteland; salvation; the coming of Spring
¹⁷ Biblical flood; coming of peace
Bring forth Medusa and the olive tree\(^\text{19}\)
Stretched limbs, carrying the weight\(^\text{20}\)
Of a one eyed man with a broken side\(^\text{21}\)
If it bares no taqsh\(^\text{22}\)
Then thou shalt cut it down\(^\text{23}\)
For it wastes the water of the well\(^\text{24}\)
And listens patiently, as the infant Mencius cries\(^\text{25}\)

Spinning threads of gold and melting wax\(^\text{26}\)
You will have no golden thread\(^\text{27}\) or odor\(^\text{28}\)
What’s essential is now;\(^\text{29}\) lay down your flowers\(^\text{30}\)

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\(^{18}\) Birth of Athena, Goddess of wisdom, from Zeus’ head; Lapis Noster is an ancient term for the Philosopher’s Stone which is both the Magnum Opus, or pinnacle work of science, and the elixir of life.

\(^{19}\) Athena’s most wretched and benevolent creations

\(^{20}\) The olive tree, a creation of Athena which herself was a product of our search for knowledge, begins to become analogues to Yggdrasil, the world tree which stretches across the universe and connects all worlds. This shows the powerful derivations that arise from the continuation of knowledge—how one pursuit leads into another.

\(^{21}\) Odin sacrificed himself upon the Yggdrasil in order to gain more knowledge. Again, our intellectual pursuits give the foundation with which others can seek knowledge.

\(^{22}\) Taqsh is the fruit that arrives before an actual fig. Intellectual endeavors need not bear fruit of their own, only the beginning signs of progress that will eventually lead to the fruit of knowledge.

\(^{23}\) Parable of Jesus cursing the fig tree makes the Yggdrasil now analogues to the fig tree in this parable which itself is an analogy for the tree of knowledge; Intellectual endeavors that bear no signs of progress should be cut down.

\(^{24}\) Well of Mimisbrunner that is reached by one of the three roots of the Yggdrasil. It is famous as a source of knowledge. Odin cast his eye into the well in order to drink from it.

\(^{25}\) Mencius was an ancient Chinese philosopher who argued that we know humanity is good because any individual who heard a baby crying in a well would certainly save it. Not pursuing knowledge strips us of our humanity and benevolence. To patiently listen to an infant cry in a well is an especially heinous act and if that child were Mencius himself then it would prevent the world from learning much of Confucius’ teachings and of cultural practices like filial piety.

\(^{26}\) Both are tedious acts that require much energy. The former is very profitable in the children’s story Rumpelstiltskin. The later alludes to Descartes proof in the Meditations that bodies are essentially extended.

\(^{27}\) A golden thread is spun at the beginning of every man’s birth and each thread represents that individual’s life and destiny. These golden are spun by the Fates in Greek mythology and by the Norns at the Well of Uror (also reached by a root of the Yggdrasil) in Norse mythology.

\(^{28}\) As cited in the Meditations, melted wax has no odor; further to have no life is to enjoy the simple odors of stopping to smell the flowers.
Under oath\textsuperscript{31} and aegis,\textsuperscript{32} 
To the village,\textsuperscript{33} 
We return.

\textsuperscript{29} As stated in Descartes Meditations, the only things that we know are that we are essentially thinking, we exist, and our bodies are essentially extended, we are here. The time to take advantage of and enjoy our lives is now.

\textsuperscript{30} Do not go through life merely picking flowers—the fruit and knowledge that others have produced—let them grow, observe their beauty, and grow your own; Myop lays down her flowers at the end of \textit{The Flowers} by Alice Walker right before she acknowledges that the Summer is over and she is no longer an innocent child. Similarly, we must step into our own adulthood.

\textsuperscript{31} Honor code
\textsuperscript{32} Wisdom, guidance, and protection of professors
\textsuperscript{33} Academical Village