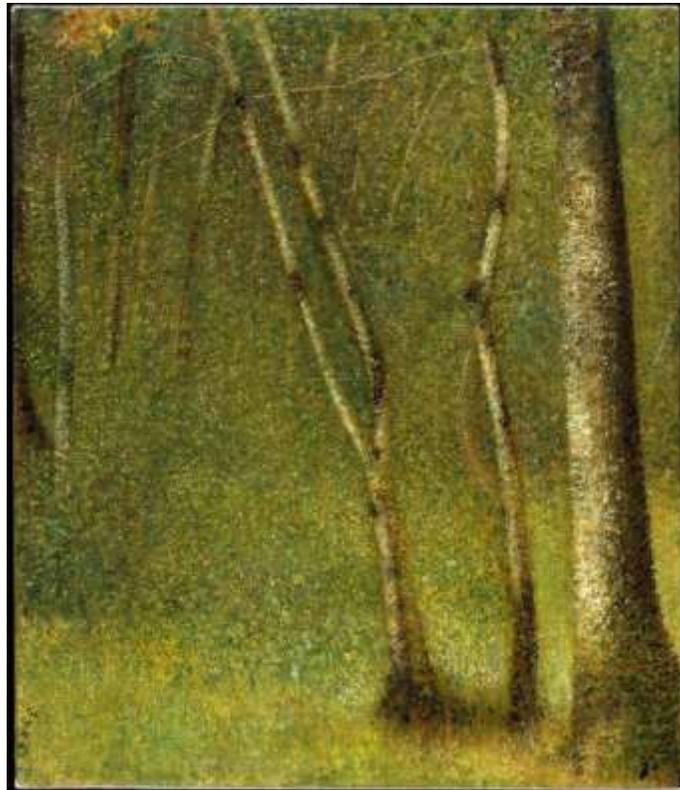


7 (seven) PoEms

By BraDley HogE

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes...*

Initially, we were inclined to just publish Hoge's ekphasic poem in contrast, juxtaposed (such a worn-out undergraduate word, right up there with 'paradigm,' 'dichotomy' and 'antithetical' (paradox-sickly)—you can almost tell which survey courses they chose as electives in their freshman and sophomore years.) to RAD's entry above. But we loved them all so utterly, how could we possibly deny our reader(s). Here is the work affixed that fixated him, Georges Seurat's "The Forest at Pontaubert" at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, as allusion and edification (not to scale or climb):



Isn't it also trans-substantial? Read Hoge's take, as well as the rest of him. As for mine, it is more space than I am allotted... You either get the picture or my proselytizing, I flipped a coin and you won...

(Spacing is poet's own.)

The White Owl

On the night my son
lost hope

I walked the dog
under the bridge where I had been told

there was an owl.
It's the route

we always take.
And I saw the owl—circling

as we approached the bridge—
dipping under the bridge—around a support

column—arcing back over the span—
and around again.

And it was clicking. A sound unlike
any I've ever heard.

At first sounding like multiple clicks—
a nest full of chicks—

or distress calls from potential prey?
But as I got closer

they all emanated from the solitary
owl. Echoing

off bridge, water, path—
or simply nature

of the click, I couldn't be sure.
And I was able to walk

to a spot where I could stand
and look up as the owl swooped

overhead. Its face
and head clearly an owl. The sounds

clearly its signal.
And it doesn't change

anything.
My son is still lost.

I don't know if he will be okay.
I have no comfort

in fate or folklore.
No clarity

from symbolism or the promise
that allegory

is any more prescient
because of the timing

of the encounter.
But it comforts me

nonetheless
that the absolutely sublime

beauty of the owl
against reflection of moon

on water flowing under
the bridge

intertwined
the isolation of my personal crisis

with exigency of routine
into such a miraculous

anthropic cosmological
moment.

Fairies

On viewing Georges Seurat's "*The Forest at Pontaubert*"
at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Enter Georges Seurat's Forest if you dare,
for it is in the shadows

that you find your self.
The forest is lost to the trees.

The depths shrouded by veil of fear.
It is from the forest that fairies and goblins

Emerge. From the depths—
where distance gobbles light. Mingling foliage

with imagination. Stories
of witches and giants. Promise

of flowers unseen. The mind
emerges from this same fear. Grappling

with darkness in need of explanation,
explication of the boundaries

beyond our sight. Beyond our ken—
where rhodora provides proof

that beauty is not accidental.
Where the serpent provides comfort

from the amoral universe.
Where the blurring

of what is seen and unseen
makes everything crystal clear.

Rift Zone

On viewing Clyfford Still's "*Painting, 1944*"
at the Museum of Modern Art in New York

Like a rift between tectonic plates—
surrounded by deep sea darkness—

dread sparks the mind.
Dread of death and dying.

Dread of meaninglessness.
Some say that when the first hole

was drilled through the crust
of the earth into the mantle

below, that screams
were heard. The wailing agony

of hell. The mind has many tricks
to protect itself. The comfort

of fear being one of them.
Because the sparks of imagination

free to illuminate all possibilities
are soothed more by belief

in the serpent than by
the prospect of total darkness.

Tearing Wings Off Butterflies

~~Two babies slipped into the water the witness said,
as the mother too weak to notice was pulled into the airboat.~~

As Harlan Ellison spoke to a group of college students,

~~And no one bothered to dive into the toxic water.
And they struggled for just a little while,
she said, before disappearing into flood.~~

*A butterfly
is freedom red in tooth and claw*

he entertained questions. A hand was raised
and acknowledged, "what does the story mean?"

*survival by mimicry
camouflage and mystery*

~~and it was at that moment, she said, she lost faith
in humanity, but not in God~~

And his face reddened as he angrily replied,
"parsing the meaning from a story
is like tearing the wings off butterflies—

*gossamer wings
and engineering*

~~So it wasn't the impersonal, but the inept,
not nature's wrath, but the lack
of appropriate response.~~

*air currents
in micro*

you lose the beauty on analysis!"

~~because, she thought, God hadn't discriminated,
but people had, and God will welcome the babies into heaven,~~

After long consideration of the haunting suggestion
of his anger, I have come to the conclusion—

~~while we will bury them in memories less horrific,
and bolster our abdication of empathy with donations.~~

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—
it becomes the stuff
of quarks and leptons—¹

I mean how trite are neutrinos today?
and when I try to write about the Tao of
space-time or cosmic dance of strings I
come up short—²

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¹Whitman knew nothing is ever really lost—quantum particles entangled—
gravitons dancing in and out of eleven dimensions—

²Thoreau saw transcendental nature—a drop of dew falling from a leaf
explaining the humid winds blowing

Lao Tsu— 2500 years ago
spun the dance of the Wu Li masters—
each molecule's past—rose petal
as rose quartz in granite—as comet dust

— as a scientist and a poet—that the butterfly

~~God will continue unaffected, unadulterated while we rebuild.~~

red in tooth and claw provides far greater opportunity
to observe natural beauty in all its glory

~~And we will praise God's work through us. His presence
in every heart, but two, which stopped beating in the abyss.~~

than simply focusing on the brilliant display of colors,
and the uplifting lightness
of synergy with the wind.

is it just another old fashioned
way of saying that life
requires creation of meaning
to be justified³

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³as wind blows through hair and gunshots ring—as anger becomes excuse for
almost anything except for tears which falling pull leaves from trees—
suspending dust fertilizing oceans—driving hurricanes and other acts of God—

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A View from Cabo

I'm looking out over expanse of blue ocean.
Listening to waves thundering

against shoreline. Smaller waves farther out
sparkling pristine. Marine

seascape like quartz crystal chandelier
catching the light just right

From the balcony of my private
beach resort in Cabo San Lucas.

Idyllic because I cannot see far
enough over horizon

to glimpse the garbage patch.
Flotsam collecting in gyre current.

Rivers of plastic flowing into ocean
along the coastline

from Alaska to the End of the Earth.
Brine and sun degrading debris

into flocs mimicking phytoplankton.
Filling bellies of fish and birds

mistaking the buoyant pieces
for food. Starving

chicks just far enough
out of sight to justify

one more round of drinks
before it's time to call it a night.

Water filling the engineered slopes like a d r t h.
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Another tree,

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as if someone tossed it in a game.
The tree's foliage sparse

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Debris catching on the trunk as the current flows around it.

Its branches full of cormorants.

Heat

I abhor heat,
sweating, and insects.

It makes me anxious,
like needing to burst from my skin.

Balloon expanding inside
me as if bursting

would provide relief.
If only I could release the pressure.

Instead I seek colder climes,
norther latitudes, higher altitudes.

And as my life wears on,
my journeys take me

farther and higher
to find the same succor.

Heat expanding
behind me to record levels.

Expanding range
of drought and wildfire.

Snows melting faster
and storms growing stronger.

Winds pushing me away
from all that is familiar.

THE POETS SPEAKS: *Poetry is a contentious part of my life, which I cannot escape. I simply lack the standing to write powerful poetry about the human experience, while being impelled to continue recording my sublunary thoughts. Poetry has given me an outlet for my philosophic and speculative mind, while my career has taken me along the braided stream of STEM education. I enjoy looking for natural metaphor in both existential and human nature.*

“The White Owl” was a real experience borne from the confluence of polar-opposite emotions. Our son had just stormed off leaving my wife and I convinced we would not see him again, alive.

I started the walk with a knot in my stomach, trying to reconcile my dread and resignation. The rest of the poem is an account of what happened next. My two ekphrastic poems, "Fairies" and "Rift Zone", relate to our (human) fears emerging from evolutionary psychology. "Tearing Wings Off Butterflies" is a complicated poem. It was inspired by the lines crossed out relating to news I read of a rescue during hurricane Katrina. Each crossed out line is meant to be metaphor for the experience I had with Harlan Ellison and my own thoughts in the margins. "A View from Cabo" and "A Tree Full of Cormorants" are also based on the incongruity that is my life: a man spoiled by opportunities to travel and view earth's beauty, while knowing, professionally, that it is rapidly being lost: "Heat" is a melancholy poem for me. It is part of a group of poems I've written about climate change, but it's really about my leaving Texas for California, my wife and two children journeying with me while my oldest son stayed behind to start his family.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Bradley Earle Hoge's poems appear in numerous literary journals and anthologies, most recently in Red Planet, Valley Voices, Angry Old Man, and Shanti Arts Garden Issue. His first book of poetry, "Nebular Hypothesis" was published by Cawing Crow Press in 2016. He has had chapbooks published by Kattywompus Press, Red Berry Editions, and two by Plain View Press. He was the managing editor of Dark Matter, an online journal for speculative writing and Quantum Tao. Bradley is currently teaching middle school science at The Nueva School. He lives in Foster City, CA with his wife and dog Bubbles.