

THE WAVE EQUATION

By Mark Antokas

WHY I LIKE IT: *Guest editor HEATHER WHITED writes...* "The Wave Equation" is a very fit name for Mark Antokas' story, as not only does the actual equation feature in it, but water comes forth as a powerful theme and in some ways, a template for the story's captivating nonlinear structure. Much like waves, this story ebbs through crests and troughs; the reader drifts between timelines, characters, and points of view, though a young man named Blake and the people he loves are most central. The relationships at play here are various, intriguing, and complex; romantic, fraternal, maternal. Rescuer and the rescued. Blake's two closest loves, the driving forces of his story, are a beautiful older woman named Isabelle and his brother, whom Blake was born 15 years after. A painful dynamic develops that draws the reader in. Cap't Antokas uses language and description in a sometimes devastating way, drawing the reader into Blake's losses and heartbreaks with sharp descriptions. We meet characters as apparitions, some not named until nearly the very end, haunting the story in a way. The Wave Equation is a captivating story that lingers.

Walking down to a stony beach one day, no one special, someone who did elephants to airplanes, horses to classical music, just a writer, just one soul looking for something that day on a lonely beach, found a young man on the sand who was bleeding, broken, in shock. The surf that day crashed into the shore, closing in hard, like bricks falling from the sky. Waves struck and pulled and sucked everything in their way.

Out there on that hot plate of a rock, where rocks beat salt from the ocean, serving himself out like an offering to a hungry fate, a sacrifice to the sea, Blake laughed a bitter Cinnar.

THE WAVE EQUATION

She was irreverent at times. Artists always were, at least to him.

About orgasms she said to Blake, "Velocity equals frequency," with a smile she added, "multiplied by wave length." Blake, the immaculate, concepted and raised

in a cloak of innocence, knew he was outclassed, in over his head, but he went for it anyway.

That was a time before the difference in their ages mattered, when all he could do was watch her beautiful mouth when she spoke, when they laughed together, when she took pink purple roses in promise from him, even though she'd taken them from men so many times before. That was a new time, when there was a radiation between the two, when there was something special in the way that they looked at each other. From him, shining eyes smiling, blood rushing, and from her, a faultless pirouette.

“The wave equation,” she explained.

There is something to be said about waves. They are constant, and in motion and have a force. From a ripple, to a wave, to a wall, they can grow. Lapping shoreside childlike, innocent and harmless, they have an elemental sound. It is music. The sea, gently caressing or ripping apart, floating gently or dragging you under. The sea can build and gather momentum, frighten, and come crashing into the shore in which you reside. The sea can create upheaval and change, transforming landscapes and relationships and souls and then, dissipate. But waves can always bring you back. The natural world creates them, and as long as there have been oceans in the world they have existed. They continue to affect.

Walking down to a stony beach one day, no one special, someone who did elephants to airplanes, horses to classical music, just a writer, just one soul looking for something that day on a lonely beach, found a young man on the sand who was bleeding, broken, in shock. The surf that day crashed into the shore, closing in hard, like bricks falling from the sky. Waves struck and pulled and sucked everything in their way. “Are you okay?” Lacking complete comprehension, seeking the story, the writer cut a path through a jungle to understand. The hurt young man’s breathing was difficult, “should I get a doctor?” the writer said. Metallic tastes of distress, concern and trepidation was the writer’s bite, emergency of situation pounded at the heart, “what can I do? Here, let me cover you with my windbreaker.”

The writer had been bivouacking the deserted beach, working hard on a novel, a story on human predilections, trying to hammer out a philosophy of cause and effect, motives and loneliness, on power and morality, a philosophy not yet there. The writer was broke and in a professional mess. Perhaps here, together with the elemental power of the place, a center could be found.

“My brother,” Blake said. They were alone except for the waves and the sand and the sky. A few odd birds meandered aftermath.

“Don’t talk now, save your strength, I am going to go and get help.” It would be a long run up in the heat of mid-morning, rushing up the rocky path to the village,

a telephone call, and then the run back down to the beach. The endless wait for the nearest doctor. At least two hours, and only then if the doctor could be reached.

“My brother pulled me from the sea.” Blood red viscous continued running slowly from a gash on the side of Blake’s face. The writer reached for a backpack, pulled a towel from the bag, and wrapped Blake’s face.

It was earlier that morning, in diversion, that Blake took with him a sketch pad, a few pencils and some memories, down to the beach, to a rock outcropping by the sea. He was an American, lonely and acetic and on holiday. With him that day, he had also brought along a history.

He sat at this early time of day, quiet, contemplative, resigned and absorbed with his past, on this pita of a flat rock by the sea. It was Isabelle who had shown him this place.

Sheer cliffs rose above him from behind. Walls of granite for eons stood defiant of sea and time. Thorny plants grew between crevasses, prospered in season, and then receded back. Birds careened overhead according to plan. Wild goats negotiated impossible pathways. Little indentations worn into the rock sheltered marine life in tide pools. An inaccessible shoreline was both caused by and protected by the sea, here, it was an unpredictable, narrow inlet of a beach, a natural vortex should the wind be right.

Together, in early rosy mornings they had taken the swim, art materials held in mouths in zip locked bags, gliding naked through the morning calm, making love, speaking the truth as they knew it, toying with art.

“Hello brother,” on that beaten smooth rock that morning, Blake heard the red wine of his brother’s voice, felt his presence in the water, in the wind, and in his mind, “it has been awhile, hasn’t it?”

‘Yes, it is good to talk with you again,’ Blake said in a voice dry, hearing in his mind the same voice he’d known since he’d been born. He had always been able to go to his brother for solace, to seek assistance, and advice. His brother had always been there for him.

And the mother who had a curious pregnancy fifteen years after the first. A foul tempered and distant woman, an accountant, she was as precise in her life as she was strict in the life of others, again confronted by the possibility of motherhood. A non-existent father, a veterinarian on call, concerned more with his animal practice than he was with his family practice. All that was left for Blake was a caring older brother.

“I see you have come to this island again for a visit,” the phantom said, “and attempting art too. One would think you would avoid such a place. The memories and all.”

“Yes. Memories,” Blake said, “what God gave us so that we may have roses in December.”

“Or a punishment too,” his brother countered, “why can’t you let her go? What is this fascination you have with a dead relationship, impossible from the beginning?”

“I’m able to handle it, okay? What happened between her and me was not because of you. Mistakes seem to be society’s way of excusing aberrant behavior. Accidents, if you like.” And after she left him, on the playlist was a requiem or two. “It ended, that’s all.”

“Strange what happens in life,” the brother said, “as to my viewpoint, I’m able to get a finer perspective on it now. Never would have thought of it while I was alive. Drowned at sea. Silly thing. A small wave really. Bad footing. She tried to help, sorry for not saying good-bye, and all.”

“I tell you again, it was not because of you.” On the drawing before him, Blake drew in a black and snarling line. Using the flat side of the pencil he marked in a cruel mouth, a stroke too bold for a sensitive man. He immediately regretted it. He hadn’t thought that he’d come out here to draw her.

It was worse at night. Wherever he went, N.Y., Paris, Berlin, he had images of an alabaster white Isabelle lounging on this same rock. In her tousled bed and hair in Paris. Naked in front of the fireplace at the cottage they’d rented one autumn

near Fire Island. “To hell with it,” Blake said, “damn all of reality.” No one could capture her fire. He really wasn’t an artist anyway.

“Science,” Blake recalled her saying, “attempts to explain. Art needs no explanation.” She thought his work as an anthropologist an unnecessary science. She thought all sciences unnecessary. Blake put the drawing aside. The morning was fine, a bright white sun, a few clouds in contrast to a blue sea. Small waves embraced a dry shore.

Waves. Out in open ocean, free and unrestricted, low in height, nothing to be afraid of here. Massing under the surface like the base of a moving mountain, trouble now, traveling rapidly and without hindrance. Nearing land, and closing in towards a climbing shoreline, a multiplication of the problem. Velocity slows, becomes more concentrated. Wave heights increase. Just above the point where the shoreline normally meets the shore, wave height is at a maximum. Then it breaks. Strange enough, most of the damage occurs as the wave recedes back into the sea.

“Unless you’re out there,” Blake attacked out loud, “and you think you’re covered by anonymity, and there’s no way you figure that you’ll ever be found out,” Blake bristled, “and you’re bending over dipping your hands into the water to cool your face and you’re out of balance and spent from the waist down and the woman with you dozes across the rear thwart in whatever kind of bliss it was that I could never give her.”

“Thought we’d been all over that already,” the apparition said, “you should give it up and start your life again. Have you finished your graduate studies?”

“Yes.”

“Got a job?”

“No.”

“You’ve started smoking and drinking I see. My, it has been awhile since we’ve talked.”

“Don’t patronize me,” Blake exploded into the space surrounding, “I’m not your little brother anymore, I don’t need you. Got it?”

“Dealt a bad hand, were you?”

“You’re god damned right, and I would think you should take some responsibility.” He regretted again.

The thing between Blake and Isabelle had started as a mild flirtation one summer on this end of road ocean shore, later it had built into a serious affair. Both were looking for something different and not knowing what; Blake taking solace from the scientific world, with an orderly life, still a student, just learning of love, of life, and reality. Isabelle the artist, older, refusing as she always did, in keeping any of her trains on any reasonable track, still in her mind assuming the position of an arabesque, having played her part to a dwindling audience in too many bad musicals with men. Older but no wiser, her life an abstract ballet, she still imagined

herself as the artist dancing nymph-like through life. But it was Adagio without a partner, wit without wisdom, and the reality was, that time had hardened and sharpened and honed the edge.

Isabelle's history with men read like a road map to nowhere. Before meeting Blake, Phillip had been her last. He was a concert pianist who cared more for his hands and his music than he did for her, and her needs. Her last words with him were this: 'You've made me hate myself.' He had made her forget her art. She couldn't live two lives. Leaving him, she chose to drown in her own poisons rather than drown in his. It had been hard to give up his life and the excitement of the upper echelons of the music world, the luncheons, the parties, the gala openings and the fund raisers, but she did. She was free of his restrictions.

And Ranier before. Tall and light skinned, and full of dark passions. Ranier. Handsome, persuasive, exciting. He was from Amsterdam. He was an independent filmmaker who was constantly visiting faraway places. Gradually they came to live together. He was a documentary video voyeur who left a trail. Later she considered carefully his out-takes from places where women and children cared little about their dress, where they knew nothing of deviant behavior and they let the camera invade their everyday movements, where they let him exploit their inmost privacies, even in defecation. It was then that she decided that there was no future with him. Ranier made no bones about it, he proved to be intent on sexing almost

everything in his path. Even the drunken Hungarian landlady that night in the hallway outside their door. Even though Isabelle had just returned from the abortion clinic that day.

Later that year, Ranier got stoned to death one summer day by the village elders in the upper Amazon. He had skipped out with his video footage and a religious head dress reputed to change the personality of whoever wore it. His body was found resting in an unnatural position in the jungle near Manaus. Isabelle understood more about his death after reviewing some of the footage returned with his body.

And Percy. Sweet Percy. Her first. They had discovered art together. They were young. Barely nineteen and getting married under a spreading apple in the spring when the flowers seemed to scream out in scented blossom color, surrounded by stoned-out well-wishers holding hands in a circle in a meadow, all in beads and tie-dye and moccasins. Afterwards they all celebrated in a makeshift sauna, then bathed naked in a cold stream.

Percy created what he liked to call 'Cerebral Art,' a curious mixture of branches and feathers and industrial refuse. Isabelle ground stones and other things found in nature into paints. Later Percy found solace in Buddhism. Still later he shaved his head and went off to the mountains outside Katmandu, and never came back.

Blake, on his hot shelf by the sea, looked again at his sketch of a cruel mouth. Three years ago, he'd been happier.

Her hair was blonde that hot summer day. He imaged her wearing white, with a gossamer veil, and flowers, but he remembered that she'd been wearing a tight fitting top, it was red. The word Tsunami was written on her shirt, it rose ocean blue and then fell across the landscape of her breasts. Blue jean cut-offs covered the nakedness he'd seen earlier on the beach. He spoke to her, certain that he must.

"Tsunami's can be generated by asteroid impacts over deep oceans," he said. She was the most exciting older woman he'd ever seen. He was on a high wire and working without a net. What would his brother say about her? "They usually devastate everything in their path," erudite now, in uncharted waters, but sophisticated.

"Well", she said with leisure. Slowness a provocation warning across her smile "You'd better be careful." She felt flattered that a boy like him could be interested in her. The last few had been older, patrons of her art, grayed, and in suits. The only art they knew was on the face of whatever currency they held dear.

She knew she was still beautiful. She never had children. A body firm at fifty. Breasts authentic and still full. A dancer's body of legs. She exercised regularly, ate responsibly, and drank little. Outside she was still soft like a woman, but she suspected a wall, inside and deep, buried in a secret reservoir which she could

recall at any moment. Put to the test she could be ruthless and exact. Punitive and just. There had been too many men along the way. She should spare this boy. He was just an innocent. He would get hurt.

“An asteroid hitting the earth could be bad,” Blake said bold and taking a seat next to her in the cafe. Vines covered, a primitive but melodic music played, a soft breeze wafted in fragrance of wild herbs. Be forward now, he thought. In control. Older women liked that. “Nothing can compare to a giant rock coming in at about seventy thousand miles per hour. When they hit the ocean there is an incredible explosion. A fifty meter object hitting the ocean at that speed would probably release the equivalent of ten megatons of TNT. Asteroid and water both vaporize.”

“A perfectly consummated experience.” Isabelle laughed. The waiter asked her if she would like another glass of wine and she acquiesced. He saw her wearing black, and in mourning. The waiter had his dark eyes targeted and focused upon her .

“Leaving a crater under the water twenty times the size of the impacting object. There is a big hole in the water.” Blake tore his eyes away from the long scissors of her tanned legs. “The water comes rushing back in, rises up like a giant fountain in the sky.”

“Quite the orgasm,” she said, meaning to intimidate. She took wine from the waiter who was bending close. He smelled like fetid cheese, was un-manicured, and had hairy fingers. His Neanderthal face grinned at her.

Blake continued, “When it comes back down, spreading all around, is Tsunami,” cocking an eyebrow, as nonchalantly as he could, attempting an Eroll Flynn, he said, “what did you say your name was?”

“I didn’t,” Isabelle told him. A man speaking with a Russian accent passed by their table, glanced, murmured something deep throated and honeyed to himself. He showed his wife, a former dancer gone bust down, to a seat. The Russian looked again. Isabelle looked back. He saw her in dark stockings and spiked heels. Yes, Isabelle thought, still beautiful at fifty.

Later that night, after a group fire at the beach---the Russian brought a guitar and sang thick and musically of melodrama and pathos, all the while looking at her. Someone else had brought a jug of homemade wine, the cask was passed and they drank. A joint floated. Pulling Isabelle away from the fire, they went off together and Isabelle told Blake everything.

She told him of loving and not being loved back, of always putting herself out on a line and getting nothing back but hurt. She told him of disappointments and expectations and betrayals, of getting her face thrust into the earth just when she

was vulnerable the most. She told him she would not stay. She warned him about the hardness of her soul.

And then on that beach, not one hundred meters from the rock on which Blake sat attempting art that morning, they made love for the first time. It was more than three years ago. Afterwards, in each other's arms, they spoke .

“This can never last, you know that, don't you?”

“But why?” the innocent said. He was kissing, caressing, burning for her, and in love, lost and not caring.

“Because what I do now is sweep. I devour, I masticate, and then I spit back out. Look, there gets a point in your life when it all seems too short, when every morning you awake and you think of what you haven't done with your yesterdays. So many things not painted. My art is in myself, for myself, and I cannot share it anymore.”

“I can't ever leave you. I don't care, I will be an artist too. Show me.”

“You are too young,” she said, “we just met, you're a darling really but I can never be satisfied. I am an artist, and with men I get bored quickly. I move on.”

Out there on that hot plate of a rock, where rocks beat salt from the ocean, serving himself out like an offering to a hungry fate, a sacrifice to the sea, Blake laughed a bitter Cinnar. She had given him almost two years; longer than she'd

promised. Now he was experienced. How many relationships had he? Too many. One after another without her, and all for the wrong reasons without relent.

His brother and Isabelle. The relationship a cold dish set before a shivering man sprawled out over a burning rock. Art forgotten, Blake laid his head prone to the sea, listened as if he could hear the rotation of the earth. In its slow rotation, he thought he understood, in the beat, beat, beat of inevitability. So tired. Tired now. Weary of the problems connected with fragile human relationships. Kinetic energy. The actual as opposed to the potential. The lurking. The destructive. The dormant power of masses in motion. Isabelle had been the first. Isabelle had been the last. Who could argue with Tsunami? Waves, he thought, and how we're swept up by them and how our lives change as a result. Blake hit the metamorphic resistance of the rock.

Out at sea.

A wave capsized and sank a boat. All hands lost and no one to bury.

The first words Isabelle said upon meeting his brother was at an exhibition in New York. Blake's brother had suggested they go for bluefish the next morning.

"Men who fish, bait hooks and sink lines into the deep, hoping for a stroke of good luck," Isabelle said inspecting his brother, flirting she said, "My, a touch of gray at the temples does make a man. You don't look like you have to fish. And such curly black hair. Is it possible that you are intelligent as well?"

“I only fish in places where I can expect to catch nothing. In this way I can never be disappointed. I’ve found pragmatism the best recourse in the face of uncertainty and danger.” he smiled, “and, I am cautious of going after prizes I can’t keep,” he couldn’t resist, “Blake was right, you are a very provocative woman.” He glanced at Blake standing there, eyes full of love for her and thought to end it before it began, “but it is the maiden who listens, like the town that negotiates, who is half way toward surrender.”

He wanted her and she knew it, “and what do you think of art,” she asked, touching the lapel of his overcoat in an appreciative manner.

“Art surrounds us. You just need to open your eyes to see it. Art is metaphor. And there is no art as beautiful as a woman,” this, he said, not looking at Blake. Isabelle smiled but did not reply.

The wind and the waves began. On his rock by the sea, Blake turned, for it was a different voice now, one which came from the mounting weather.

“It’s not your fault,” she said where wind and water always fill in footsteps in the sand, “I’ve always had problems with men. At fifty I should have known better.”

“Why did you go? What were you thinking? Why did you leave me?”

“You were just a boy”

“And my brother? Was he so much better? Why couldn’t you have stayed on shore with me? That day, I waited and waited until the taverna closed, and even more. I couldn’t bear to leave in fear of losing you.” Blake threw away his attempt at art, failed to notice the weather rising, couldn’t hear the wind begin to howl, “and you,” his voice a losing battle into a gathering tempest, “sleeping in the sun, spent after being with him, and me, without either of you now.”

Blake looked up at the clouds gathering. At the weather cooling and a summer chill in the air, the waves larger now and drawing near, closing in, developing, massing and still he did not move, “and you, my brother. My only pal. I trusted you. You took her away from me. Oh yeah. Tell me again, some things are not meant to be. What a load of crap. She was mine.”

Far out at sea a wave had formed and traveled in all directions. One of these waves traveled far, and it now crested, and broke over him on the flat rock on which he sat.

The wave pulled Blake, clutching at nothing, out from the shore, brought him back, hurling him into the rock. The resulting swell pulled him back out, clawing at a smooth and unhelpful surface, without relent, time and time again, until Blake thought he could stand it no more. He cried out even though he knew he was alone. That is when he got some help.

The writer had to keep Blake cogent, had to keep him from slipping into unconsciousness, had run up to the taverna, had to alert a sleepy waiter running stubby fingers through his tousled hair. The waiter conjured up the doctor's number in his mind and dialed. The doctor advised at least an hour.

"Tell me again what happened."

"I thought it just a silly disagreement," Blake murmured, "I knew things had cooled with her, but..."

"No. On the rock I mean. What happened? Didn't you hear about the wave? That it was coming? Did you slip?"

"No. I did not slip. The wave did not take me." Slipping in and out of coherence, Blake asked, "What do you think of, of, art and science?"

The writer thought it an odd question, but had to keep him talking, needed him to stay conscious. Being a writer, approaching from the academic, she said, "Science breaks things down into an elemental form, a mathematical formula understandable as an absolute value without emotion." Blake moved his head from side to side as if to disagree, the writer continued, "Art portrays the human condition from the artist's point of view at the time he exists." The writer felt Blake slipping again.

“Then she went out to paint him fishing,” Blake coughed up a laugh, “even though she hated the smell of fish. I should have known. No one could hold her down. No one could hold her back from what she wanted.”

“Where is your brother,” the writer asked.

“First he went. Must have hit his head. The waves capsized the boat and for both of them, there was nowhere to go.”

“They both drowned?”

Blake was in delirium now, broken bleeding on the beach he said, “My brother was there, he helped me, he pulled me from the sea.”

Rushing, unaccustomed to physical demands, the doctor made his way awkwardly down the path and over the rocks to his patient. He attended to Blake while asking questions. “How long has he been like this?”

“I found him about two hours ago, the wave must have taken him out. He keeps saying something about his brother.”

“His brother?”

“Yes. He died at sea.” The writer said nothing of Isabelle.

“What is your name. For the report.”

“My name is Rachel. I am here working on a novel.”

“He will need someone to stay with him while I go up and arrange for an ambulance and stretcher. Will you stay with him?”

“Yes. I will take care of him,” the writer said. She looked at Blake. On the beach, waves continued to break, disturbing small stones and sand, pulling out the shore in rearrangement and then returning once again.

AUTHOR’S NOTE: *So you’re sitting naked on that remote beach. In Greece. And a word and a phrase comes to you, first as fine droplets, as you watch the undulating sister of the earth. It crashes in with unending power and hubris. In the caldron of your mind you think now of all the relationships gone awry, and you put aside the final edit of that novel of Christmas, and winter, and New York City, to make notes, ephemeral ideas to paper, of science and art and relationships. Afterwards, you make that climb up a craggy path to the taverna where you touch others in social greetings and make more notes on humanity. You return to that beach and the wave equation is drafted. The story is resurrected again and again and it is finally released from the drawer and done.*

Since I was a child, any book that came across my hungry eyes, was a target. I went through the usual suspects, Tarzan, Moby Dick, pulp-fiction Hot-Rod novels of the fifties. I even did a stint with the Russian Masters. It was the sixties which radicalized my brain. Vonnegut, Kesey, Marx. But it was the writers of the thirties which took hold of me. Hemingway for certain, and Faulkner, but most powerful for me was John Steinbeck, and I try to get to that perfect character and plot point carried by superb English sentences, in my work. Perhaps someday, I will.

My uncle, a former high school English teacher and poet, once told me that the purpose of literature was to entertain. I answered that the purpose of literature is to educate the masses. Somewhere in between, I suspect, is the answer. You can access me on Facebook, Mark Antokas, and my writer's: webpage at MarkAntokas-RaconteurandWriter.com

AUTHOR'S BIO: Author Mark Antokas has traveled the world in all manner of conveyances, on water, on land, and in the sky. Having in the past had altogether too many jobs, professionally and otherwise, there be too many hats for this rack. All grist for the mill. Experience. What we do. Write.

Spending time equally between the Greek Islands of the Aegean in the summers, the author winters in the U.S. and is currently restoring a 1977 Nautor Swan 43 in the Cape Canaveral, Florida area. He has two published novels on Amazon, "In the path of Exile, the Odyssey According to Homer, 1967-69," and, "Another Noel." Currently he is working on a short story collection which has a working title of "You Said We'd Be Friends Forever and I Believed You," which should be published Summer 2020.

EDITOR'S BIO: Heather Whited is originally from just outside Nashville, Tennessee, and after many changes of her major, somehow graduated from Western Kentucky University on time in 2006 with a degree in creative writing and theater. After a few years working and traveling that saw her hanging out on no fewer than three continents and gave her the chance to try vegetarian haggis, Heather returned to Nashville to obtain a Master's degree in education. She now lives in Portland, Oregon, where she teaches in the public schools and at Portland State University. When not writing, she plays on a killer Harry Potter trivia team and a general knowledge one too, spends time with her dog, does not go camping, ever, and tries not to think too much about the vegetarian haggis.