

# POST-MODERN PAPYRUS and other poems...

By Liana Kapelke-Dale

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes... The greatest tragedy in editing poetry is that it is almost as lonesome as it is personal. So me, myself and I, are each delighted when we run across something we simply adore. I think Liana Kapelke-Dale, a name for the stage or at very least something artful, has set sail her voice box to parts unknown—"among the swampy reeds." "what must become lost / within the chalk body-outline / of irrevocable classification?" 'Pagophobic Logophobe' cascades, "clinging to a drainpipe / like a kitten to a tree branch" And 'saltwater taffy' "on what i can taste / in this new flavor." (Spacing and font size are poet's own.) HS*

## Post-Modern Papyrus

When everything is new, or maybe old  
but newly remembered by my heartbeat –

that's when I lose all use for language.

Every word is a platitude in the face  
of something entirely new,  
and so I fear the naming of unknown things.

If mere observation inherently changes  
the observed, what must become lost  
within the chalk body-outline

of irrevocable classification?

Regrettably unaware of its uselessness,  
my verbose voice box chatters  
in a fluid string of toneless, banal syllables  
as I lead it, oblivious, onto a raft  
pushing it away from shore,  
sending it down the river and through the reeds  
like Moses.

Out of sight, the hollow soliloquy fades to silence.  
Distracted, I estimate how long it will be before  
my little chatterbox is found  
spouting platitudes among the swampy reeds  
and hailed by the inarticulate as a prophet of rare insight.

Absent-minded, I make a mental note  
to expect guerrilla proselytizers armed  
with glossy pamphlets printed  
on non-recyclable paper, advertising  
“The All-New, Tax-Exempt 501(c)(3) Non-Profit  
Church of the Divinely-Endowed Voice Box”  
(or whatever)  
sometime within the next six months or so.

But no matter now.

Everyday objects around me blur  
into an impressionistic mess of light  
and texture. Words and names  
fall away as colors bleed  
through me quickly like watercolors  
through tissue paper.

Wet and pulpy, I drop  
clumps of the sopping paper  
(which sobs pathetic rainbow tears  
as it nears cellular breakdown)  
into my blender, wincing as the blade  
rips the sodden stuff to mush.

I spread and flatten the pulp with a rolling pin,  
bake it until it's dry  
and stiff and thick  
and brittle.

Hot homemade papyrus, straight from the oven –  
just like the ancient Egyptians used to make,

only probably rougher and bumpier  
and overall much more difficult to write on.

There will never be a clean slate.

Words can be lost

abandoned

rejected

recanted

but not erased.

So now I recycle my names and words  
for things and record patched-together  
insights on my ever-improving  
homemade batches  
of post-modern papyrus.

Because nothing in this world is ever entirely new

except,

perhaps,

for our understanding.

## Pagophobic Logophobe

**pagophobic** (*adj.*):

(1) of, pertaining to, or exhibiting pagophobia, the fear of ice and/or frost.

**logophobe** (*noun*):

(1) one who suffers from logophobia, the fear of words and/or talking.

I'm frightened

Little tremors fumble through

my gut's firmament

I'm so afraid of my words

they might

slice downwards

like icicles

tear through paper

I can almost feel cold diamond shards

on my skin

Sometimes my words just

drip

so simply

onto paper

as though from

paint

at the tip

of a brush

or

water from

the eternal

faucet

and I invite breath deeply into my lungs

But now my words are dry frozen daggers

hypnotizing with their wry scintillating points

and my breath freezes as well sharply

below them

My fear is  
of the potential to inflict  
    mortal wounds  
Winter's starry-eyed blades  
could crackle down  
onto unsuspecting heads  
at any moment

and I am afraid

I cower with            head in hands  
back bowed  
spine paralyzed into submission

*We learned about this in elementary school*

*In case of: earthquake*

*tornado*

*blizzard*

*flood*

*hurricane*

*nuclear war*

*etc.*

*please cover head with hands*

*because you can live without your hands*

*but not without your head*

nor without your words

Feet sunk deep in snow

I stand below

looking up at sparkling translucence

that could stab to the core

But I reach up

gently tug at the largest

most deadly

icicle

until it breaks off cleanly

at the root

Sheathed in my hand

the icicle shines cold

frozen ripples distorting its clarity

The blood that blushes my skin begins

to soften the ice against my palm

and as I smile

at the thought



that the remaining icicles  
are simply water paralyzed  
clinging to a drainpipe

like a kitten to a tree branch

the lethal weapon

melts in my hand

## **saltwater taffy**

whenever i learn something new

about you

i tuck the information away

in my wallet or jacket pockets

to salivate over

later

in the sanctity of my bedroom

i'll secretly take it out

like a sweet juicy piece

of saltwater taffy

that demands my attention

it challenges my dry mouth

not to water

i unwrap it

with surgical precision

not wanting to leave even the tiniest

sliver of candy

behind on the waxed paper

unable to wait any longer  
i place the delicious morsel  
        onto my tongue  
close my eyes  
and focus  
  
on what i can taste  
  
in this new flavor

### **THE POET SPEAKS:**

*The three poems of mine published here in Fleas on the Dog came into being by way of three very different catalysts. "Post-Modern Papyrus" is in some ways my favorite of the three, and somewhat ironically was written to express how sick I was of my own voice at the time. Generally, I love the sound of my voice (not a joke), but I was really burned out by words for a while, and my kind of sardonic resignation to that fact ended up producing "Post-Modern Papyrus." I don't take myself too seriously as a person, but that fact doesn't always come across in my poetry; I think that it does come across in this particular poem, which is one of the reasons I like it.*

*"Pagophobic Logophobe" is also about the intense effect that words can have, but it was written more about their potential fallout than linguistic exhaustion.*

*"saltwater taffy" is definitely the most straightforward of the three at first glance (it's about falling in love), but I'll leave it to the reader to decide why this love has to be enjoyed in such secrecy – and why the poetic voice has only small morsels of their beloved to cherish.*

*Honestly, generally there aren't a lot of poets who I'm consciously inspired by. I just kind of write. Some of my favorite poets include Pablo Neruda, Federico García-Lorca, Anne Sexton, e e cummings, Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson, Blanca Varela, and Tracy K. Smith. (I like a lot of Spanish-language poets; one of my other linguistic loves is written translation, and sometimes*

*for fun (I'm also a gigantic nerd) I'll translate a Spanish poem into English.) The person who's unquestionably had the greatest impact on my poetry is my mother, Kathleen Dale, an excellent editor and poet in her own right. She continues to help me with my process.*

*I will say that I rely more on outside poetic influences ("outside" meaning outside my brain, I guess?) when I'm writing in form. For example, I've been experimenting recently with villanelles, and I've looked to Sylvia Plath and Dylan Thomas for guidance there (incidentally, if you like reading poetry in form, check out the journal Grand Little Things – they exclusively publish poetry in form, and my villanelle "Feral Love Song" was featured there recently).*

*I'm not sure I'd be alive today without poetry. I've dealt with mental illness (Bipolar II Disorder and Borderline Personality Disorder) my whole life, and writing poetry lets me bleed onto the page rather than bleed literally. Then I get to feel the wound heal to pink and scab or scar over. It's similar with reading poetry – whether the blood is surging lifeblood or from a bleeding wound, great poets express emotions in ways that are so precise, you know exactly what they mean. There's a simultaneous uniqueness and universality to really good poetry, and for me there's nothing as satisfying as finding the exact right words to describe a sensation or feeling – whether you're reading those words or writing them yourself.*

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Liana Kapelke-Dale holds a B.A. in Spanish Language and Literature from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and a J.D. from the University of Wisconsin Law School. Her poetry has been featured in such journals as Impossible Task, The Fabulist, Uppagus, and Torrid Literature Journal, among others. Liana's first chapbook of poetry, *Specimens*, was published in 2012, and a second haiku chapbook, *Little words seeking/Mute human for mutual/Gain and maybe more*, was published in early 2020. She currently lives in Milwaukee, WI, with her beloved pointer-hound mix.

