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-Modem 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
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.
Pagophbic Logophobe

**pagophbic (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

down 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
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.