

EW & I
JASON BARRY

ON

*THREE
POEMS*

Jason.

Que'est-ce'qui ce passe, mon ami? Ca fait longtemps, uh? Ah well. We pass the time in a moment. We pass the time in a moment of saying my how time has passed, uh?

As quickly, we stride to now.

I sit here, across the country, but not across the world, from you. I read your poetry, and I disappear into your world. Your world of brief remarks, of three simple strokes, delivered with intention. I am your moon, poking its head. Only, unlike your moon, I am here to draw my own marks.

You've left me three and three I leave you, after I am done sifting as I do. Before I launch into your poetry, I could update you on life and so forth, but suffice with single-sentence news, and an acknowledgement that I'll talk to you soon. Alyssa and I moved to Medina, across the water, where we live in the guest room of a magnificent modern home, waiting for her medical results and for the Corona virus to disappear, for the pandemia to disappear; Daegu is blocked, my grandmother's birthday is in June; we'll be somewhere in the United States until after that.

(okay, onward)

Ghost Ranch

Ghost, Bones, barely anything here. Just that second lick of the deer. A return to Jason's delicate imagery, stuff that even seems removed of metaphor, or linkage to the human realm.

There isn't much
to graze on for a deer

(Reader sees that this will be not only the image, but also the substance of the poem. What can I lick from this bare grass. What is there in the world of

no-nourishment to be had?)

at this late hour
no patch of grass

(I see you do this: *tiddly diddly diddly dye, no diddly diddly day*: a fair bit. Could we move past it this time? ‘There isn’t much / to graze on for a deer. / / / Beneath the desert bluffs / wind swept chimneys...’ Do we have aught to gain from removing the repetition? No patch of grass simply provides a reiteration. Perhaps you think there’s something to it.)

beneath the desert bluffs
wind-swept chimneys

(simple, lovely, Western)

pinon-prickled sky
she stoops and licks

(Ache to add an extra return to break between sky / / she stoops, even though you’re working in couplets, as if the Reader / Poet were gazing at the landscape and return to the deer.)

the ground a second time
calyx of frozen yarrow

(uh, sure baby. That’s lovely. And you didn’t do any purpling of what came before, so the treat of this vocabulary is totally appreciated and totally allowed. I had to look at Yarrow on googly, but yes. The doe bends to pluck at that waving scrubland flower)

my fire gone to ember
gone to ash

(interesting. so we turn to the human, to the observer. the fire gone to ember /

gone to ash, pretty. she's in our campsite.)

the sudden glance
and two fear-stricken eyes

(and she sees us. the sudden glance. she's startled, by what? by the fire gone to ash? by an unknown or unspoken movement? by a scent of something? I want to know what it is. Is this the barrenness of the landscape, and thus of the poem, that is keeping me from my sensory treats? Is this deliberate? If we include the human? (or perhaps we are extra-human still, and it's the scent of the fire that strikes her fear, a la Bambi, something deep in the animal that knows char = danger). But still. I want something not just delicate, but substantive, some of that flower's nutrient, e.g. she licks the char of the old fire, perhaps. something.)

light rain
a scattering of bone

(I do not want rain, I think. I do not think rain adds. It is a detail, but we have the physical world. I am at her nose. I am in her eyes. The rain removes to a space of ethereality that suggests the connection has been broken, whereas 'a scattering of bone', that continues the danger, or the connection, things of her notice.)

beside the camp
hoof-sound in the breeze

(similarly to the rain, this hoof-sound, it does the same. why in this loneliness, the hoof-sound? which, without modifiers, signals the coming of something, signals some safety in numbers or a new threat on the horizon. the piece is so quiet, is so well-paced, that to allow something outside the strange, very tender membrane to penetrate, bursts it, in a way that 'the sudden glance / the two fear-stricken eyes / a scatter of bone / beside the camp' would not.

I also want to take the moment to encourage, since imagery is SO SOLID, that you attack fear-stricken and change it. It is assumed, not known. What else are a

doe's eyes; why always struck with fear? ARE always struck with fear? (I do not think so, but I also do not know))

long way from the city
the bracing herd

(love this ending. love this ending. this piece is so spare, so nice. sense of loneliness, even freedom, despite the vulnerability that it also has contained herein. I would, because this feels like a moment of partnership, or very temporary, very alien connection, suggest mirroring that connection by adding 'from' to the start of that last line (from the city / from the bracing herd).

And then title. it's fine, it doesn't blow me away? it's somehow non-lyrical and acknowledges the place/landscape, more than the connection that's made. Again, all still assuming that the connection is extant, and this isn't just a painting of a doe in an old dead camp.

My suggestion, or what comes to mind, is: 'Just the two of us, for once')

Ghosted

(Ah, so modern. The double-ghost poems, one apres the other. Ghosted - to be fled from by a friend. To be left in the lurch. (Could we call it 'Lurch' (you know I love providing these alternative titles when I get my hands on your work)))

Hard to believe that it would come—
after ten years of friendship, a half a dozen trips

(Convivial tone. Disbelief is .. notable, but maybe only paid lip-service? 'hard to believe' is very casual, and very much a phrase that has lost any true punch,

because why?

Friendship listed as numbers, ten years, six trips. I am being led to your astonishment at Loss with easy words. Something like a diary.)

overseas, long walks through the campus,
collaborations and discussions

(overseas feels broken at an odd juncture. emphasizes the break, the pause before 'long walks'. wondering if it might not serve; if the problem is that line 2 is so long with overseas tacked to its rear, you might emphasize this 'counting effect' of listing 'how big' the friendship is in numbers, something like: 'hard to believe that it would come / after ten years, six trips overseas; / our long walks through campus / collaborations, discussions, meditations)

about art, holidays spent at my parent's
place (when you had no-one else),

(aching here for a punch. (why am I always aching). art, after those long 'ions' and 'academic' words of the previous stanza, might be the spot. what I'm suggesting is a hard stop of sorts, since what has come is 'flow', or a sort-of withery blibbery slippery set of lines that go from one to the next without JAMMING. So, perhaps like: 'Hard to believe it would come / after ten years of friendship, six trips overseas; / our long walks through campus / collaborations, discussions, meditations / our art. / (You had no-one else)'

Perhaps it's too violent. Perhaps its not the sentiment, but there is a blame that's being skated around that doesn't confront, entirely, the feeling of abandonment. Or perhaps there is no anger. Perhaps there's no need to stop.)

the nights I'd call to ask you for advice,
my faults and limitations, your damaged pride. . .

(this feels beyond the argument. It feels belated to that absolutely perfect summary of 'when you had no-one else' (note my removal in the previous paragraph

of ‘when’).

it’s like you’re stepping back after you’ve made the play already to add more argument. And I find the only really excellent element of this is ‘your damaged pride’, which, I could still lose to move the lovely next lines)

What was it I said on that evening
in Vallarta, the reckless tide

(okay, this is the fountain of the poem. You could leave it as it stands, though I think the bolder move might be to actually provide an answer, rather than ask a question. Provide a multiple choice solution to the question, because realize, I, Reader, have not become the You. This remains a dialogue between Poet and You, and if there is no room for me, Universal Reader, I am left looking at a photo from a trip of two people who I do not know.

So allow me:

‘I said ‘Alright, I’ll call you a taxi’ and
I said, ‘Does your leg hurt?’ and
I said, ‘Have you been seeing her then?’ and
I didn’t look at you the whole time, so’

Which was it, on that evening
in Vallarta, the reckless tide’)

retreating in the rain, our claustrophobic
hotel, the space between us

(and, were you to incorporate, some element of this idea I’ve thrown your way, I would offer that ‘claustrophobic hotel’ is stunning; the taxi coming is unrelated to the question, the hallmark, the shining question of the piece: ‘which thing that I said in that claustrophobic hotel is what triggered you to leave me’ is the desire of this poem . Stay in the claustrophobia. Choke me with it. Because it imitates, creates, the claustrophobia of the mind that wrote this poem, who is

stuck considering their own actions, their own unrelieved conscience.

Give them no taxi out.)

when the taxi came?

(‘retreating in the rain,
our claustrophobic hotel’)

A Little Closer, If You Can

- for Colin

(A request, for Colin. Closer to what, we ask. To Us?)

Call it love, if you’d like, or what comes after:
the space before forgetting, before time
shifted and we moved out of the city.

(I pause, of course, for the period.

There are major conceits being dropped one after another here. ‘love’, ‘what comes after [love]’, ‘space before forgetting’, ‘time shifted’. and then we move to the concrete. We do not know where this ‘it’ is ushering from. Or where ‘it’ ushered to. Call it love. It is between us? It is already passed? It is in my mouth, and the reason I write? It is what you felt and what has concerned you?

Maybe give us why the confusion exists? Why this ‘identifier’ by occupation, this Poet, has come? I’ll give an example:

‘You are confused how to name it.
Call it love, if you’d like,
or what comes after.

Call it 'before you forget
but after it is done', if you'd like.'

I will be doubly honest: 'time shifted' I would rephrase or nix entirely. It is either a science fiction concept or ... too sensory? I think you could simply move to the concrete.

'Remember, it was before
we moved out of the city.'

Kim's closing down.
The long summer coming to an end.
A smell of cow manure I recall,
and willow trees down by the lake at Epple Park,
soft light thin
between the leaves,
and water striders by the rocky edge.

(This is all excellent. All except 'soft light thin', which is too fae for me. You have your delicates in 'willow trees' and 'water striders' and I even allow 'long summer', though that has ... be careful of 'soft/hard' and 'long/short' and 'early/late' which are easy go-to's for you that deserve your sensory probing as opposed to your assessment-in-summary)

How little I have left. How much has left me.
A boy sits alone inside the bus. The moon pokes its head
between the clouds.

(Here my troubles return. Where did the questioner go? They have evaporated into the identifier whom I identified in my first paragraph of notes. The identifier itself has become completely lost in these memories, and who, with such surety naming 'love', naming 'space before forgetting', has become the boy alone on the bus. The one with so little left. My confidence breaks. Now we are guideless.