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Navigating the Blind Rainbow of Life: A compilation of proetic fragments

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Navigating the Blind Rainbow of Life

A compilation of proetic fragments

Eric Bachmeier

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Introduction

I was in a poetry class when I first discovered the scraps of language sprouting in the margins of my notes. One long slow day I looked at my friend Sharlyn's notebook and saw that her margins were filled with pictures, doodles, and designs.

Sharlyn's notebook frustrated me, because I've never been an artistic person. I can't draw anything more complex than a cube. While her notebook was illustrated with drawings, mine was bare. There were no pictures in the margins of my notes, just words, phrases, sentence fragments. At that point I realized that my margins were not void; where Sharlyn had illustrated her day dreams with sketches, I had captured mine with words.

These fragments from the margins form the substance of my project. For a long time I was unsure of the purpose of these words in the margins; they seemed random and unrelated even when they were sparked by the topic of the lecture documented in the center of the page. I always pushed them to the sides, and they survived on the edges of my work. I didn't realize their worth until I read Julia Kristeva in a critical theory class.

Kristeva's essay (from 'The System and the Speaking Subject') introduced me to the theory of the genotext and the phenotext. The phenotext is the privileged form of communication: the said, the ordered, logical, and linear; the genotext is closer to the unsaid: "the 'remainder,' the waste." This theory helped me to understand the notes in the margin and allowed me to justify

moving them to the center of the page.

In this project, I have attempted to say the unsaid, to bring the genotext into the phenotext. As I have plodded through four years of college, I have paid daily tribute to the phenotext (to order, meaning, and logic). I have heard countless lectures and scribbled about a thousand pages of notes. I have taken close to a hundred tests and written dozens of papers. These have been the formal products of my education; thus, they chart my advancement as a scholar. The marginal fragments represent the genotext, and they trace my journey as an organic and creative being. These sparks of insight and understanding have been exiled to the margins for four long years; it is finally time for them to come home.

Even after I began to understand/appreciate the notes in the margins, I was unsure of how to put them on display. My first instinct was to retrieve the fragments from my notebooks, clean them up, and create a long list of random marginal notes. Some of the poems, like "Some Things I Have Learned," ended up in this form, but it became clear that my project would need a frame. I discussed it with my advisor, and Marc (Professor Geisler) directed me to Annie Dillard. In Dillard's Mornings Like This: Found Poetry I discovered something resembling my vision. She took other people's prose and created poems; I have used my own words, but the concept is the same. We both set out to work with pre-constructed (existing) linguistic fragments in the hopes of creating poetry. For my project, I have been working with scraps of language collected from the margins of my notebooks. I have

weeded my verbal garden to create a tossed salad of language in the image of poetry.

I'm not sure how successful I have been. I mentioned earlier that I first discovered my fragments in a poetry class. I feel that I should now mention that it was the only poetry class of my collegiate career. I am not a poet. I do not claim to be a poet, except in the sense that everyone who lives and breathes stumbles into poetic creations. In fact, I consider myself something of a non-poet. Most of my college work has featured essay examinations and critical papers. Perhaps that is why poetry was such an appealing form for my project. I have had my fill of logic, order, and meaning. Although I am not prepared to abandon these literary tools completely, I am ready for a poetic vacation. (Poetry, like the sirens, calling me to my doom.) I have composed and revised these poems, but they still seem slightly out of tune. All six strings are singing, but each produces a variation of the song. Perhaps that is the inevitable result of building with fragments; it is extremely difficult to craft a seamless patchwork quilt.

The poems come in many different forms. Some are united by sound, others by subject. I didn't consciously comprehend the themes of the pieces until after they were completed. As I read through the poems I was aware of the feelings associated with each one, but I didn't examine them critically until I tried to explain them to my advisor. As we read through the various pieces, I began to find meanings that were previously obscured. In moving the fragments from the margins to the center, I

purposely avoided strict adherence to meaning and order. After the poems were composed, it became clear that, while the random fragments were unrelated and illogical, their poetic combinations yielded coherent themes.

In general, the poems deal with contrasts and contradictions in perception and perspectives. I could probably write pages about each poem, but I won't. I don't want to force anyone to understand my poems, but I do want to give people a way of understanding. I hope that I can introduce you to some representative examples so that you can begin to get to know the rest. I shall begin at the beginning.

The first poem in this series is entitled "'This One's for Kurt.'" This is a poem where meanings count. The words create images, and the names are real. The poem consists of many takes on the world melded together to explore the contrasting perceptions which color our lives. This poem is about the different possible perspectives on the problems people encounter in life, from the monkeys trapped in the basement of Miller Hall, to an acquaintance who packed his bag and failed in an attempt to end his life: about a year ago, Ryland jumped off the Aurora Bridge. The title is a phrase that Eddie Vedder, of the band Pearl Jam, used to introduce a song in memory of Kurt Cobain. It sets the stage for the poem by invoking the image of one extreme perspective: suicide, the ultimate form of pessimism.

The first line comes from a hot spring day when I walked through thick animal stench on my way to the computer labs in the basement of Miller Hall. I thought that I was having an

unpleasant experience, until I thought about the monkeys. The second line addresses my personal experience with one-way love. The second stanza moves on to the experiences of others. I mentioned that Ryland failed to kill himself. His present state of life, trapped in his body in a hospital bed with control only of his eyes, must certainly be worse than the life he tried to leave behind. Fioré Pignataro is the father of a friend of mine; he was ice fishing once when he became so cold that sprawling on top of a smoldering campfire was a good thing to do. (At that point, I am fairly certain that he was not concerned with the tax status of corporate profits.) The next couplet begins with a twist on the N.R.A. slogan: "Guns don't kill people, people kill people." In the conclusion of the film Cyrano De Bergerac, Cyrano was haunted by visions of his assailants or of the opportunities he had allowed to slip from his grasp. The next verse returns to my life experience. My friend Sara has had a cracked windshield for several years now. I notice it (and worry about her safety) every time I ride with her. Sara sees it every day, but she doesn't see it anymore; it is a normal part of her life. My prized possession is a twenty pound collection of chewed bubble gum. My gumball is one of the most incredibly beautiful things I have ever seen; some people disagree. A girl that I loved was unimpressed by its colors. The last two lines are quotations from economics class. The first is organic and abstract; the second is concrete. We each have "messes" in our lives. Some folks are haunted by the state of their relationships with people, others by the taxation of their

financial investments. Different people have different problems, and the lesson I've learned is that a single perspective erases many options; our vision can almost always be enhanced by examining how others see the world.

Aside from its content, I am fond of this first poem because of the way the words fit together. "Alive" at the end of the second verse grates against the "die" which precedes it and the "kill" repeated twice in the next line. The "it" in the penultimate stanza could be anything, yet "it" carries the hint of everything or "The world" featured in the next line. The final stanza merges abstract and concrete in couplet form. The words in the last line are testament to accidental poetry. Who would have expected economics to yield such a musical phrase? The "corpor" and "pro" sing together (assonance) while the four "t"s hum along (alliteration).

I could write as much about each of the poems, but I didn't commit to writing a book. Besides, I do want to preserve some sense of mystery; I want to leave the pieces a bit ambiguous and open to your experience/perception. I will, however, provide very brief explications of a few more of the poems.

I was more concerned with sounds and combinations as I composed "Books and Bands of an Overactive Imagination." I should explain that music and literature are two of my favorite things, so when I daydream, it's often about books and bands. This poem is essentially a list of imaginary band names and book titles. It was originally two separate lists until I decided to put them together. It is patterned after Annie Dillard's "Index

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of First Lines" in which she used the alphabetical index of first lines from a book of Irish poetry to create a poem of her own. My poem is also arranged loosely alphabetically, but it features a few emphatic exceptions. This poem gave me a chance to play with two, three, and four (sometimes more) word fragments to create meanings and to twist existing meanings. A few examples are "Basic rain," which offers an opposite alternative to acid rain, and "Coming of sage," which plays on the existing phrase "coming of age" to suggest a senior rite of passage. "Snowfeel" is perhaps my favorite member of the list (my spell check beeps insisting that it doesn't exist). It was an accident created (as part of the series snowfall, snowfell) when I misspelled fell as feel. Snowfeel isn't a word that exists, but it does describe my experience of the serenity and wonder of snowfall. In this poem, sounds and words/meanings are available to be experienced.

The poem "Things Lived" attempts to address the differences in perspectives and experiences of the world. It is about how we see things and how things see us. In this one the meanings of the sentences are most important. It seems fairly straightforward to me.

"Things Lived" is a good poem to conclude with since it offers an effective summary of my project. I present my experiences and perceptions, but I do not hold you to them. My version/vision of the world might resonate with yours, but there are immeasurable differences between our respective lives. We exist, like the fragments in the margins, waiting for something we don't quite understand.

"This one's for Kurt"

We all have our clouds of monkey pain to endure;
She beats me with lashes of indifference.

Ryland took a trip, but he didn't die,
Fioré Pignataro lay down on a campfire to stay alive.

Guns don't kill people; bullets kill people.
Cyrano battled the demons at his death.

A cracked windshield endangers the life of a friend.
She expected it to be more colorful.

The world is a messy place;
Corporate profits are taxed twice.

Books and Bands of an Overactive Imagination

Banned books
Basic rain
Big business

Bizare grinding device
Coming of sage
Concrete box

Corporate rock
Counterculture logs
Cycle analysis

Disposable love
Femalevil
Fishmonger

Forget me
Freudian popsicle
Fuzzy data

Greyhound love
Grunge puppets
Jones family reunion

Large bread
Lowerarchy
Maple throne

Metabolic freaks
Muglab
Nappy headed freak

Paper intimacy
Perfect teeth
Poetic refuse

Platewaste
Profound rebound
Platonic plague

Puddle thrush
Remember me?
Rainbow forest condition

Sekou Wiggs
Sigmund floyd
Slop bucket

Snowfeel
Someday seeds
Somerset (Summerset)

Special guest
Suicide notes
Superpail

The man who planted dreams
Thinkings
Tongue fury

Usually confused
What wise men think
Altitude sickness on the roof of the world

Speak Sparingly of Love

I know it's wrong to play with matches
If you're not prepared to start a fire,
But warmth and light are so beautiful
I never thought that they could burn.

I keep thinking of bleeding;
That's what this feels like.
Part of my essence is gradually
Escaping from my soul.

All I want is for there to be nothing between us.

Something About Me

Sometimes I question
the strength and wisdom of my resolutions.

I am a man
at the crossroads between the past and the future.

I thrive on
the absence of light. I am a powerful animal.

Am I an ugly man?
I am certain there are miracles inside me.

Better With Words

A plastic rainbow bleeds
into pools of iambic endurance.

Fresh dead people chill
in the windy alcoves of life.

A miracle lantern
grants vision to machines.

Plastic staples bind
blind men to their condition.

Virgin spectacles rescue
children from angst.

Leaving

I watch the stars
drip from your wings

You have flown
far beyond my reach

You are on
the other side of the world

More than a night
away from me.

Not titled

On the day
When wrong turns right,
My soul will leap
And take to flight.

The weeds in the concrete
Defiantly shout:
"We will not yield
To a world of concrete and glass."

A fine wind today?
Yes, a fine wind.
Accident and impulse
Are the hands of God.

Things Lived

Sometimes I wish I had words for the telephone,
But other times I don't really give a fuck
About talking to a person that I can't see.

The moments of insanity keep me sane.

I tried to be self-destructive,
But all I could do
Was eat ice cream too fast.

I have seen things that you will never see;
You could probably say the same.

Some Things I Have Learned

Chess is a game best not played with friends.

In the future, people will live everywhere.

Time makes strangers of us all.

Love, like a thunderstorm, is both beautiful and terrifying.

Tradition is often used as a poor excuse for a lack of creativity.

Patience is far more powerful than violence.

There are no perfect people.

Roses are for gardens, and diamonds are for fools.

There is always a way.

Lowerarchy

Two stone thrones at the water's edge
I sit alone and watch as city lights twinkle in the waves.

It's sort of an all or nothing thing now;
I can only give so much more than I receive.

I can't stand the cold any longer;
I fear blindness more than death.

For an instant the world is covered in shadow,
But the instant never lasts.

Life is a game we have to play.
It's music that keeps me
from bashing my head against the wall.

I believe that wonderful things will happen.

A poem about how we see things

Mountain
lost, confused, lonely

Mountain

cold, dark, distant
Mountain.

Crucify me,
For I am less
And more than you
Shall ever be.

The Blind Rainbow of Life

Red is the color of love and blood and apples.
Orange is the color of the sun on fire.
Yellow is the color at the center of an egg.
Green is the color of the earth.
Blue is the color of water and sky.
Purple is the color worn by kings.
(Gray.)