

In the Pit of the Empty



Poems by

John Levy

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Acknowledgments

Some of these poems were first published (a few in different versions) in HASSLE, is/let, NOON: journal of the short poem, otata, and Stride magazine. The initial poem ("parts of the day") appears in IMAGINE A WHALE (Smallminded Books, 2011). Five of these poems are in *float among what sails & spirals* (Dovadola Press and ArtXchange Gallery, 2016); these poems (on pages 15, 23, 24, 31 and 33) were written in response to drawings by Donald Cole.

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for Philip Rowland

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parts of the day
like a building under construction
in a child's drawing

the crow inside the night inside the crow

(for Cherie Hunter Day)

Earth

A place
where I've slept.

A thimble-

ful
of hearts,

beating &
gone. Mother

was here as well

as You.
lcome.

We-

Multiple Choice

(a)

the starfish is neither
in my opinion
the phone rings

(b)

light handcuffed to wet cobblestones

(c)

the wolf changed
the river she said
then walked away

(d)

minute hand

hour hand

second hand

armada

(e)

the wind

quotes

the tree

broken
strands

of seaweed a
child drags

and holds up
in childhood's

nothing else

Most of the raindrops roll straight down the glass, but a few curve this way or that. One big one stops, hanging there, clear, for a few seconds before rushing down. He presses his hand against the glass. What would it be like if his hand were transparent like the rain? Then he scares himself wondering what it would be like if his hand could dissolve and stream down the glass like the rain. He turns, walks back into the kitchen where his mother sits at the table with her cup of coffee.

With a sentence by Elias Canetti

what to call

the color of a ripe persimmon

the color of an oval school of little
flashing fish

the color of a stem on its way to a flower

For the sake of the colors

the colors of peaches brimming
over the top of a barrel under a tree

alone

the color of her eyes

it would be worthwhile

the colors of her eyes

to live

the colors of her hair

forever.

watching birds at the feeder outside
his nursing home window my father
and I, who we are in silence

Lines Lifted from Williams' Paterson

--a trumpet sounds fitfully.
the flame's lover
the strictness of beauty.

What does it matter?
cooperation is the key,
and happiest *non sequiturs*.

Take up the individual misfortune
the snow falling into the water,
a green bud fallen upon the pavement

its form no longer what it was
the green bush sways: is whence
in the air, slow, a crow zigzags

Procrastination

What other long word we learned early on
felt so fine and fitting? How else capture

the desire to say No in the moment and No
all week long? Procrastination arrived, a formal

almost religious appellation bestowing upon
each delay an immediate blessing.

Life

a pedestrian
crossing, a fear

of darkness, flowers
scattered through-

out, a language
that's

the mother,
tongue, eye, occasion

constellations for and at the
moment, *time*

takes almost no time to say,
a lifetime, a

breath
crossing the darkness

Daylight

(1)

searching for something to write with, the raindrop

(2)

the small show of
light
between two low waves

more nuanced by
far
than a thesaurus

(3)

the way the poem happened
like a dog running into the house through the doggie door

not even your dog or their dog or anything
that looked like a dog before

(4)

my late mother's
small rhyming dictionary has
no entry for *grief*

(5)

if you say so,
language,
it snowed

a raven
in the tree
fixes the
tree, he thinks, though the
tree did seem
it didn't need repair
before the raven got there

he moves a mote
of dust with a breath

it's a diamond though

so much smaller than
the one in his mother's wedding ring

a blue jay flies to a branch and enters
the green leaves now a

round slice of blue meets

glowing greens as the mote
drifts

(Death) Death (Death)

(1)

death disguised as nothing ever after
night

(2)

I ask Alan about death
he answers, *death is just death*

I didn't meet him until we were both safely out
of our childhoods although I can't speak for him and
I am not sure I can say I have ever been
safely
out

(3)

William Carlos Williams came to me out of his Selected Poems one Saturday when I was 15 in Walden Books, alone, reading from A to Z on the poetry shelves waiting to decide -- over two Saturdays of reading at least one poem per book in the hundreds of them, holding on to my two bucks and waiting until I'd finished to decide what I most wanted to own and then reading Williams and knowing. I walked home with his book, stopping on an empty street after rereading his poem about a cat stepping down into an empty flower pot and a black cat on the street in front of me crossed my path with Williams' cat in my mind and that black one flowed.

(4)

where does death fit in

I hate to think of death "fitting in"

(5)

the first poem in his Selected that I read was
"The Widow's Lament in Springtime"
and that
did it

then I found the cat in a poem titled "Poem" and

(6)

I haven't talked about his face
on the black-and-white cover of his Selected how
he looked, to me at 15, so
almost mild, so unposed, so just
there, like a guy who could be standing behind me
in line to buy a book in that store, an old guy
wearing glasses

William Carlos Williams

the cat
climbed over
the top of

the jamcloset
first the right
forefoot

I didn't even think "what

is

a jamcloset?"

(7)

I saw the cat
descending

ending

in the pit of the empty
flowerpot

where I now think we all
end up

along with everywhere else

the wind

comes
to tell
us
it wants to leave this place

it has dreams

keeps searching for
where

it can write at leisure

because pace
is crucial

as is peace
at every level

it aspires to a
playful style
that will stir and believes

maybe somewhere else
nearby
but not yet reached

will feel completely right

death when the original windows open

Yesterday seems more
like a full circle, he replies, while right now's
a scribble.

this flower
achieves
what a whole school of fish
has in the spaces between their
swimming selves

The eternity on the surface of a puddle
on which a receipt floats in the vacant lot
gets interrupted by a crow's
shadow for a split
second

interrupting
the previous eternity. He loves
both eternities.

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