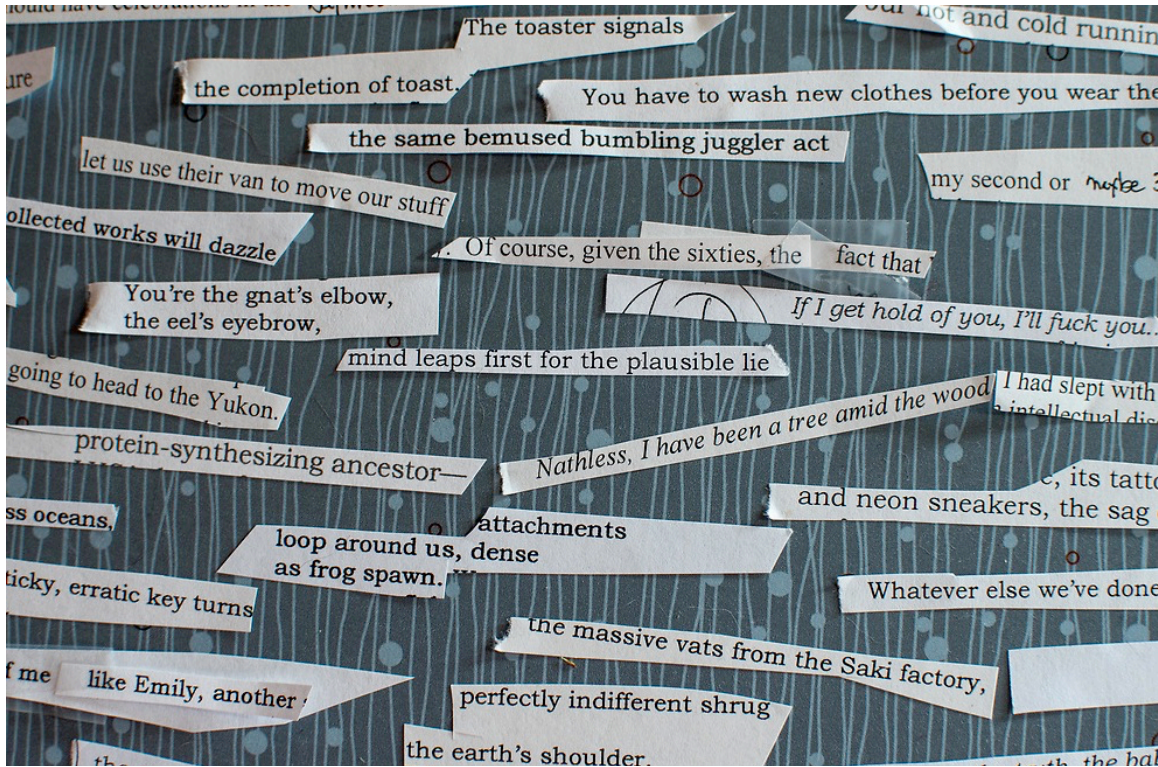


Current Project



I am working on a project inspired by Jericho Brown's essay on how he came up with a sonnet form he calls the Duplex:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2019/04/invention>

He cut up old poems into lines of 9 or 11 syllables, and constructed a sonnet with these lines. His rules are rigorous, with specifics on echoing lines and rhyme.

But I started with his idea of cutting up old poems. There are years in which I have written every morning, which means that I have many, certainly over 1,000 really bad poems. I've saved these in folders by year. Some of them I have written many drafts over several years, and the poem still hasn't worked. So the idea of cutting the up, saving a line or two that seems

particularly meaningful, was very appealing. I began printing out the old poems and taking the scissors to them was a deep, visceral pleasure.

Soon, though, I realized that I was wasting a *lot* of paper. I began simply extracting lines on the computer, and making files of single lines of 9 or 11 syllables. The line length constraint was helpful; it infused a certain discipline into the process. And while cutting up these files of lines isn't quite as satisfying as cutting into the physical poem, it suffices.

My rules evolved as I went. They are all sonnets made from lines of 9 or 11 syllables from existing poems. No two lines follow each other in their original order. At first I made the first and last lines echo, but then, I dropped that requirement. It has turned out that all of these I've created so far contain one line that's a question, and I like that, though I'm not sure it's a requirement. Because they are looser than Jericho Brown's form, I'm calling the form a Looseplex.

Here are the first few I assembled.

Ending with a line by Lew Welch

How many years was my path obscured by junk
My ungovernable heart, pocked with grievance?

Microorganisms effervesce
Starting from something simple, like milk

Push up bras, slim jims, and cheese doodles
Endlessly stitching snags in the sky.

Remember being crazed with desire?
Seeds release in heat, the ground charred clear for them.

We talk after dinner, wine glasses refilled.
The monks who touched the match to their own dowsed robes.

What I believed was the absolute truth, no,
The fluorescent, merciless present.

The earth gearing up to shrug us off,
These are the stamps on the final envelope.

* * *

Tsunami

It was morning for days afterward.
The telephone poles and wires whipped and sparked.

Gold looked like brass and bones poked up through plowed fields.
You can fall a long way in sunlight.

The white balcony, the pine needle's shadow,
Impossibly doomed and graceful and obsessed.

Is the psyche bound to the body?
Icing of debris over orderly fields,

Barnacles on memory's exposed pier,
The way pain fades to the memory of pain

Slicing the orange flesh of the papaya.
O life, life, you are such a muchness!

I searched for more footage of the massive waves.
It was mourning for days afterward.

* * *

Peter

Heading with you to the Laundromat
Parched, sharp grasses in their shades of brown.

How quick you were to cover for me
Coming at me upside down and from below.

Something that used to hold us haphazardly
So friends thought were we a little too close?

Dance along the wire backwards or blindfolded,
Spring shoots on the window sills, the walls, the floors.

The sea change starts. It steals in unasked for and
You were acting *just like our parents*.

Few days we spent in the hospital before
Snatch of song, drem remnant, beloved touch, grudge,

Bad luck or fate or something unspeakable,
A closet full of hangers banging empty.

Last summer my project was a series of prose poems, largely inspired by Carlo Rovelli's *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*.



Thinking about Einstein while waiting for the Big Blue Bus

how it is that the light at the corner of Pico and Lincoln that spills so generously over the sidewalk the blue metal bus stop chairs the five lanes with their cross-stitch of traffic can be “discrete packets, discontinuous, distributed across space” how a mind on a series of ordinary mornings forkfuls and mouthfuls and earfuls how a mind could deconstruct the everywhere-ness of light into microscopic moving parts some of which only exist when they bump into each other how is it he could gaze at the golden abundance spilling over Ulm and Munich and Pavia and think no not a blanket not a swath but a gathering of particles that meander somewhat predictably through the bent universe to bump against us in leaps and bounces while in Germany the Jews begin to stitch yellow stars on their sleeves and next to me at the bus stop mostly Hispanic faces and the light streaming over everyone

Made of molecules

I take for granted that the earth is solid the idea of permanence seductive as I move about checking the time going here going there the small chores and pleasures of daily interaction shaken when the lanterns in the Hunan restaurant suddenly begin to sway and we all run outside remembering that the reliable ground under our feet can suddenly shift that the Live Oak with its wrinkled elephant trunk and ancient lichen its catkins and acorns reassembles itself moment to moment as if forever as if predictable as if not vulnerable as if not a continuous regrouping a notion a casual kiss that might be the last

Why size has nothing to do with it

After the party when you've collapsed on the couch leaving the mess for the morning and he gets up as if it were the most natural thing and fills a plastic tub with soapy water and starts moving the sponge along each plate and cup until the dishwasher is full, nothing sexier than his hands dripping suds, his love handles peeping out from his shirt as he moves his fingers up and down, around and over, nudging the crud from the tines of the forks, emptying the sink, nothing hotter than the tendons of his arms as he swabs the counter and when he's done your fatigue has disappeared and you can't get to him fast enough and even the longest schlong in Cincinnati can't compete with that.