

2016 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest
Honorable Mention: Xiao Bin Pan

Midwinter Evening's Dream

*"There are many things that I would
like to say to you, but I don't know how."¹*

Enveloping is the settling comfort that
hangs in the air between bodies that are
wary, though freshly relieved of the 9-5.

A note, a familiar note of *the* summer song
breaks us out of this robotic trance,
Ignites flimsily the spark layered deep under
winter coats, under oversized headphones,
under our practiced, callous resting faces.

But perhaps break is too strong of a word.

That warm note, reminiscent of a fading summer sun,
Of the waning wild and liberation and promise that is youth,
The amateur voice recalls the words we fumbled
for, to find a coherent way to convey the clench
We felt in our chests, the caught breath in our
throats at the crisp of a clear night sky bursting
with stars, with Budapest ahead of us,
Vienna behind us, and tomorrow
full of possibility.

For the minutes of inaptly sung chorus,
my skin remembers the flutter, and the vacuum
that was the soft of your lips, the sweet of your breath
I wonder if our story has really ended.

His amateur voice drops a note.
Fingers asked themselves if it was a mistake
to let go.

¹ The song "Wonderwall" by Oasis

The train arrives and the midwinter evening's dream is no more,
dissipated with the warmth of a plastic seat under fluorescent lights.

PARIS.

Would it feel powerful, to decide what varying degree of life
to give to each word of someone's private poetry?
Would you shake your head, as you did when
we watched those people below us move about with their lives,
proclaiming yourself as a mere interested, but idle spectator?

But maybe I've been too concerned with "power"
thinking of us each as handicapped,
each trying to function for the both of us where the other can't.
But this is not a machine, all bearings and bolts,
You are no fingers that only know how to pluck at strings,
Body that only knows how to rock with waves,
And I, am no tight-lipped smile that takes cover behind hands to giggle,

And we are not parts in a machine--
Something I tend to forget.

Fragments of my unconscious,
that had simply been bubbling in wait,
Entertaining the idea of uniting in surface tension
into something, something more tangible,

Fragments found their right into existence
In this piece of polar ice mint that you dropped
into this carbonated "body", and as if by magic,
Carbonated fireworks found their form in ink.

My thoughts, with the confidence of
Shaking adolescent bodies,
Sneak through half-filled notebooks backwards,
And I have handwriting like this
Small, not always neat, though always seeming
To fit into structure of lines even on paper without lines to follow.
Some call it "cute".

Sometimes it seems as if the letters are trying
to not take up more space than they're worth.

The past few days,

My mind has been on some sort of steroid,
Like the violin player who plays on subway platforms,
Competing against the noise of clunkering, decades-old metal trains
For the ears of tired people whose attention spans,
Fleeting as they already are, last only until their trains' arrival.

His cast down eyes were not looking at hands that dropped change
But rather searching for a pair of feet that would stop before him,
To give him some sort of respect befitting a human being,
As if to say, "Hey man, I felt that."

I hear that the smell of rosin dust is more addicting than cocaine
And that the most beautiful voice, when perfectly reflected,
Feels chillingly hollow.

I'm putting on my comfortable shoes
Because I'm preparing to race across this ocean
Before the sands of your interest slip through my fingers,

To put these words of mine in your hands and tell you
That I'm ready.

So before you fall asleep tonight,
Please teach me how to pluck the strings to this song of mine,
And I'll try, I'll try my best to help you find yours

In a Court of Law.

Your Honor,

I do not claim to have possession over
Any part of the defendant's soul,
Although he may argue
differently.

And this contract of ours terminates
At roughly noon on the 6th of September.

If you were to officiate affairs,
such as the one discussed,
In such a way as strictly according to
The terms of our contract,
Or lack thereof,
There would be no humanity
nor fairness in that decision.

For the duration of time in aforementioned discussion,
there existed no active contract between us,
And therefore, those actions incurred no violation
of any contract, strictly speaking.

And I guess that means even under contract law,
There is nothing to find the defendant liable for,

But regardless of the law,
You took our innocence,
And made fools of us both.

OBJECTION, YOUR HONOR.

SUSTAINED.

BRICKS.

Mon cher, we knew that
There are some things, that
can only belong to that winter
we shared.

In the tundra of that winter, we built a castle
out of snow that we pounded into bricks with our bare hands
and glued together with heat we managed to stave
out of our shaking bodies.

When we left, there remained only a toothbrush,
the pink one that used to lie next to yours, and the towel
that you used to wipe the shower from my body.

Brick # 36: *Deux Jours et Une Nuit*.
Achilles laced with lavender in the air.
Skin remembers first taste of skin
As terrain remembers first taste of boot.

I wonder if you could hear the tsunami in my veins.

My fingers learned to map your landscapes,
They learned to understand the textures of your laughs,
And they kissed the smooth of your sides as
An oar would glide along the surface of a lake,
In the heavy calm of early morning,
Sinking themselves into flesh of body
Only deep enough to *know*
the taste of water,
No more.

Brick # 68.
This brick is all heavy with salt.
All breaths from racking sobs
That asked my chest to please, please inflate.

Brick # 97.
Remember those pieces of my private poetry
that I left for you to find in Chicago?

I wonder whose hands they fell into,
whether kind eyes found my words, and
whether lips found the smiles I left
for yours to melt into.

Or perhaps my words lie still in abandon,
Or became the meal of unwitting city creatures.

Brick # 99.9.

I asked him, to please,
give me an ounce of smile to rest
my doubts on.

Brick # 100.

This sun brings me back to that afternoon
when we met again at last, two mismatched cities later,
We found pieces of each other to rest on.

Your hands parted the damp of my hair, strand by strand,
And my fingers burned onto themselves the
Story seeped into the contours of that scar
On the right side of your forehead.

We laid, tangled in each other's heat,
In the rays of sun that poured in the cracks of our castle
In inhale and exhale, and nothing more.

A fat drop from the melt in the cracks
finds both of our skins.

Summer was already coming.

Brick # 107.

When I finally told you what I had written
in those notes I left in Chicago,
que tu m'as manqué,
you pulled me a little closer.

Brick # 189.

I dreamt of Machu Picchu.
Someone had told me the story of how it was built,

Stone by stone, masons would run hands along rock
To memorize the shape of their cut
And chipped away to make space for
each block's ragged edges in another.

And through roaring earthquakes, and time,
it still stands. Machu Picchu still stands.

In Beijing, skyscrapers reach into depths of clouds,
These skyscrapers sometimes get built in a matter of days.
Everything is placed to more exact precision
Than in an engineer's wet dream.

And yet, an earthquake would shake these skyscrapers
to the ground.

That night, we were Beijing,
And I could feel our skyscraper skeletons shaking.

(That was also the night I found out that
you don't *get* metaphors)

~

I lay what is left of our ice castle
beside a bed of seedlings. It is
Still too early to tell what they will grow into.
But we had always known that
these bricks will eventually turn to water,
that time would catch up to us,
but I hope that these bricks give life
to an orchard of oranges.

But if not for the sun, maybe the salt
would have melted all those bricks away
anyway.

The last brick I hold is almost pure ice,
with a tinge of your scent and mine.
A tease, tempting as a tease does.

But summer has already gone.
Et j'ai laissé.

Our American Dream

我真的很听话，对吧？
每天起床，上班，
不需要别人告诉我。

“I’m such a good little soldier,
aren’t I? Marching to work everyday,
No need for someone to tell me to,
Like a good little soldier.”

His hearty laugh accompanies his words
Like coffee does sushi,
Strange, uncomfortable,
but aides in digestion.

And strikes a note of guilt into
Our bodies that don’t know of
grueling manual labor because of him,
And into our tongues that have forgotten
how to twirl to the nuances of our mother tongue.

And this distinct flavor of guilt, I know well,
Like spicy oyster sauce from our hometown
that kicks your senses into a numbness,
But leaves you with a sweet, mellow tingling.

As we drive by the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway,
my father points out the lower Manhattan skyline.
彬， he calls me affectionately, as only he does.

“Look at this view,” he says with the same laugh,
“People come from all over the world to see it.
I get to see it every morning.”