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Now, Immemorial

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Recommended Citation

Nicolay, William, "Now, Immemorial" (2022). *CSBSJU Distinguished Thesis*. 29.
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Now, Immemorial

W.M. Nicolay

Introduction

In my poetic work I find myself drawn over and over again to the idea of in-between spaces, liminality - moments of pause before a big change, a brief awareness of awe during one, or melancholy reflection just after. There is something incredibly salient about these small portions of time, and I believe we form a lot of our perceptions of life, people, and worldly experiences from those disembodied breaths of pause where we think about what something really means. Essentially, many of these poems are an attempt to capture the emotional truth of a charged moment in time. In order to bring this across I often play with the idea of a setting that represents a state of mind through location or perspective, such as the ruined world in "Wish it Were Clear" or the dismal mental beach of "Shoreline".

This booklet includes a great variety of different poetic forms, but I studied a few authors this semester that gave me strong inspiration for my own work. Firstly, I was compelled by Mai Der Vang's book *Yellow Rain* - both by her collage techniques and the way in which she meditates on such an incredibly personal, disturbingly unclear event as the yellow rain and how it affected her Hmong relatives. I am still haunted by one of her opening lines: *I have been following the rains, hunting them in my dreams*. Such a chilling, ethereal fixation informs the restless reflection in some of my longer poems - especially "Wish it Were Clear". Lucille Clifton's work was also a large inspiration for the theme of my poetry, especially "blessing the boats". The way in which she takes a vulnerable, transitional moment and breathes assurance into it with images of the sea is profoundly beautiful to me. Many of her poems embody moments of reflection, longing, and propheticism which moved me to want to explore similar themes in my own way.

Finally, regarding my own poetry I wanted to work on improving its sound, rhythm, and rhyme. I have always been drawn to alliteration and the way that well-chosen words flow together, which can be improved even further by a thoughtful rhyme scheme. Not all of these poems rhyme, but I did try to pay special attention to how they sound in that way. For example, the poem “Altiloquence” is a study in alliterative phrasing; it attempts to be jarring in some places and smooth in others to bring emphasis to the word choice. Another place I focused on rhythm is the poem “When”, which is inspired by Heid E. Erdrich’s work with mid-line pauses and her use of spacing. I use these pauses to control how the poem is read, the speed of its lines, and where the emphasis lies. Overall, despite the work I’ve already done with this booklet, I believe there is more to be explored in these lingering moments that fascinate me so much. I am still trying to express *place* in my poetry more definitively - even if that place is one of liminal contemplation.

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March

there can be no plainness

like the parchings of

a schoolchild

spread flat

upon the floor

every striving effort of man

sets forth to strike the

face of death futilely

We, the nameless eternity,

go anyway

Wish it Were Clear

Inspired by the song "Wish You Were Here" by Pink Floyd

Can you stop and just feel
The burn of rising sands,
The slowly opening hand,
Stretching out to the fields?

A well full of wheels,
The wanderer appeals,
Fate cuts many deals,
It bleeds into the land.

The mindscape stretches on,
Goaded by pride,
Or was the trader being snide?
As he counted his bonds.

Is there some last way
To find something to show,
To shield us from blows,
As the horizon fades?

Grass burns on the rim,
Cities sag and sigh,
Men ranging out for why,
Come back but never return.

Will you excuse
The tears in my face,
The heart out of place,
A hapless recluse?

How I wish it were clear,
The warm sun and the shade,
The ancient moon of green jade,
Crystalizing our fear

Altiloquence

Rich flowing sap from

Cheap plastic spiderwort

Burns hellishly

Melts the senses like

Smoking oil, scalded

Hot iron upon a fool's head

Drips down convincingly, stirring

Altiloquence igniting

Petrified pinecones

Of piggishness, lying

Dormant in our foolish hearts.

Unbewusste

He keeps coming back to it - it lurks in the corners of his mind

A rotten, desiccated husk, perhaps of some great beast, found in the damp woods
beyond the reach of pencils.

Usually he observes it - a traveler of no renown

It lies undisturbed, the ruins of some shadowy dream.

Was it ever alive?

This image, the disturbing carnality of it, a shock to the senses to ground oneself
in the real.

But

-

Perhaps the ribcage is tight and centered, like that of a man.

Maybe there lies beside it a leather pack, cracked and burnished, assailed by rot
as it rested contentedly.

There might be a cracked brown envelope inside, full of the sorrowful scrawlings
of some long dead journeyer laid to rest deep within the wayside.

Perhaps (somehow it is always perhaps) he looks at these things
with an impassive brow and reverently, lovingly, places them back in their resting place
before wandering further into the gathering pines.

Sestinal

Created using a modified Sestina poem structure

By the end of the broad summer road lay a backpack

Around it, sniffing dogs

Mindful of nothing, its contents they devoured.

Seeing the mark of me they became careful

Heeding the presence of man.

What else could cause nature to tread so cautiously?

Rain from the bruised sky fell lightly,

The earth, its roots, graciously ate,

I stooped to gather that backpack

Filled with the nourishment and parchings of a foolish scholar.

I extracted notes, reading carefully,

We are this floating world, as are the fleas upon hounds.

The haze of heat humbled the cooling rain, made the afternoon dogged,

Elements tight on my skin, I no longer felt a man.

From the path I lifted lightly,

Emerging out of a backpack,

Expanding slowly, slightly, carefully

From the whole world I ate.

Abecedarius

Atomized

By

Creeping

Decisions, stuck fast to

Eulogies

For the recent past.

Guaranteed to harbor

Hallucinations of time.

Infinitudes of

Jumbled worries. A

Kalon of keepsakes, kaleidoscopes of

Longing.

Moralizing momentum merits

No stoppages.

Open the

Partitions, prepare a

Quotient of stability.

Rise to face the morning

Sun!

To delay is to

Undermine. Stride,

Valorous

Wanderer,

Exclaim

Your unbound

Zeal!

Expressionism

Excerpted from *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor E. Frankl

By declaring that man is responsible and must actualize the potential meaning of his life, I wish to stress that the true **meaning** of life is to be discovered **in the world** rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a **closed** system. I have termed this constitutive characteristic "**the self** -transcendence of human existence." It denotes the fact that being human **always points** and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself—be it a meaning **to** fulfil or another human being to encounter. The more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to **love**—the more human he is **and** the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he **would miss** it. In other words, self-actualization is possible **only** as a side-effect of self- **transcendence**.

When

You say *be safe* when
No one is on their way
You say *nothing* when
A knock rattles the house
You say *please* when
Rounds slant in, flaming rain in the dark
You say *wait* when
Conflagration licks our doorsteps when
Your strength echoes quietly
Swelling through
A cracked heart.

Shoreline

Handling is what the great creators always did best

holding too hard makes it brittle, sensical

tiny little scraps upon the sand

skittering through a scattered mess, some floating away in the turbidity as I watch

The laptop closes and

salty mooring rope circles my ribs cinching tighter

laughing at a yawn that crawls up my throat clawing deep into my eyes until they burst

cracking rice paper shattering useless vain thin trash

I do not see it I grasp for it sand paper hot tears but god the warmth that's what matters
these words are useless without the pictures they are toddler's zoo pastel alphabet
placards

Stillness wracks my beached mind

Let go

Let it go, let it be and just touch it

Run the back of a hand over it

caress it

coax meaning out of that coastal cave

The way you beckon

A wavering child into sunlight

Ritual

Today I made my bed, and then decided to sit down and write about it.

There is something serene in the repetition of behavior;
I believe humans seek familiarity as the buffer between form and void, a comforting refusal of the nihilistic nothingness clawing out from behind our eyes.

Who knows what it is that plants a small smile on my face
as I ruffle the sheets into place, affix the comforter with practiced evenness?
It is, perhaps, the only ritual of renewal I allow myself - a reminder of the new day
approaching fruition, and
my quiet resolve
to meet it.

There is something sacred about carefully tending to things.
To affix effort and consciousness to something means to acknowledge its worth, to
perpetuate your marvel with it.

I know of nothing more difficult or more rewarding to cultivate than one's relationships
with others.

A clock's maintenance requires knowledge, tools, a fine measure of oil;
to tend to people one must only possess the will to be present in their lives, to keep
expressing: "I am here. We are part of one another. I wish to remain".

That kind of appreciation can seem rare and inescapably difficult to find,
but like the comforting seal from which we emerge into the new day, so too does a
profound depth of love spring forth from us each morning as readily as sunlight spilling
over clouds.

Thanks For All the Fish

All of wonder, all of man,

All which cascades

Waif, astray,

All of beauty, all of time,

Dancing along intrinsically,

All our words, their arrangement,

Flitting about so uselessly,

All of form,

All of void,

Swallowing and bellowing

Inexorably

Works Cited:

Frankl, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning*. 1st ed., Amazon, Beacon Press, 2014.