
Palmwise

Audrey Johnston

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Aeon

Darkness distills
on the blue-lipped horizon.

Brittle skin of winter
frost stretches taut

across kitchen windows.
Ten thousand thousand

years ago the same scene
unfolding, one

bulb igniting, one
receding in darkness.

Wake

I rose at midnight
in a moonlit film,
tasting silver,
calling her name.

Silver shone over
everything, pressing
gravel in the driveway
into dark pearls
awash in the ebb
and flow of clouds
over the face
of the moon.

I rose at midnight,
out of a dream and ran
to the door as if to find
her home again, walking
up the drive in a moonlit film,
singing silver, calling my name.

Ephemera

As the new season
sleeps on the horizon,

within the folds
of winter's pelt,

I lift the fragile
membranes of

wilting memories,
and press them,

thin-petaled,
onto parchment.

Perennial Spit

we two women raise up	unfolding our selves each morning
awakening stretching reaching east	in sunlight our hands as seeds
shoulder to shoulder in the mirror we stand	taking root waist deep within dreams
like beads reflecting we raise	of dew the day the water
up from the sink into our mouths our teeth.	palmwise our lips baring

Avalon

She spreads east
before us, the day,
a rolling expanse

of grey sand and wind-
whipped grass
splicing up
amid the dunes,

where a half-
sunk fence leans,
barely visible

whispering
wander this way
up from the water,
the earth's hum
whirling outward,
wander this way

The Flood

As August rains
crooned lonesome
the river banks burst,

heaving mud-caked
culverts awry into the valley;
cold water surged into basements,
swallowed fields and roadways,
poured into and out of the woods.

I remember the weight of my feet
on the planks and downed trees,
as I left home, with the rain,

a drip-drop lullaby,
welling up in my veins.

Orion

sing me in circles,

 sing me seed spun
in with the wind,

slipping through
 the burlap

 sieve of seasons,
 sing me stories

 of the soil ingrained
in our growing

sing ferment and sooth.

Solstice

winter skin
pale sky mornings
she awakes

in snow drifts
relentless wind
her season

mirrors her self
bends into
the shadow equinox

turning only
to turn
again as

an early sign
of thaw whispers
within her
bodyscape.

Winter's Still

Footsteps
in the snow, his
winter prints
from weathered
brown boots.
The tracks twist
where he turned
to look again
as I waved
in the doorway
of this cabin
made
of bookshelves,
so many stories.
Writing my own
I echo
a remnant
of his
parting
silhouette.
December's
wet, wrung out
twisting now
to memory.
Soft longings,
dregs of
loose-leaf
tea, traces
say
we lingered
here, I
write
if only
to arch my
body round
this new hollow,
all the
contours
of absence
still
essence -
a poem for
the long night.

Vase

Lilies, white
as the full
moon flowing

over bodies
of early
summer

return me
to a time
when we swam

in those waters
our pale limbs
lit lunar
in the darkness.

Hearth

Allie bends to nip
at the ridge of her hind leg,
snout disappearing into
the darkness of her fur;
Patty curls with the braided rug,
spine to the woodstove where
the air simmers and sweats
round the glowing coals.

Sitting beside them,
legs stacked like timber,
I trace the grain
of the floorboards, I am
leaching from my body
the winter shards, yearning,
for the itch to ease
and warmth to settle
inside our bones.

Gathering

In the sugarhouse,
stirring sap
strained through
Maple trees
sweet meat and skin
rough as rust,
borne of winter,
boiling over.

Brine

Both depth and
froth, we are
breadth within
and without,

a pulsing of water
upon tissue,
tidal moorings.

Knowing only this
rhythm, let us
release our stories,

come away
from our clinging
minds, our old
picking bone.

Evening Seams

In our apartment on Montgomery Avenue
the windows seek a pasture

where the cement sets
in the moon's mien hovering

where the city's steep
walls are the rise of a valley's unraveling

where Angus etch ruddy swaths
across a canvas of wildrye

where I walked as a child
twisting lea threads in my palms

out of sight
beyond memory
such soft scapes arrive

in reflections gathering above
the sills, a whisper -
come in

The Train Sang

Thoughts of you
in your resonant
blues slipped
away
into the spring
afternoon
sunshine.

It was a spring
thaw,
winter's seep
into oblivion,
churning
the old leaves
deep into the
soil,
the ties sunk
into the skin
swallowed again
by a new
season.

June 5, 1992

I have heard
your story of becoming
my brother, how you were
born at home, still and silent.

How all the words
and the light went out
of the world when you arrived
with cord twined round you,
blue and breathless.

How you were lifted,
how the hush was unraveled,
all the palms anointing
blows on your back,
and the crying as warmth
bled into your veins.

Psalm

Years ago it was my mother
and I here, toe to toe
with *Mel Bay's Complete
Guitar Songbook*, strumming
the simple chords, walking
our way through each song,
hands unsure, fingers stretched
along the frets, singing
sort of off-key, so -

Though now the guitar she
bought in college stays
with me, the hollow inside
echoes with memories of
summer afternoon sing-a-longs,
"Moon Shadow" and
"Amazing Grace" and the
half-sung lullabies we'd get
stuck on in our giggling
ricochet from song to song, so -

Each time I see sunlight
run a thumb down
the strings thick with dust,
I hear the bent pages of
a songbook turning, our
fingers together searching,
our voices as one.

Sunset

Let the poem
be a place where dusk
settles, a time when our fine
lines diffuse into subtleties that
further define our being, where
shadows blend and the horizon
unfolds in hues of the heavens,
giving rise to reverent echoes
illuminating a valley within
us, a basin cradle set
to sway with the
evening refrain
let the poem
be a resting
place.

Palmwise
A Critical Reflection

The poems of *Palmwise* explore the interweavings of consciousness and the natural world, especially in regards to my own experience at home in the wooded hills and river valleys of Vermont. Having grown up in this rural setting, I've always felt most grounded with my feet in the soil, most vital when surrounded by natural forms. Nature arose as my earliest foundation and remains a crucial way through which I seek and create meaning in the world. Over the years I have discovered that a profound way to channel this meaning throughout my life is in the depth of expression provided in reading and writing poetry.

While I grew up exploring the land surrounding my home, the cultivated fields and wilderness that stretched beyond, I also grew up in an environment rich with language-scapes: reading, writing, word-play, the exchange of letters, poetry, and other forms of words as both communication and aesthetic have been parts of the essence of my family. The presentation of the annual Christmas poem was one of the my first glimpses of poetic form and feeling. The Christmas poem has been written in turns by my aunts, uncles, parents, and grandparents. Though each voice is different, the form remains roughly the same: an iambic stanza or two for each family telling of the events of their past year, and a gesture of hope for the months to come. Each Christmas, as the writer presents the poem to the family, there's a vivid mix of emotions. Beyond the itch of awkwardness that arises with the familiarly cheesy verse, there is joy at warm memories of time spent together, wins on the soccer field, births, weddings, bountiful garden harvests...and there is sadness

over the loss and despair of struggles, separations, illness and hardship in its many threads. All these feelings are present among the listeners, and the reading often induces shared laughter and tears. Through the Christmas poem I became aware of poetry's ability to memorialize and punctuate moments. This poignant art form makes the year come alive once more and gives resonance to the rare moment when all the family was gathered together, engaged in this moment of reflection.

Because we write poems at Christmas and feel at home in the environment of language, it may come as little surprise that many in my family are writers - my grandfather writes novels (most recently one recounting colloquial stories of Prince Edward Island) and poems and records our genealogy, my grandmother writes poetry and a monthly article on the history of Strafford, the small town where we live in Vermont. The art form arises in my father and sister, as well, who write poetry of nature and human experience, and with whom I sometimes exchange humorous haikus. My brother keeps a growing record of his journeys scouting and hunting, my mother teaches writing and poetry to elementary school children in our community. Just as language has its own etymological lineage, so too do the expressive models and articulation unique to families. I see my own work as having roots within my family's reading and writing, yet branching further into my own individual expression that speaks my individual truths as well.

My inspiration then draws not only from the tradition of the Christmas poem and family narratives, but also from an evolving collection of wordsmiths whose expression evokes feeling within - poets and songwriters, novelists, teachers and others who bring my fingers to the page to trace and retrace their words. From the anomaly of reading Robert Frost's dissonant verse in second grade, to the revelation of hearing Joni Mitchell

paint vivid and unfixed stories in her songs not long after, I became aware of the wide open fields and wilderness of lyrical expression. I happened to be given a copy of Frost's "Birches" in the spring following an incredible ice-storm, and the poem's description of frosty birches bowed over in the wake of winter's hurricane captivated me and opened a window into Frost's strange rhyme-schemes, which had previously felt inaccessible to me.

The poem opens with this meditation on such distinct winter silhouettes:

"When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-coloured
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen." (Frost, 90).

When I first read these initial lines, Frost's words stirred my own recollection of the past winter's storm with its petrified birches bent and glistening on the rise behind my house. I was moved by his words, not only at the freshness of their sound but moved in mind back to a sensation of playing in the warm sun on Kibling Hill with my father and my brother, tracing the iced bows, licking them like icicles, shattering the "crystal shells" with a gloved hand. With Joni Mitchell and other songwriters that emanated from the living room speakers, drifting over the braided rug, I heard the honest longings and bare emotion, love stories born out of the tangled, verdant threads of experience - Bruce Springsteen's "River", Bonnie Raitt's "Angel From Montgomery", Neil Young's "Natural Beauty" and

others. Feeling and meaning emerged in the unique pairings of words and the accompanying silences, and I began to feel the complex textures of verse found in the tones and rhythms of articulation; that language is a moving material, both in its ability to bring about sensation, and at the core of its physical composition as well.

The body of poetry I have created follows the resonant voices that have surrounded me and the notion of language as a physical entity, possessing a primacy and musicality that engage real sensation in writer and reader alike. The potential depth of feeling has the potential to provide a well for reflection, a furthering of the sense of self, and an endless canvas for free-range of expression.

In her groundbreaking work *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Julia Kristeva characterizes language as a material through which we configure the self and surroundings through both primal and societal drives. A text itself, for Kristeva, is seen as woven by threads of one's inner drives and outward socio-linguistic constraints; a writing subject therefore channels both conscious and un/subconscious forces into a work which "germinate" together within the threads of the work. (Kristeva, 9). This underlying process of interaction and growth of one's inner and outer worlds endows the site of a text with endless, evolving depth and texture. A natural landscape in its own right, this terrain takes shape in the presence and perspective of the writer and reader who dwell there momentarily, yet it also births new aesthetics and concepts and is therefore an evolving body as well.

In turn, I've come to read the broad genre of "nature poetry" and its eco-poetical tributaries - which deal specifically with concepts of sustainability and the connection of "non-human nature" with "human nature" - as present not only in descriptions of natural

scenery but in the physical material of the language itself and its biological relation to the subject speaking (Engelhardt). As Leslie Scalapino observes, there is a substantial connection between the mind and environment in poetic expression.

“Perhaps the start of a sense of ‘eco-logical writing,’ for myself, is the phrase ‘my mind is phenomena,’ mind (as its phenomena/subjects and as its body), not the same as land but alongside it. Writing enables the making of that spatial relation (of land and mind-phenomena, the two placed beside each other). It’s a relation that’s going on in every instant but writing can also ‘make’ it (future) by altering space, allowing one to see one’s own joyful movement in space (making that) as well as being one’s movement and seeing others’ movements as joyful. The text is the altered space, sometimes one’s to walk 3-D in it at jetting evening.” (Scalapino, 66).

For Scalapino, the placing of words on a page reaches far beyond the small frame of ink on a blank white space; instead, this practice articulates one’s projection of themselves into past, present and future spaces. Writing, understood in this context as a subject’s movement through space, thus expresses a unique and essential relation of person and place, an individual’s momentary explorations and states of inhabitation through which self arises, engages with surroundings, and reflects. Furthering this notion in her essay, “Metamorphic Morphology (with gushing igneous interlude) Meet in Language: P as in Poetry, Poetry Rhetorical in Terms of Eco”, Brenda Iijima writes,

“Beyond being merely mimetic of an outside reality, language is a conduit for bodies to articulate explicitly - meanings travel and exchange in every conceivable spatial direction. Language enacts. Language is a biological function as much as it is a technology. Biorhythms and metabolic functions coincide with language as it is rendered, conveyed, and received. Thoughts and utterances become bodily substance as encoded matter that imprints and sheds itself in worlds.” (Iijima, 281)

Iijima deepens the spatial aspect of language to include the fluid, abstract impressions of meanings in addition to surface aesthetics - content and form - that give shape to person and place. Not only are the contours of language extended in Iijima's observation, but the biological essence of language as well. The expression in poetry is a material in and of itself and by attuning to the makings of this material, through the perspectives of both writers and readers, we gain insight into the nature of our existence and its many representations - social, biological, temporal, etc. As Catherine Cucinella writes, "When we attend to tropes and poetic representations of the body, we can better understand the matrices of power and politics that affect our sense of being, our understanding of the world, and our relationship to both." (Cucinella, 152). Beyond the lyrical sway and expressive artistry possible in poetic language, there is a crucial perspective present in the unfixed creativity and endless refraction of the form and content, which is not simply born out of imaginative loft but from the live energy of our bodies and minds.

Regarding poetry as a vivid mirror opens the analysis of poetry to new depths, and at the same time it presses the concept of writing poetry beyond the singular act of putting an idea on the page to a moving utterance evocative of one's evolution and coursing existence. In writing my own poems, I sought to maintain an awareness of the threads of my text and the fabric of my physical existence being of the same material. Thus my own poems and those I am drawn to read engage a corporeal essence and exploration of nativity - a being's birth, dwelling, and passing through language.

Walt Whitman, one of the fathers of American poetry and free verse, laid a groundbreaking foundation for such poetry in his own celebratory and liberating work, which brings body and place into a compassionate and freeing dialogue. The content of

the west rises for morning and for noons continual.” This honest and imaginative layering opens up the growth and decay of each to an intimate yet expansive rendering.

Writing after Whitman, I was inspired by the liquidity of nature and the body in his verse. One seeps into/over/beside the other continually, offering a duality of landscapes as well as a crucial unity. In “Solstice” the seasonal space of winter and the winter body/mind meet and combine to deepen the sense of being in this particular moment in time, both inwardly and outwardly. The intention was to portray existence in winter, yet also to move through it, envisioning the spring renewal in the body and the land. Through the lens of Scalapino’s observations, “Solstice” plays with writing writing as an action that establishes and extends the body in time and place.

Solstice

winter skin
pale sky mornings
she awakes

in snow drifts
relentless wind
her season

mirrors her self
bends into
the shadow equinox

turning only
to turn
again as

an early sign
of thaw whispers
within her
bodyscape.

Through the scopic, fluid rendering of the feminine subject I sought to endow an ethereal essence to the figure of the poem, which flows through both the woman's body/mind and the seasonal landscape. The verbs "awakes", "turning", "whispers and others provide a subtle yet consistent dilatant and effusive movement in the poem, which subtly pushes the narrative of the poem into the future and outward, invoking a thaw. The impression of this poem is thus fully realized in the mapping of the self of the feminine subject over the essence of the season, and each are amplified by the presence of the other. In this instance and similar moments in this collection, I drew inspiration from Whitman in representing the body as connected with and illuminated by its natural surroundings.

Wendell Berry displays similar sensibilities towards the intersections of human and nonhuman nature in his poetry as well. In reading his work, I am not only interested in the continued effort to express identity of person and place in and through each other, but also his honest and unpretentious language. In "A Homecoming" his concise presentation of the wilderness of love and the effects of dwelling therein gets to the heart of the matter with a vocabulary that is seamlessly metaphorical, so as to draw the threads of person and place so tight as to seem indistinguishable.

A HOMECOMING

One faith is bondage. Two
are free. In the trust
of old love, cultivation shows
a dark, graceful wilderness
at its heart. Wild
in that wilderness, we roam
the distances of our faith,
safe beyond the bounds
of what we know. O love,
open. Show me
my country. Take me home.

Berry paints a picture of the landscape of emotions in love using non-specific language and a modest tone in which the simple words stride and settle. What strikes me about this poem is the depth of sentiment plumbed within such broad descriptors and short form. Similar to a haiku, "A Homecoming" is eloquently blunt, and in this it achieves a poignancy that lingers long after the last line is read. In my poem "Gathering" and others, I strive for the bare-skinned language of Berry's example, in which the resonating human voice heard upon the page is the poetry first and foremost, without a reach toward floral verse and embellishments that draw one's eye and emotions away from the core expression of the poem.

I found in the process of writing that the simplest truths and coarse images or sensations were harder to put down on the page than lyrical flourishes that sweep over whatever essence or truth I sought to evoke. Berry, and others such as W.S. Merwin, Gary Snyder, David Budbill, and the haiku heavy-weights Issa, and Basho, display an intentionality in their work that shows lyrical poise and an adherence to the raw fiber of experience - rekindling, as Kristeva might say, the primacy of language. In my efforts to keep a sharp edge on the language and import of my poetry, I found that literal awareness of body and space were key to staying present and true in my voice. Just as Berry finds himself composing poems during and after a hard day's work with his hands on his farm in Kentucky, I found my voice emergent in the movements of my hands in hand-writing (as opposed to working at a computer screen), the stillness of my mind and the rhythm of my breath in meditation, and the flow of my limbs in yoga. Even the act of reading and the inevitable composting of what has been read into a personal narrative can be regarded as

the momentary blending of body and mind, a process which can endow poetic expression with presence and freshness.

Rumi, celebrated Persian poet and Sufi mystic, composed much of his poetry in dance-induced spiritual states. In reading his work, the words sound conversational, without premeditation and instead engaged with the moment at hand. In "Whoever Brought Me Here Will Have To Take Me Home" Rumi ends in a candid tone that exemplifies the aspect of his poetry that is his communion - a spur-of-the-moment dialogue spun within himself: "This poetry. I never know what I'm going to say. I don't plan it. When I'm outside the saying of it, I get very quiet and rarely speak at all." Rumi's tone in this passage holds such interiority - the poem opens up to reveal the speaker's inside. In a similar vein to Whitman, the open lines allow for a liberation - there is no pretense here, instead the gesture towards raw expression resonates outward. As a result of this openness, the tension of speaking of his own poetry within his poem, and the unsettled nature of his sentiment are discordant but not dysfunctional within the poem. In fact, they add a human element which deepens the expression, the barbs of the tension giving stronger resonance to the poet's voice overall.

May Swenson keenly evokes tension as well in much of her poetry, a tension which often explicitly connects to the myriad of natural processes that work against and alongside each other. In her poem "Come In, Go Out" Swenson deftly describes and shows through form such natural complexities.

COME IN

GO OUT

A world of storm	A life of waves
Raging circles form	Tides and icy caves
Wind loops the globe	Sun scorching palms
Blizzards in the brain	Or deadening calms
Then modifying hope	A single summer day
A hoisted sail	Unfolds twinkling
On the dream trail	Flinches past the eye
Hummingbird's green	Bullet of gauze
Illuminant	Of primal cause

The form of this poem displays a relationship between two separate poetic entities under the subjects of "Come In" and "Go Out". Primarily, these two subjects consist of actions that oppose each other, and thus the two columns of the poem reflect a repelling dynamic, wherein the blank mid-space enacts the separation, the void between them. And yet, Swenson's poem expresses a more livid energy in its form, for it can be read in infinite directions, allowing for a constantly evolving narrative, an unfixed expression of nature's give and take. Reading Swenson's poetry brought the concept of poetic language as a live energy full circle, for not only is the content evocative of the speaker's existence in time and space but the form is as well. Swenson's poetry reminds her readers of the signifying process that is poetry through her engagement with phrases, words, and even individual characters as visual symbols in their own right. In a sense, she lifts Kristeva's threads to the naked eye, showing the push and hush of human drives within content and form of poetic expression. Many of my poems, and most explicitly "Sunset", "Perennial Spit" and "The Train Sang" are written after Swenson, seeking a visual depth and the evocation of pace from word to word in order to press the sensation of the poem further. The form of

“Ritual” especially follows Swenson’s liquid landscape, for it can be read in any direction, and as a result holds several different narratives and meanings.

Perennial Spit

we two women raise up	unfolding our selves each morning
awakening stretching reaching east	in sunlight our hands as seeds
shoulder to shoulder in the mirror we stand	taking root waist deep within dreams
like beads reflecting we raise	of dew the day the water
up from the sink into our mouths our teeth.	palmwise our lips baring

“Perennial Spit” suggests the pliable essence of a poem, the many paths one can take across the page. In all, *Palmwise* plays with the tactile elements of poetry through the immediate presentation of words on the page, yet the tactile is felt beyond the material of each word and aggregate poems. It involves an integration and evocation of the self, the spirit, and the body within linguistic landscapes. Specifically in this collection, the subject matter of human experience is woven into natural elements through the loom of poetry, evoking a deep sense of space, in addition to the form and material that engage with the visual syntax and overall corporeal substance of language. Not only does poetry ground

you more deeply in the present moment, but is allows for the creation of new geographies and temporalities through which to reconsider and (re)frame. In the primacy and practice of writing poetry I find the opportunity to cultivate, communicate, and dwell from phrase to phrase.

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