

# The Prismatic Menagerie



Bernardo Villela

*The Prismatic Menagerie*

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*Le branle universal de la danse macabre  
Vous entraîne en des lieux qui ne sont pas  
connus!*

“the universal din of the Dance of Death  
leads you down to places unknown!”

—Charles Baudelaire, “Danse Macabre”

*Ao verme que primeiro roeu as frias  
carne do meu cadáver dedico como saudosa  
lembrança estas memórias póstumas*

“To the worm who first gnawed on the cold  
flesh of my cadaver I dedicate as a fond  
memento these posthumous memoirs”

—Machado de Assis, *The Posthumous  
Memoirs of Bras Cubas*



# Preface

**A**ssemblages of poems I've created thus far have most often been cobbled together rather than created by design. Sometimes when I'm writing some imagery recurs, but as through a prism, the image is changed in its new iteration, colored with a new shade of meaning, or it incorporates fragments of larger works that have yet to see the light

of day and come alive on another end of the writing spectrum.

Searching for and finding these images and themes in multiple works became the modus operandi of this collection. As the poems came together, I was glad to find a shape in them and a consistency that would allow individual pieces to stand out but also present a vision that gave me the confidence to take a chance on it.

The overall vision is a double-edged sword: beauty and horror, hope and despair, fear and joy. The poems owe a debt to Poe, Baudelaire, Machado de Assis, and other writers referenced within, as well as people in my life who have guided my approach to writing. Among whom are: my uncle, Renato Guéron, who instilled in me a love of wordplay that traveled across

linguistic divisions; my aunt, Dulce  
Ribeiro, whose advice to work toward  
greater dexterity in English has allowed me  
to better incorporate and write in  
Portuguese and other languages; my  
parents for encouraging my interests; and  
my husband, Mark, for always  
championing me.

Special thanks to Kara Hawkers and Emery  
Blake at The Ravens Quoth Press for  
giving my work and this collection a  
chance.

I hope you enjoy this ray of light and all  
the creatures within it.





<b>REFLEXIVITY .....</b>	<b>17</b>
For as Long as the Devil Lived .....	19
Angels of Life, Death and Hell .....	21
Counterbalancing Evolutions .....	23
Corroding World .....	25
A Demonic Fragment .....	27
Cicatrix Mundi.....	28
Playing with the Strings .....	30
Maleficent Malleability.....	31
The Land of Those Who No Longer Want to Live .....	33
M. Alice.....	35
Shapeshifter .....	37
Death Was a Doorman .....	39
Wander.....	41
Hazy Hays.....	43
Mr. Llama Came in for an Interview .....	44
Cracking in the Deathsands.....	47
Moss Most Fearsome.....	50
The Zombie Cackling.....	52

## REFLECTIONS ..... 57

Four Pilings.....	59
Gauze-World.....	62
A Killer Begins .....	66
Impressionistic Accident.....	67
Bottomless Pothole.....	69
Beauteous Visions.....	70
Os Herdeiros do Zé do Caixão (original) .....	71
The Heirs of Coffin Joe (translation).....	74
The Indian Child's Revenge: A Shakespearean Sonnet .....	76
The Tragedy of Young Lucius: A Sonnet.....	78
The Cockatrice.....	80
Emergence .....	83
Dedicated to the Arts .....	86
Endless Wandering.....	87
Dichotomy of Desires .....	88

## REFRACTIONS ..... 91

Refracted Fractures .....	93
Phenomena of Irregular Motion.....	95
Blood-Blooms .....	99
Decomposing a Moment.....	100
Periphery.....	102
Mandibles.....	104
The Disintegration of Inculcation.....	105
Anadiplosis Enchained to a Prism .....	107
The Municipal Circulatory System .....	109
The Tree of Death .....	111
Inviting the Arbor.....	113
Time's Papering.....	115
The Tentacular Crown.....	117
Frozen Waves: A Mythos Rondeau.....	119
Undulations.....	120
The Galline God.....	121
Mermaid Bloom and Lion-Rose .....	122
The Sideways Door: A Tanka.....	124
Benedict's Travels Through the Mirror-Eye.....	125
Blaise the B'ar .....	129
Prince Mud, The Stuck .....	131
Through a Whirling Vortex.....	132
Skeleton Suit .....	139

Dream-Images of *Ligeia*: An Erasure and Reassembly of Poe  
..... 140

The Prismatic Menagerie ..... 146

**BERNARDO VILLELA..... 155**

**THE RAVENS QUOTH PRESS ..... 157**





# REFLEXIVITY





# For as Long as the Devil Lived

For as long as the Devil lived  
his minions came when beckoned,  
fearing his mace.

Many a male was made lame  
in his fire-rife lair.

Impatient, he could only listen when it was silent  
Trails of blood told the story of his trials.  
His cup runneth over with glair;  
Teeth exposed, slime in his smile.



He'd slap his pals and sin more  
than an angel could glean.  
"Away off my dais," he said.  
The way clear, he walked across  
The bloodstained stiles  
Covered in bone-tiles;  
Past the swine bathed in fine wines.  
Excited as God's dog to seek new recruits,  
To the sulfurous, ruddled earth belonged his heart.





# Angels of Life, Death and Hell

From within the womb  
Into life abloom,  
A fate unrequested,  
Into a world infested  
Thrown, left to fend  
Alone, unwilling to bend.  
    Battling fearsome foes.



From without the tomb  
Nearing death too soon.  
A fate concerning  
An existence burning.  
Sliced, left to bleed.  
Christ, pay heed!  
Deflecting awesome blows.

O withal demons loom  
From hells festoon  
A frate unblessèd.  
Chaste, left to lie.  
Chased, left to die.  
Donning darksome clothes.





# Counterbalancing Evolutions

Past and present  
ephemeral and eternal  
within this amalgamated  
animal move. An ambulatory  
metamorphosis defying all logic.  
It's no campestral  
dislodgment, not flora, nor fauna,  
but part fungi  
with other fruiting  
bodies, such as  
barnacles, in tow.  
Natural devolution  
severs its spinal column to grow



a trilobite tail. Counter  
balancing the other  
evolutions and other  
mergers with invasive  
species, endowing it  
with a cockeyed trifurcated body.  
The gaping piscine mouth's  
stuffed with an upward climbing  
mushroom, growing to a  
periscopic cap,  
sucking through fungal  
gills, the animal imbibes  
and inhales to motor  
its chimeral form along.  
Present and past  
eternal and ephemeral  
amalgamate in this moving  
animal. This metamorphosis  
is ambulatory, all logic it defies,  
but what life-form doesn't?





# Corroding World

Acerbic,  
her hydrochloric eyes  
see a corroding world.

Melancholic,  
her mind laments  
what dementia mended.

Eyes,  
shattered windows  
to an abandoned soul.



Whirling

vortex of existential

dread burrows into her mind,

inundating

her thoughts

disallowing even cold comfort.

Assailing

her waning moments

allow not even sweet release.





# A Demonic Fragment

He bore the weight of silence  
on his shoulders.

He felt the urge to speak  
but found he could not.

Now, with demons all around,  
they chattered incessantly  
but he too would have his say.



# Cicatrix Mundi

Cicatrix mundi  
for the world is sick of tricks.  
More and more you're torn,  
scar, scar,  
you're reborn.

The scarred world  
wears a crown of thorns.  
Tectonic plates rift,  
the planet bleeds.





Souls are torn,  
pain unfurled.  
From ashes uplift  
life's very seeds.

The tricks that tear  
have less power  
when always we return  
souls in constant flower.



# Playing with the Strings

A talon-fingered puppet master,  
decrepit purveyors of vile villainy,  
hold the strings that make the choices  
regarding this young woman's body.

She tries to tell the puppet master  
that she can move, she knows her legs,  
arms, body, and her way through this perilous  
world, but they continue pulling her strings.

Persistently they march her to the cliff's edge  
because they don't know how she moves,  
how her body works, or where she should go;  
they just like playing with the strings.





# Maleficent

# Malleability

Death is not the end... but what if it never comes?

The skeleton but a frame to build upon

And skin is but clay.

Who's to stop me, my dear,

From pausing and changing one day?

Shift.

See me.

Lift.

See me not.

Tie.

See me knot.

I am the same,



Yet changed  
In your eyes.  
New,  
Nubile,  
Coycurious,  
Ivoryporcelain,  
Hardsoft,  
Every contour the same but  
Looking different than before.

Yes,  
You have seen me  
somewhere else before.  
I'm here all the time.  
Still the same,  
I never change.  
Play my game.





# The Land of Those Who No Longer Want to Live

Broadcasting live from the Land of Those Who No  
Longer Want to Live,

He was used to being used,

He couldn't converse agreeably but only argue the  
converse.



Acidic tears tear through the ground.  
A festering wound wound its way around his body.  
He would read what must be read,  
Following the lead of lead,  
Documenting the deeds of the dead,  
Surrounded by disease and *disease*.





# M. Alice

It made no sense.

There was nothing afoot within a foot of us.

Then things appeared out of nothing.

Who knew that a maze could amaze him?

Like a labyrinthine snake, it tried to constrict him.

Who knew I could not avoid a void?

A tightening gyre, pulling me like a vacuum.

This was all her doing,

the undaunted malice of M. Alice.

We knew we'd have to work together to get her.

Then,

he saw some thing and knew he had to do something.



A sliver of silver in the corner of his eye.

A blade in hand, he lunged.

Before he could grab Ed, he grabbed her.

She sought to make Ed unhand her.

Slicing at her wrist, he dismembered her.

M. Alice was the one who had been un-handed.





# Shapeshifter

There lay the creature, trying to mine what was mine.

Burrowing through my soul, feeding on my fear.

It would have been a bore, were it not for the evil it bore  
within.

Far from my house, who knew this innocuous cave could  
house such a beast?

Run ragged,

My spirits were low

And I recalled everyone who ragged on me.

Once I believed myself a learned man, but now I acted as  
if I learned nothing.



Its shapeshifted anew.

To the left was an underground river.

In it a rowboat sat.

Its last occupant met with a grim end,

Evidenced by the blood and bow on the discarded bow  
both.

The shapeshifter slid nearer me.

I glided forward.

Its hellacious ululations rent the cavern.

It sought to start a row, I sought to row.

Like Job's wife I chanced one last glance over my  
shoulder.

Its form was indeterminate.

Crustacean came closest to describing it.

It was very near me,

Trying to lop off my neck as I loped away.

Had I been caught in its mandibular crosswind,

I'd not be here today.





# Death Was a Doorman

that opened doors and slinked  
about the hills and streets.  
It wants to eat us, swallow us  
down its cataclysmic throat  
take us in its womb and part with us  
birthing us back into  
broad daylight, but  
I stuck to shadowy paths  
littered with nought  
but bones loosely forming  
a cross. Whether it was a  
grave marker  
or a tribute to God I couldn't tell.



Death's brilliance shines to me  
in windowpanes reflecting  
funereal processions of the past;  
in the image of the Repentant Thief  
hanging on the Southern Cross.  
It fascinates and mesmerizes me  
and while I am stopped Death comes  
on a dead-run to take me away.





# Wander

My thoughts  
always wander  
away from  
where I am  
now  
to where I was  
then  
and where I want to  
return soon to  
where I want to be  
in the end.



I am always  
looking for the horizon  
yearning for the past  
ignoring the present  
seeking the future  
or a new world  
somewhere  
out there  
behind the moon.





# Hazy Hays

Cellophane cells,  
phantom smells,  
prismatic pills,  
dander hills.

Into the fissures  
the fishers dive.  
Into the fisher's fissures  
flayed alive.

Into the summer haze;  
I am set ablaze.  
Into the summer hays;  
I am sent, glazed.



# Mr. Llama Came in for an Interview

Looking like a boss rather than an applicant  
and the Suits were duly impressed by his posture.  
They found the constant chewing a bit off-putting  
but he wore an impeccably tailored suit,  
so they were willing to overlook the cud.

They shook his hoof.

Pleasantries were exchanged.

Mr. Llama and the Suits sat.

The main event was about to get underway.





The Suits were three in number.

All human; one woman, two men,

one of the men was Black.

Not a very diverse group in Mr. Llama's opinion.

The Caucasian man with salt-and-pepper hair asked:

“What are your best attributes  
as an employee?”

“I'm dauntless, you can fleece me

and I'll come back for more.

It's no skin off my nose.

In a few years my wool grows back  
just as thick as it was before.”

The woman had fire-red hair and asked:

“Do you have any language skills?”

*“¡Por supuesto! Me llamo Llama. Yo hablo  
español, portugués y varios otros idiomas también.”*



The salt-and-pepper white man grumbled:

“I’ll just put that down as a yes.”

The distinguished-looking Black man impatiently folded his hands.

Mr. Distinguished’s impatience was aimed as his colleague’s histrionics.

“Why did you leave your last employer?”

Mr. Llama chewed his answer over.

They’d reached that question sooner than he expected.

“They had a herd mentality there.

There was no room for individuality or innovation.”

Mr. Llama looked across the table,  
whereas before they seemed to be their own people,  
he now saw three identical expressions  
on three faces disparate in appearance  
and he knew this company was no different from the last.





# Cracking in the Deathsands

Quick!

Act now!

If I don't

the quicksand

will pull me down

before I crack

and fully shed my old

skin, becoming a better self.



The breaking is painful  
but necessary.  
But wallowing until  
being swallowed is  
so tempting. The deathsands  
are so comforting; they  
tempt me to sink.

While split, me and my corpseclone  
will scream and battle, but  
the old must be allowed to die;  
the new must have room to live.  
If my own screams enchant me,  
and my pains consume me,  
what is good will wither,  
what is bad will thrive,  
and both my selves may die.





Hold!

Hang tight!

I tell my new

hands as they push

down my old face

so it may disappear

into the quicksand

forevermore.



# Moss Most Fearsome

On stone and  
on bark and  
on the ground  
moss clings.

It was usually  
a serene sight  
that brought me  
peace but now  
it is fearsome.





For after I  
am long gone  
and my children  
and their children  
and humankind  
are all gone  
the moss will  
still cling to  
the stones, to the  
bark, to the ground  
and be accompanied  
only by cockroaches.



# The Zombie Cackling

He who always smelled  
like lead.

A sickly child died  
afflicted with mumps.

Now excavating a tomb  
in the coffin I hear a *zabumba*.

I try to stop the gargantuan  
gravedigger. He resists,  
tells me off, creates a ruckus.

Then once again comes a booming  
to our side in the accursed catacomb.





He stops to listen, considering  
the possibility that I'm not an old biddy  
that I'm right. In the sky day  
breaks but rottenness from the earth comes.  
There comes a thumping again, this one  
lighter, softer, like notes played  
on a *berimbau*.

I was even thinking that these fields,  
in this scrubland covered in *guaçatumba*,  
was a strange place for a cemetery to be,  
for here's the proof, earth redolent  
of the dead, that frightens the valiant and is  
impregnated with macumba curses.

Now, as proof, here comes the  
mort-vivant poised to attack.  
Cold skin heats up,  
it doesn't want to stay in the grave.



The coffin splinters apart!  
Woe is my heart!  
We run  
climbing stairs  
without handrails.  
Feet slide,  
come off the floor.  
Powerful arms  
choke me,  
suddenly I'm delivered  
to the broken coffin.  
Unable to breathe  
soil falls on me.  
Gasping for air,  
it doesn't work, my throat's  
blocked by clay.  
The rebellious corpse





working with a shovel,  
is set to bury me.

The gravedigger sneaks up,  
the last thing I saw,  
then came the sound,  
the shovel knocked him out.

The earth trembles,  
“You’re gonna die, it’s no use,”  
says the zombie cackling.  
I felt more earth fall on me,  
“And you’ll also  
take my place.”





# REFLECTIONS





# Four Pilings

## I.

My happiness was

diving

off

pilings.

Now

diving

is

a

memory.

Diving,

my happiness was.



## II.

Off pilings I fell into cold water.  
The deepening plunges stirred our souls,  
with these friends I was forever bonded.  
Surfacing, splashing, besoaked in laughter,  
so far away from hearing the bell's tolls,  
how soon this moment would abscond.

## III.

Cannot  
remember most  
of it now, which is one  
of the worst things about being  
this old.





**IV.**

Such joy resided within us that day,  
as if our lives passed by within a dream.  
Always we believed we would be at play  
held safe and sound within a warm sunbeam,  
thinking time is a lake and not a stream.  
Around distant hills the future-haze looms,  
when fog-bound we are taken to our tombs.

◀ ▶

# Gauze-World

In a diaphanous  
Bergmanesque  
black & white  
existence, he  
steps into the  
room. Lying  
at my side  
his face turns  
into mine and  
mine into his.

Into the gauze-world  
we dove, set to drown,  
cloud-sheet billowing,  
brewing storms and  
tenuous calms that  
would never last long.





Grayed blue-eyes stung  
my soul & split my heart.  
Ears burnt by his incisive  
words & most acerbic barbs.

Speaking each other's words  
misunderstanding all we say.  
Our roles could be inverted  
or we could be in other bodies  
and our conversations would always  
end the same. The confusion,  
deviated our psychic septums,  
frayed our corpora callosa. So  
we did not speak, but we ran  
lines and practiced our  
amorous embouchure.

Through utter silence spiders crawl,  
blind corpse-memories walk and  
threaten our solitude with their most  
hateful solicitude.



The world's silence  
sprung from God's muteness punctures  
our eardrums. Tongues tied now in  
knots that will not be loosed, he & I  
clutch onto one another sheltering  
each other from the rising tide  
of sorrow, that engulfs our shores, placid  
no more, our island's erasure pending,  
an oceanic interment nigh.

Souls bruised,  
battered. Psyches hurt. The accumulated  
weight of lives ill-lived weigh us down,  
decreasing our buoyancy. Wretched wights  
are we who even alone cannot be free.





If  
only the island in its charcoal and  
argentine tones had always been  
here & we had always lived here together,  
then this tempest in a  
cracked teapot might not be  
what brought us death  
both as a unit and as  
individuals. Brine  
swallowed  
whole the  
two of  
us.

# A Killer Begins

Blood-spatter made the flooring gory.  
Killing, he had never felt more alive.  
His sibling done, first in a series of five.

Abhorring his sister most, he'd given her  
priority. The Queen Bee deprived of her hive.  
Shy of forty, she breathed her last.

Off her neck the ivory necklace came.  
The irresponsible jewelry matched her vibe.  
It was something he'd lock in the tile.

Resorting to crude implements of slicing.  
Courting danger, spilling forensic evidence.  
He has her now trapped in his death-stare.





# Impressionistic Accident

A right merge  
left him in the lurch,

in need of urgent help,  
injured and frail.

Hail fell as his  
ankle swelled.

Pain scale broken,  
skin turned pale.

His whale-shaped foot,  
a surgeon's delight.



Car-spewed groceries  
on rain-soaked blacktop.

A purge of kale  
and cornflakes about.

Jackpot lights, he screams,  
sirens, he shouts.

Door open; stuck.  
Jaws of life; free.

Body on a stretcher  
car on a carrier.





# Bottomless Pothole

Calendars used to be  
polka-dotted with  
appointments to keep  
in order.


A year ago we fell  
into a bottomless  
pothole and we've  
not emerged yet.



# Beauteous Visions

Heat-waved horizon  
over placid waters,  
gliding prey-bird  
in sunset illumined,  
oracle's gates beckoning,  
in hazy distances  
beauteous visions threaten  
to turn the world  
upside down for food.





# Os Herdeiros do Zé do Caixão (original)

*Zé do Caixão terá herdeiro  
chamado Zezinho do Caixão.*

*E Zezinho do Caixão  
vai gerar vários Zezinhos  
em milhares de caixões.*

*No crepúsculo vão gemer  
e começarão a acordar,  
e vão jogar pros céus  
as suas mortalhas.*



*Na luz do luar  
eles andarão  
pelos cemitérios a fora.  
Pelas cidades entrevadas  
A meia-noite eles levarão  
as suas almas todas.*

*E mais tarde,  
em cadáveres encarnados  
os Zezinhos em legião mórbida uivarão  
suas gozadas arrepiadores.  
Captarei uma nação pela a goela  
até o sangue soltado pelas unhas  
encaracoladas começará a escorrer  
dos pescoços aterrorizados e vão  
abrindo alas nas almas. Com as  
benções do Ser  
entrará nessas pessoas  
a proclividade e o dom  
para o terror.*





*Com esse sentimento no coração,  
e transfundo no sangue, parte das  
almas, assombrando as expirações  
não somente viverá o terror  
más florescerá,  
Como um tal  
Flor do mal.*

# The Heirs of Coffin Joe (translation)

Coffin Joe will have an heir  
called Coffin Joey.

And Coffin Joey  
will beget many Joeys  
in thousands of coffins.

At twilight they'll groan  
and begin awakening,  
and they'll throw skyward  
their coffin lids.

In moonlight  
they'll walk  
through many cemeteries.

Through darkened cities  
at midnight they'll take





all of its souls.

And later on

incarnate in cadavers

the Joeys in morbid legion will howl

over their terrifying delights.

They'll take a nation by the throat

until the blood loosed by their curlicued

fingernails starts running

from terrorized necks, making paths in souls. With

the blessings of the being,

the gift for horror

will enter these people.

With this feeling in their heart,

and transfused into their blood, part of their

souls, haunting their breaths,

horror will not only live,

but will flourish,

like a so-called

flower of evil.

❖

# The Indian Child's Revenge: A Shakespearean Sonnet

Be the Indian child mage or dream-weaver?  
Progeny of a midsummer night's dream  
or remnant of a passionate fever?  
Worse yet, a victim of Puck's devious scheme?  
Cruelly cast away, with fate unclear,  
not untouchable, but a caste aside,  
his existence, his duality, breeds fear,  
drawing ire upon him from far and wide.





For sins perceived in him he did repent.  
Denied forgiveness, his fury did grow,  
fighting all comers, faces he did rent,  
blow by blow, unleashing a ruddy flow.  
Colonial bloodbath, the crown jewel  
stained by the Indian child, nobody's fool.

❖❖

# The Tragedy of Young Lucius: A Sonnet

When the blood dried, the dead in graves laid,  
Young Lucius dwelt upon murders faded.  
His slumber not sweet, but gruesome and flayed.  
No peace for he, when in gore he'd waded,  
With drops of blood upon his fingertips,  
Putrescent visceral floes cascading  
His heart and soul facing total eclipse,  
A dark foretold fate was worth evading.  
Away from sanguine-soiled Rome he would go,





Hopeful rhythmic briny seas would bring peace.  
A deckhand, comforted by the heave-ho,  
Lo, his new self did not arrive in Greece.  
There he goes tossing men off the barque  
“’Tis true; the raven doth not hatch a lark”

# The Cockatrice

The sickness has been in the henhouse  
but it had gone at long last.  
A new flock, a hopeful generation,  
was brought in to occupy the coop.  
The chickens knew innately what  
happened prior, the farmers knew it factually  
but the hens went about their business  
living the only life they knew:  
nesting, preening, feeding, & laying eggs.

All was uneventful for a while, pure bliss.  
The young farmhand came to collect the eggs  
& send them off, making revenue anew.  
Until one day he found an egg too large  
to be from one of the hens.  
But what bird (reptile?) laid it?  
The egg had the right size & appearance  
to be reptilian, but why'd one abandon it there?





The boy's father & grandfather both said  
that there was nothing to be concerned about  
abnormally large eggs happen from time to time.  
It was as the boy had seen, so his father wasn't angered.  
To calm his son down, the father retrieved  
the egg-candler, the grandfather protested.

It was worth it for his son to see.  
If the egg was fertilized the child would know  
the hens had gotten around, nothing out of the ordinary.  
Couldn't hurt.

Candler behind the egg, a silhouette appeared.  
Like nothing he'd ever seen.  
Within the egg was a serpentine form.  
"Dad, what's that?" the boy asked, terrorized.  
He couldn't answer. He was too disturbed  
that things had gone so amiss.  
"That," his grandfather said. "Is a cockatrice."



“I don’t understand,” the boy pleaded.

“A cock laid that egg,” his grandfather replied.

The sickness hadn’t gone, it’d gotten worse.

“What do they do?”

“These serpents have a stare, like Medusa. It’ll kill ya!”

“It’s good we caught it then,” the boy said relieved.

His father went to destroy the egg.

“We caught that one. There’ll be more,  
we must be vigilant, boy. I just hope we  
haven’t missed any & that other folks are looking.”





# Emergence

She walks wanting

to emerge.

Diaphanous red

one leg

one arm;

A double exposure.

She walks wanting to

emerge.

Her dress billows around her

Left leg

as it walks

alone;

shallow depth of field.



She walks wanting to emerge from  
celluloid, scratched,  
from an easel besmudged,  
into reality  
out of a dream  
half-remembered  
as through a glass darkly.

She walks wanting to emerge.  
I sit and watch, wanting to  
submerge  
    into the grain,  
    into the oils.

She walks wanting to extract  
the rest of her from another  
reality,  
dream,  
dimension,  
frame.





I walk away from the image  
extracted from submersion into another  
frame of mind,  
into another dream of reality  
seeking another dimension  
half-remembered as through a glass darkly.

❖❖

# Dedicated to the Arts

Bodies donated to the arts  
have varied afterlives.  
Bodies dedicated to the arts  
have varied results.

Skeletal frames sit behind easels,  
their necromantic gazes fixed on their subjects;  
discorporated souls maneuver paintbrushes.  
They paint not what they see but what they wish to see.

The dead exist amongst the living.  
The living share space with the dead.  
Some paint to be immortal,  
some are immortal because they paint.  
Watercolor worlds fade over time  
but artistic universes are ever-expanding.





# Endless Wandering

Unbidden dreams  
suck unsuspecting  
souls into eternity.

They

fall down deep  
    into a breathless  
abyss, a black heaven.

Endlessly wandering  
paralytics who  
find no rest.

◀ ▶

# Dichotomy of Desires

In a parking lot where no one wants to park

there are grasses that want to grow.

Out of the fissures

in asphalt that don't want to remain whole.

Caution tape is strewn about with reckless abandon.





It no longer seeks to cordon anything off.

On the macadam a letter lies open

which no one wanted to keep (if they even read it).

The tree line continues to encroach.

Nature is present.

We continue to pave greenspace.

We are insistent.





# REFRACTIONS







# Refracted Fractures

Prone, I look on  
Across the water's horizon,  
Across the surface of the sky,  
Birds on the wing cry.

On my back  
Seeing blue and black  
Waterclouds refract skybranches.  
Lakesky fractures tree trunks.  
Birds in flight upside down  
Turn the world right side round.



Turned around,  
Skycanopy singed,  
Branchroots stretch,  
Surrealism real  
In nature's sketch.

The world's a snow globe  
I shake up and down.  
The atmosphere ripples,  
The air waves  
Water blows birdfish.

Rolling, on my retinae  
Remain images  
I can tumble down  
The oxygenwater,  
The hydrogenair,  
My mind's wings  
Let me fly there.





# Phenomena of Irregular Motion

At curtainrise the stars and the ocean separate.

Upon starrise the stage is illumined and

upon seaset the stage is laid bare.

God is a stagehand.

Enter ACTAEON, THE STAGHEADED MAN

stage right.

Behind him flow the planets

in their charted elliptical orbital

courses through galactic oceans.

All around him, draped over staircases

amidst groves of palm trees are a coterie

of onlooking women. He stands before a lake,

twin hounds lap from it



De

scend

ing

from

the wings

are cumulous lands with Helios

transporting disinterested gods to

watch what happens

below.

Actaeon continues crossing, stops and thumps his staff into the ground. His umbrella away, he stops as

A Portuguese man o' war enters

upstage center,

and another enters upstage left,

and another enters upstage right.

They all cross downstage

only the third exits downstage left.





Actaeon, The Stagheaded Man watches them admiringly, side-lit by a waning crescent moon peeking in from the wings.

He turns to face his audience and speaks:

ACTAEON, THE STAGHEADED MAN

As the ocean pushes up into the sky,  
as the heavens push down onto the sea  
and the Earth's massive weight thrusts  
out beyond the proscenium arch of the  
world's stage, I find that there can be  
great beauty in the decline, that as we  
descend we can transcend. If the cloud-  
bound pantheon can watch us in calm,  
if jellyfish can fall starward down,  
then we have no reason to frown  
as over the precipice we fall and drown.



Splashdown

as the

arch crashes down,

along with orbital bodies,

and all celestial Cnidaria too.

Waterspouts shoot up, The Stagheaded Man

plunges into the deep star-littered waters.

Longitudinal lines and theatrical columns crumble,

latitudinal lines, sickle-moons and roof beams tumble.

Antler-points, Latin prose and an umbrella canopy

slip into the blackening aqueous cold; all is uncertain.

CURTAIN





# Blood-Blooms

Blood came from:

the Big Bang; the moon;

the extinction-event comet—the *Chichxulub* impactor;

the saturated sanguine clouds soaked;

the oceans in blood during the Flood,

The red, bloodthirsty gods left behind

a chain of purple corpses.

North America's outermost swamplands

and South America's innermost bogs

have imbibed the lifeblood of native

and invader alike. The ground sown

with plasma, what's flowered has been

hungry for replenishment, for more

and we have been eager to fertilize it

to watch more blood-blooms flower.

◀ ▶

# Decomposing a Moment

Staring ahead,  
soaring back,  
gliding on

through ochre-streaked  
peach fuzz skies.  
Espy the watercolor lake.

Reflecting pool  
of time and thought  
shining up.





Reflecting skin  
of sin and memory  
throwing up,

thinking ahead,  
counting back,  
moving on.

Avian mantle, fly  
me through lilac-stem trees;  
decry a pastel mistake.

Skin pool  
of thought and sin-memory  
shining, throwing lies.

Periphery

Purple strands glowing like embers,  
Eventually lacing themselves like a thread into fallow strands,  
Dance in my eyes as we hold hands.

A half-moon sits on my bed.  
Stairs pinwheel through ocular ovals.  
The night is young and hopeful.

We're beings who float,  
Held in the air by the slightest suspension,  
Interlocked gazes; mounting tension.

To speak now a word or phrase  
Would be deadly and incite malaise.  
In the quiet we're profound,  
Hiding from those all around.





On the sand of some distant beach we creatures would like to be  
Minuscule and inhabiting the insides of shells,  
So that none can see.

There is light in this place as my betrothed's pug-nose brushed my  
cheek,

We creatures giggle and suddenly feel weak.

There is light only we can perceive.

It is dark

Is what we like all others to believe.

Racing contours become exposed

Now we are in the throes...

Later on, it glows all through the dark.

Both us creatures spark,

Winding down,

Our lips spread apart,

Communicating,

What we can't say with our hearts.

◀ ▶

# Mandibles

the chaotic chomping of the creatures  
eating their way invisibly through my ear;  
the percussive sounds of mandibles closing  
push back my ear drums, depress my brain,  
shunt my center of gravity, stifle my inner  
monologue, castigate my inner child,  
shorten my future, and dig my grave...





# The Disintegration of Inculcation

1.

Into the wallowdown  
geese guided me onward  
into my mind's Montana  
where Ghost Tooth can't  
Gnash me down to dust.

2.

Unable to calculate the  
half-life of death  
I struggle to give up  
and fight for all  
my nothingness.



3.

My self-portrait drawn  
with erasers on wind  
is seen by all, but none  
Will find me among the  
living dead in stasis.

4.

Out of the nightmare  
A bloat of hippopotami  
Lead me to the black  
sun of my mind where  
all is known but unsaid.





# Anadiplosis

## Enchained to a

### Prism

The ghastly rook upon me landed,  
landed men and ladies all watched,  
watched as sentence was carried out,  
out of the world I flew,  
flew into a raging fire,  
fire burned my condemned innocent body,  
body of water boiling,  
boiling all around, flaying skin,  
skin forsaken by martyred saints,  
saints forgive my just complaints.





Complaints unheard, unbrushed teeth,  
teeth gnashing and biting,  
biting at me, into me, around me,  
me and my big mouth,  
mouth of a molten river,  
river-wide demons cackle,  
cackle songs beckoning me to sing along,  
along I drift toward nothingness,  
nothingness lies, breaks the promise,  
promise of heaven long hoped for.  
For as long as I exist,  
exist in thought, word, and deeds, I—  
I hope my thoughts, words, and deeds have meaning,  
meaning I hope they made an impact,  
impact lasting longer than I could ever hope to live.





# The Municipal Circulatory System

The arteries of the city are  
constricted but not clogged  
by homes and cemeteries  
that bloom in living color.

The cemetery views give  
glimpses of *la vida de muertos*,  
all throughout the waning  
days of your dying life.

The heart of the city  
beats below the surface  
streets that circulate  
the local citizenry.



The town's hill heaves  
as subterranean lungs  
draw deep breaths and  
exhale thru bare trees.

The town's eyelids close  
setting the day's sun  
under darksome skies;  
dreams yearn to live.

In night's liminal state  
halfway between life and  
death, time heals scars  
before morning's rebirth.





# The Tree of Death

I asked a physicist to explain the existence of this tree that represented everything that was foreign to me. And he related theories that nearly made sense, about things I could not see: its blackness being explicable by quantum chromodynamics, a function of color charge. As incomprehensible as the words he used were, he laid at their feet a meaning that conveyed the possibilities of the impossible sight before my eyes.

“Within this particle garden where electrons and positrons whizz about willy-nilly they’re functioning irregularly, we can see and feel matter, antimatter, and dark matter all aswirl. We cannot prune those antiparticle branches or water those gluon roots, but we can admire this fermion fern.”





But a layman, with eyes  
untrained has no hopes of understanding  
the whirlwind he finds himself in, all I can see  
are souls going from hot-white, to ivory,  
to bone, to gray, to ash, to charcoal, to pitch,  
the gravitational pull pulls each deadening  
soul closer and closer to the tree,  
adding a new stanchion to the bark,  
contributing to the endless accretion of  
the Tree of Death.





# Inviting the Arbor

A rhinoceros  
was eating a leaf  
at the entrance to a deciduous forest  
frightening travelers, he led them  
inadvertently into another realm.

Under vast canopies, silence,  
stillness hypnotized visitors,  
setting them up.

Inward they walked  
seeing oaks alongside  
growths of bamboo  
white birches alongside  
baobabs & myriad other  
impossible pairings confound  
& terrify both those who know  
& those who don't.



Those who resist  
face painful ends  
when I entered the forest  
a sickness metastasized within me.  
Standing over the roots of a banyan tree,  
I spread my arms cruciformly,  
inviting the arbor within.

The low-hanging sphagnum moss  
sought out my veins  
& pricked them.  
Bark swallowed my face.  
Branches broke my bones.  
I was now a tree.  
Termites came marching,  
to eat the cancer out of me.  
I let them be.





# Time's Papering

The world is bordered  
by concentric squares  
with filigreed adornments.

The décor makes of the floor  
prison bars, from here I do not stray.

The optical illusion of a chute leading to  
a vortex—that once upon a time comforted me—  
just as I was soothed by solidifying  
the wall, taking an eraser to the window,  
now the wall only taunts me. Within the inset  
box where a rectangle is formed by small squares  
to emulate a bygone window, I created a dream-past  
to escape a nightmare-present and a decadent-future.

A little ivy unfurls itself from its pot  
reaching for floorboards, yearning for fresh air and a trellis.



Cancerous, a window-casing wants to metastasize  
from within its wallpapered, drywall confinement.  
Muntins seek to slash free the double-hung window

panes,

to shine light upon my darkened inner sanctum.

The walls are desirous of having artworks crucified upon  
them.

Even within the rectangular outline of a buried electrical outlet  
exists the threat of it digging itself out like the living dead  
to re-volt and shock me to death.

But instead, here I sit,  
artless in an art installation,  
feeling disconnected,  
unobserved; thus,  
invisible as  
the past  
and I seek  
to renovate  
stripping away time's papering.





# The Tentacular Crown

Mara agreed to sink  
her life to the ocean floor,  
but slowly things disintegrated;  
the deep dark surrounded her.

Her son, Prince Alesh, was bles't,  
*Selah!*  
But as he grew, he eschewed her,  
no longer needing a right hand.



Then came the change.

Upon sinking she'd become  
more amphibious, developing gills.  
Living in a shoggoth provided relief,  
but as the years passed, she became something  
other.





# Frozen Waves: A Mythos Rondeau

Saline crystals in frozen waves,  
Breathless ocean deeps he braves.  
Safe, surrounded by the diving bell,  
penetrating an aqueous hell,  
finds humans emerging from caves,

an ichthyic god's indentured slaves,  
a shoggoth aerating their future graves.  
The half-breed prince protecting his cartel  
in frozen waves.

An idol of Prince Alesh says "Behave!"  
to all dissidents he enslaves.  
Tragedy upon the diver befell,  
buried under Dagon's exclave  
in frozen waves.

◀ ▶

# Undulations

Desire grips me, into the waves I dive.

Youthful, ichthyic, he's a vision.

I swim, the waters drive.

Flesh on flesh, flesh on scales, enlive  
me, titillating, causing frisson.

Cupid's hair, a desirous stare.

Grinding into his pelvis, seeking division.

I quiver, he tingles, we pair.

Undulous brine, writhing divine, we  
dive.





# The Galline God

Ectoplasmic stanchions  
Support tenebrous walls  
Pulsations along the vapor corridor.  
Tributaries of the River Styx  
Brings us forth to the idol  
A roseate galline god.  
The bounty of its inverted pelvis  
Returns unwanted offerings  
To feeble, feal worshippers.  
The path to this blood-black idyll  
Is lined with broken hearts and dreams.

◀ ▶

# Mermaid Bloom and Lion-Rose

Though wounded, the lion rose,  
above the splayed, flying octopi,  
away from sectioned uteri, that  
rapacious gargoyles wanted to eat.

Leaving behind the mad-smiling Ferris  
wheel and the high-hovering hummingbird,  
tap-danced the lion across piano-key streets  
seeking to serve the mermaid, it killed.





The mermaid against axolotls battled;  
swam thru blackwater, fallen leaves;  
to a track, then escaped a runaway  
subway, like a butterfly finally freed.

And thru this nightmarish tapestry the  
lion cut a path, slicked with blood; the  
mermaid must now bloom like oleander  
and alongside it must grow a lion-rose.

◀ ▶

# The Sideways Door: A Tanka

Sideways door leads  
to a mysterious room  
were violence reigns  
blood starts flowing from  
every single pore.





# Benedict's Travels

## Through the

# Mirror-Eye

The Mirror-Eye shows Benedict a fantastical world  
but beneath its surface things seem familiar.

Malevolent spirits haunt the Mausoleum of Kings,  
all are tongue-tied in the Graveyard of Languages.

Wooly mammoths wander the Snowlands  
searching in vain for the tundra grasses they eat.

Benedict, in his barnstorming, comes upon a town called  
Nucnac, which feels like his world turned upside-down.



But nowhere within does it feel like his home and  
his feet are compelled to move him ever onward

into areas inhospitable to pedestrian travel  
such as the aptly named Intraversable Pass

and the Pit of Vageyres, full of embryonic angelic  
creatures whose piercing wails nearly deafen him.

Beyond a cliff's edge, Benedict comes to the Impossibly  
Tall Pole, scales down it, then climbs the Ascending Orchids,

which leaves him in the Valley of the Men  
of the Cycloptic Sloshing Eyes, within their large

singular sockets float those orbs spying all those  
who travel by, looking down, assessing threats.

Few are ever adjudged to be dangerous,  
most move on to the land of the gray-skinned.





Here the alive-again dead attack wayward sojourners  
like Benedict. Those with sufficient wherewithal

and fortitude make it through to the marvelous  
Land of Jindedwas, whose sights are so bedazzling,

no mortal has ever accurately recorded them,  
but what all agree upon is that it is minute,

and just beyond its borders on all sides  
are harrowing sights and horrific experiences.

Benedict's compass, like everyone else's, stops working here,  
so whether sights lie beyond Jindedwas's eastern or western  
boundary

is unknown, but opposite the Gray-Skinned can be  
found The Melting Woman, a phoenix-like oracle whose



state of decay never fully ends. Most who seek her wisdom find that all their questions futile before her vague replies.

Beyond her are The Cascading Shadows, which fall down a mountainside, day and night, causing disorientation to all.

Feet bloodied and blistered from countless strides, neck sore from craning up at the Cycloptic Men's Sloshing Eyes,

arms and legs sore from descending poles and scaling orchids, body bruised from dodging the alive-again, eyes bleary from

squinting against the brilliance of Jindedwas, mind reeling from The Melting Woman's dissolution and the shadows

turretting before him; Benedict came to The Vacant Throne of Tipeuaí. Sat down, half-dead and accidentally took on a

new burden that would challenge and tire him more than anything on his prior odyssey could've prepared him for.





# Blaise the B'ar

Blaise was a bear born without hind legs.

For this reason, he was called Blaise the B'ar.

This was a moniker that made sense to the Little 'Uns,  
dwarf-like creatures and his nearest neighbors.

To those passing through this land, such as myself, Benedict,  
and his young brother, Kimbo, it made not a lick of sense.

It was proof that mysteries abound no matter how  
plain or fantastical a world might appear to be.



Another example of that was that, missing hindquarters aside, Blaise seemed to be a perfectly functional and content bear (b'ar).

You may think this just anthropomorphism on my part, but it's not, as one other thing to note about Blaise is

that contrary to bears in our own world, whether possessing all their limbs or not, Blaise could speak and told me so himself.





# Prince Mud, The Stuck

Prince Mud,

*Der Wildes Kinde,*

The Childe Scribe,

was stuck,

he had fears—

fear of writing,

fear of writhing,

fear of not writing,

fear of unworthy prose.

To address one of those phobias

he wrote poetry; as a compromise.

If he was to have imposter syndrome

anyway, he felt he should have to earn it.

There's no worse feeling than thinking

you're not good enough to be an imposter.

# Through a Whirling Vortex

Transported by flying donkey was I,  
through a whirling vortex, past  
a bloating moon, over rising waters.  
That impregnated uterine satellite  
birthed birds, and as these lunar  
albatrosses fell into formation and  
flew off. My donkey and I followed  
casting our gliding shadows over fifty  
sea turtles below nesting on the beach.





Over the horizon imposing aeries tower.  
A sourceless blinking light emanates from them.  
A glowing keyhole, that might house sages who  
can guide me, a stranger in a strange land,  
along my way. My Pegasus-spawned ass  
flies me away coasting on albatross drafts.

As near as those peaks appear, reaching them  
takes hours. The airborne beasts I rely on know  
something I do not as we avoid perching in  
their lofts and instead swoop down.  
Famished now, we land in a village where  
I find vendors proffering a most unorthodox  
meal: French fries and cotton candy.  
Without knowing how this knowledge came to me  
I reach into my pocket where I know I'll find coin  
with which to pay for my vittles.



Then, in another happenstance quite  
unlike any in the world I know, the donkey brays  
telling me it's time to go. I've had my  
fill and climb aboard. The children of  
the vendors divvy up the leftovers. And we  
fly on. Myself, my ass, and the albatrosses  
who'd stopped to feed on fish carcasses.

We are still rather high up in this valley  
and swoop down through what's labeled,  
on a rickety sign, as The Descending Chute.  
The Chute is clearly meant to be flown  
through being so high above any scalable  
surfaces. The albatrosses dart ahead,  
my donkey and I are sucked as if through a wind tunnel.  
When we come into the open air again  
he has to angle his wings to arrest our momentum,  
then I feel his sturdy frame tilt forward.





We're descending and fast. I fear a crash  
landing but in a surprise to me, while  
the albatrosses do their usual chaotic rolls  
across the ground before bounding to their feet,  
my donkey spreads his wide wings  
and catches enough air to land us  
slowly aground. As he clomped his  
four hooves down, I found myself  
surrounded by seven robed figures with their  
snoods up. An imposing sight,  
they made Druids look cartoonish by comparison.  
Their snoods drooped down so far that  
when they flipped them up they instantly  
lightened. They looked like monks from my world.  
For a moment I was calmed. "We're here to prepare  
you for your journey to the next world."  
It was a short moment.  
My ass looked up and nodded  
his assent, then let me dismount.



Having no idea where I was  
or where I was going,  
I gave myself to these men.  
They laid me down and ritualistically  
cleansed me with water then oil.  
It's amazing how dirty you can get flying around.

When the ritual was done, I was clean but more confused than  
ever,  
like a newborn after the viscera of birth has been washed away.  
They indicated I should remount my donkey.  
He took wing and flew me up,  
up, and up toward the sun.  
It kept getting brighter,  
and brighter, and brighter.  
Finally, he reared back,  
my body went parallel to the earth below.  
The donkey's head and wings enveloped the sunlight.





All I saw were my feet and that sunlight.  
That light, that warm yellow glow,  
as I took it in it was impossible to look away  
in part because it only stung my eyes a moment.  
Then the intensity decreased, my eyes couldn't possibly  
adjust to the light that quickly. Nor could I blind myself so fast.  
No one can turn down the sun,  
yet it was less intense,  
less yellow.  
More white, eyes open wider. All white light.  
I see only feet. No donkey.  
I'm in a tube.  
White light all around me corona about my feet.



I start looking above, below,  
side to side.

“Stop moving, please,”

comes a voice echoing

up the chamber

from outside this world but I feel my senses, memory return.

*I'm in an MRI*, I tell myself.

“Sorry,” I say aloud.

Was I in a dumb dream?

I think I had to have been,

but if that's so...

Why am I so wet?

No! Not wet.

Oily!





# Skeleton Suit

Unbuttoning his skeleton suit, he reveals his life-source,  
his beating heart.

It could also be the source of his death, if it is stilled,  
his beating heart.

That pulse of lifeblood symbolizes an emotional need:  
his love.

That, unlike the rest of him, does not age or die,  
but continues.





# Dream-Images of *Ligeia*: An Erasure and Reassembly of Poe

## I.

I cannot, for my soul, remember

Ligeia.

Yet I believe that I met her,

Ligeia!

a recollection flashes

wan, misty-winged

ill-omened.





She came and departed as a shadow.  
Pervading purest ivory,  
luxurious smoothness of surface,  
serene and placid,  
breadth, softness and majesty,  
fullness and spirituality,

Ligeia.

most brilliant of black,  
vast latitude of ignorance.  
Incomprehensible anomalies of  
our endeavors to recall to memory  
something long forgotten.

## II.

Often upon the very verge of remembrance,  
without being able, in the end, to remember.  
In the survey of a rapidly-growing vine

Ligeia!

—in the contemplation of a moth, a butterfly,  
a chrysalis, a stream of running water.



I have felt it in the ocean; in the falling  
of a meteor. I have felt it in the glances  
of unusually aged people; two stars in heaven  
certain sounds from stringed instruments,  
some remote connection,  
gigantic volition,  
tumultuous vultures,  
miraculous expansion of eyes  
magical melody,  
the fierce energy  
rendered doubly  
effective by the wild words.

Through the chaotic  
world of metaphysical investigation  
—that delicious vista  
by slow degrees expanding  
before me,  
down whose long,  
gorgeous, untrodden path,





I might at length pass onward  
to the goal of a wisdom too  
divinely precious not to be forbidden!

### III.

I was but as a child groping  
benighted. The many mysteries  
of the transcendentalism, the radiant

lustre of lambent and golden effulgence

Ligeia!

—solace and reason were the uttermost  
convulsive writhings of death,  
shaken the external placidity  
overflowing of a heart  
I cannot bear to dilate.

Aloft with spasmodic movement  
exhausted with emotion,



crushed into dust-sorrow  
melancholy time-honored memories  
utter abandonment  
verdant decay  
child-like perversity of incipient madness  
in the gorgeous bedlam of the trammels of opium,  
absurdities I must not pause to detail.  
Mental alienation—  
as if endued with a serpent vitality,  
a continual succession of parti-colored fires.

**IV.**

The bore of simple monstrosities;  
The phantasmagoric effect of ruby-drops  
upon the sarcophagi.

Ligeia!

The turbulent violence of a flood  
from the bed of ebony  
My soul was awakened within me  
ghastly extremity of horror.





Dim, my reason wandered;  
the color fled, pulsation ceased;  
icy chilliness,  
livid hue,  
intense rigidity,  
the sunken outline,  
a tenant of the tomb.

Near the grey dawn,  
more irredeemable death;  
invisible foe; wild change  
helpless prey  
a whirl of violent emotions,  
with unwonted energy  
imparted their charnel character  
to the figure tottering,  
bewildered in a dream,  
a crowd of unutterable fancies  
—a tumult unappeasable.  
into the atmosphere of the chamber,  
blacker than raven wings.

◀ ▶

# The Prismatic Menagerie

## I.

“What’s your favorite animal?”; an adult-minded question  
subconsciously conditioning children to think in absolutes.  
All lives are a prismatic menagerie.

Children answer Absolute Questions  
differently based on phrasing,  
they have favorite animals  
and favorite dinosaurs.  
I know I did.





At two disparate ages  
I dreamt of being a paleontologist. So,  
my favorite animal and dinosaur were two  
two different things.

Animals often frequent a child's thoughts;  
their prismatic menageries.

In the earliest construction  
of my mindscape,  
I associated and linked disparate things.

Casting my adult mind into yesteryear,  
into bestial daydreams,  
tentacles groping and grasping at memories,  
soaking synaptic cobwebs,  
I open long-ignored chasms  
in various cortices.



## II.

In Portuguese the word  
for “the people,” as in “populace,” is *povo*;  
the word for “octopus” is *polvo*,  
almost homophonic;  
a distinct link between man  
and beast. I believe it was *polvo* (not *povo*)  
to which Mom attributed the smell  
emanating from Jamaica Bay  
as we drove along the Belt Parkway  
on a long-lost childhood day.  
The notion that octopus (*polvo*) would congregate  
and their stench could be sensed from so far off  
painted a landscape on permanent display  
in my mind’s gallery, fascinating me despite  
the likely inaccuracy of my memory.  
She probably said it smelled *like* octopus  
not that it *was*. But still... imagine if it was.





Children can succumb to awe and admiration  
more readily than adults. For example, learning the submarine  
in *Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*  
was called *The Nautilus*, after a swirling  
vortex of a creature scared me for a time.  
They were most direct link to ammonites  
fearsome denizens of prehistory's waterways,  
It was a healthy fear and respect, but it was there nonetheless.  
The same fear and respect I have for the T-Rex,  
my favorite dinosaur, though despite that fact  
I didn't want to meet it. Imagination was all I needed.

### III

The sperm whale at the American Museum  
of Natural History entranced me during  
my dozens of childhood visits,  
always hoping the squid would escape  
its predator's buccal vise,  
the frozen, oversized diorama



created a tableau whose conclusion  
was mine  
(anyone's)  
to construct, there were  
as many possible  
endings to the battle as tentacles  
on that cephalopod.

During the renaissance of my paleontological obsession  
I learned of scientific classification—like that sauropods are a  
clade  
of dinosaur. Another lifelong passion, movie-watching,  
taught me that squids are cephalopods.

Why those memories persist and others desist,  
I cannot say. Some imagery's found when sunlight shoots  
beneath the surface-waters of my consciousness, finding things:  
mica-coated images, thoughts and memories  
in long-darkened deeps, squid-memories  
and octopus-musings more often encountered alone than in shoals.





Writing can be as lonely and as anonymous as deepwater  
photography,

but it can create and capture lasting images, much as the 2005  
images of the giant squid

taken in the oceanic depths marked its solitary sighting in the wild  
and

immortalized the creature more than had otherwise been possible;  
allowing it to flourish in my prismatic menagerie,

for I am a part of it, and it is part of me, and both need nourishing.

The sharp corners and jagged edges of my manmade-prism,

though harsh and discordant, form one being much as eight  
tentacles

join to form a single cephalopod.

And through repeated attempts at shining light

down into the recesses of my cerebral trenches

I hope to rekindle my childish mind's fire;

watching its endless burn.









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