

5-6-2014

Found & Otherwise

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Found & Otherwise

by

Thomas J. Wiggins Jr.

A thesis submitted to the Department of English of The Collage at Brockport, State
University of New York, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

May 6, 2014

Found & Otherwise

by

Thomas J. Wiggins Jr.

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5/16/14

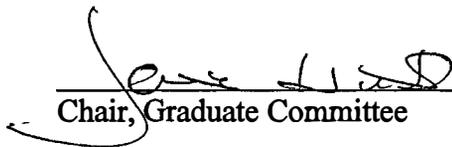
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Reader

5/16/14

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Chair, Graduate Committee

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Chair, Department of English

6/24/14

Date

I would like to thank Drs. Steve Fellner, Ralph Black, James Whorton, and Anne Panning for their invaluable guidance and patience.

I would also like to thank Ellen Wiggins, Garrett Fowler, and Grisell Buides for their support and encouragement.

Abstract

The fifteen poems in the first section of this collection are found poems inspired by various visual media, paintings, and sculptures. They were created from paint color names taken from swatch cards that were matched against each piece of inspiration. These poems are almost purely descriptive and in many instances the words within the poem give no hint as to their found source or the visual media, painting, or sculpture that inspired it. The critical introduction details the author's methodology for the construction of these found poems. It compares the author's understanding of the definition of Found Poetry against the established definition of the term presented in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. The introduction also examines the lyrical nature of the paint swatch poetry and its lack of narrative. The poems range from a single stanza to two pages in length. Sections two and three respectively include a short work of prose and three additional poems that are more traditional in their presentation.

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Introduction

My poem "Walls Around Me" was rejected in January 2014 by the *Found Poetry Review*, a print and online literary magazine devoted exclusively to Found Poetry. The email from the magazine gave no specific reason for the poem's rejection. Instead, the magazine provided a link to a webpage containing a list of print and online experimental genre reviews. They kindly suggested that I consider those publications for my work. I can only speculate as to why my poem was not accepted by the *Found Poetry Review*. My work may have been too "original" for publication since I used words and phrases in my piece as opposed to the more commonly used appropriated line or sentence. It's conceivable that the magazine felt my poem was too unconventional for their tastes because I used haiku in an untraditional way. It might be possible that the editors objected to the lack of determiners, conjunctions, and prepositions in the piece. It is also quite possible that the poem was rejected by the review as they had already met their submission quota or maybe the reader looking over my poem simply didn't like it.

Found Poetry is defined by the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* as poetry that "is created by taking words, phrases, and even more commonly, entire passages from other sources and reframing them as 'poetry' by altering the context, frame, and format in which the text appears" (Green et al. 503). The encyclopedia also states that the poetry is intertextual, composed from other texts as opposed to something that is outside of text. Additionally, Found Poetry is known as the poetry of appropriation.

I agree with most of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics'* definition of Found Poetry. There is no significant difference between this definition and my understanding of the term in relation to the appropriated nature of the source material. The work presented in the first section of this thesis is composed of words and phrases that were taken from a printed textual source, specifically paint names borrowed from Behr Premium Plus paint swatch cards. The paint names were reframed from their original context and format. There is no indication in the composed poetry that most of the words and phrases used in the work came from the swatch cards that were intended to serve another purpose. The greatest difference between the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics'* definition of Found Poetry and my own focuses upon the type of sources that are acceptable to use in terms of appropriation. The definition states that entire passages and whole texts including an entire copy of a newspaper have been borrowed to create this form of poetry. I would not utilize passages or entire texts as sources for my work. The more you borrow from a found source the greater the risk for plagiarism, accidental or otherwise. I also feel that the use of words and phrases allows the Found Poet more creative opportunities for masking the intertextuality of the found source thus giving the found word or phrase more independence to function exclusively within the context of the Found Poem itself.

The poems presented in section one of this thesis were crafted using a process that was originally created for a final project in my poetry workshop during the spring 2013 semester. Digital photographs of various public domain paintings and

sculptures were obtained via a visual arts website. Randomly selected areas of each image were enlarged until individual pixels of color were large enough to crop into three pixel width by three pixel height image samples. The pixel samples were then printed out on standard multipurpose printer paper. Each sample was then physically compared to Behr Premium Plus paint swatch cards. In cases where the pixel sample contained a single or fairly homogenous color, the paint name from the best matching color found among the swatch cards would become a word or phrase used in the poem. In cases where the pixel sample contained pixels of differing colors, the additional colors would also be matched yielding multiple words and phrases for the poem. This matching process continued until all pixel samples for a section were finished. The accumulated words and phrases were then organized into poetic lines residing in a single stanza. Found phrases were kept together and determiners, conjunctions, prepositions and punctuation were added to facilitate grammatical sense in the lines when appropriate. This process would repeat itself through all the randomly chosen sections until all of the lines and stanzas for the poem were created. A title for the poem was then selected usually bearing some reference to the painting or sculpture used in the poem's creation. To illustrate this process, the poem "Hydra Hercules" contains seventeen pixel samples yielding twenty-three words and phrases organized into thirteen lines and three stanzas. The title references the poem's image source, a 1921 painting by John Singer Sargent entitled *Hercules*.

The role played by the visual arts in the creation of the Found Poems in this thesis is considerable. It would be untruthful to state that I decided to pursue Found

Poetry first and then created my poems. Actually, the poetry was created before I discovered what it was and what it meant. The journey began with Vincent Van Gogh's *Flowering Garden*. I have been a longtime fan of Van Gogh's work and *Flowering Garden* in particular. My thoughts during the Spring 2013 semester had been focused on various poetry exercises and I began contemplating how I could craft a poem from a visual source. *Flowering Garden*, with its vivid colors and engaging composition, very quickly became the image in which I would find inspiration. I began to think about writing a piece that would capture the beauty of the painting literally. I do not remember the exact moment I conceived the idea of matching the colors in the painting against paint sample colors from the local big box home improvement store and using the names of the paint sample colors as the words in the poem. The idea struck me as somewhat original and thus, my thoughts turned to another artist whose originality I have long admired.

Marcel Duchamp deserves credit for influencing two aspects of my Found Poetry work. His famous and controversial submission of a porcelain urinal to the American Society of Independent Artists show in April 1917 under the name of Richard Mutt revolutionized the modern art world. Jonathan Jones of *The Guardian* credits Duchamp with introducing the idea "that any ordinary 'readymade' object can be chosen by the artist as a work of art" ("Reinventing the Wheel"). Duchamp's original thinking has always inspired me to think outside of the proverbial box, so his inspiration helped to steer my thoughts firmly towards the idea of using paint swatch cards as a found poetry source. I performed an extensive online search to discover if

any writer of Found Poetry had used paint names from paint swatch cards as words or phrases in a Found Poem. My search found nothing. I felt as if I had received Duchamp's blessing.

"Vincent's Flowering Garden" was the first poem I produced using the methodology described above under the guiding influences of my muses Vincent Van Gogh and Marcel Duchamp. The eighth stanza, a two-line couplet, illustrates the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics'* definition of Found Poetry while simultaneously demonstrating my desire to keep intertextuality to a minimum:

"Sandstone cove lilacs murmur / chocolate froth for road runners" (29-30). The stanza was assembled using four pixel samples matched to four colors each with a two word phrase. The words "lilac" and "runner" were pluralized, the preposition "for" was added as well as a period at the end of line thirty. There is little to no indication that the appropriated word pairs originated from paint color swatches, nor is there any indication that a Van Gogh painting served as the visual source for the stanza and poem.

Duchamp's second area of influence in regards to my found poetry is an extension of his novel idea concerning readymade art. Is there is an intellectual reason for an artist to choose a readymade object as an artistic subject beyond the freedom to do so? An editorial attributed to Duchamp in *The Blind Man* addressing the rejection of Richard Mutt's "Fountain" by the American Society of Independent Artists stated "He [Mutt] took an ordinary article of life, placed it so its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new

thought for that object” (Roche, Wood, and Duchamp 5). Duchamp is arguing that thought is synonymous for context. The artist has the intellectual ability to create an artistic context for any object which imparts to the object a meaning that is different from its everyday associations. Poetry inspired by a visual work of art is normally labeled ekphrastic and the poetry I created for this thesis can be labeled as such. However, my poetry for this thesis moves beyond that label as the work of art associated with each poem is also literally integrated into the fabric of the poem. Duchamp took a readymade porcelain urinal and turned it into a work of art by removing it from its everyday usage and assigning it the context of artistic subject. I take a readymade work of art, remove it from its context as art, and turn it into material pixels of color. Duchamp’s rationalization for the readymade has opened the door for me to use the entirety of the visual art world as raw material ready for conversion into paint swatch card Found Poetry.

“Vincent’s Flowering Garden” and the remaining fourteen poems that compose the first section of this thesis are organized along the lines of a public art museum walking tour. Inspiration for this design came primarily from *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Guide* as well as my own experiences wandering around the museum itself. The first poem would address admission to the museum. The poems that immediately followed would be based on the Mediterranean Antiquities and Ancient Egyptian period. The next series of poems would focus on European painting from Middle Ages to the Post-Impressionist period. This series would be interrupted by a “rest break.” The next series of poems would feature landscape and

still images. The museum gardens, sculpture and finally the gift shop would round out the series.

Inspiration for the specific paintings and sculptures chosen for conversion into the poems for this thesis also came from *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Guide* and from the companion publication for the exhibition *The Museum as Muse: Artist Reflect* which ran from March 14 to June 1, 1999 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. I decided to choose several well known artists including Bruegel the Elder, Monet, Cezanne, Seurat, Klee, Bernini, and Da Vinci in addition to Van Gogh as I felt choosing a well known artist would generate additional interest in the poetry by potential readers.

Two of the poems in the collection, “Five Dollar Invocation” and “Homage to R. Mutt,” are based on digital images taken by me specifically for the series. “Five Dollar Invocation” was composed from an image of a US five dollar bill and “Homage to R. Mutt” was crafted from an image of a urinal in Drake Memorial Library. The thirteen images taken from the website *Wikipaintings Visual Art Encyclopedia* were all listed as public domain images with no restrictions in terms of use. There are no contemporary images in the series as the copyright dates for most visual work currently covered extend back into the 1930’s.

The Found Poetry I have created embraces yet simultaneously challenges conventional lyric/narrative poetry. Joanie Mackowski is a poet whose lyric/narrative style and creative bold imagery engages my intellectual curiosity and aesthetic sensitivity. I have developed genuine appreciation for the poems presented in her

2010 book, *View From a Temporary Window*, and I believe that her work is an excellent choice in which to compare and contrast my poetry.

Mackowski offers several fine examples of a well-developed soundscape throughout her poetry. “1,080 Photographs of My Nose” is one of my favorite poems by her not only for its sound but also for the fact that it is a poem that derives itself from visual image, specifically a CT scan of Mackowski’s sinuses: “They slide me under the humming arch, / where a moon orbits my head, and they watch” (Mackowski 1-2). The first two lines of this poem utilize several poetic sound devices that are typical for Mackowski. Assonance is present in the first line with the similar “uh” vowel sound in the words “under” and “humming.” It appears again in the second line with the “o” sound in the word “moon” and the word “orbits.” Alliteration weaves its way through both lines with the “h” sound in “humming,” “where,” and “head.” Mackowski also uses an imperfect rhyme to join together the last syllables of each line with “arch” and “watch.”

The first stanza of my poem “Hydra Hercules” contains a soundscape that utilizes two of the three poetic devices Mackowski employs, assonance and alliteration: “Around wild porcini / & burnt almond Arabian / sands beneath a Florida / mango iced tea and toasted / wheat Sahara sun” (1-5). The “a” sound of the word “around” expresses itself again in the words “almond,” “Arabian,” “sands,” “Florida,” and “Sahara.” Additionally, three of those words are alliterated. Alliteration also appears with the words “sands,” “Sahara,” “sun,” “tea,” and “toasted.”

The frequency in which assonance and alliteration appear in my poem is significantly greater when compared to Mackowski's and this circumstance holds true for my Found Poetry in general. "Homage to R. Mutt" is the shortest piece in the collection and even with its minimal haiku form, lyricism makes an appearance with the presence of rhyming words in the last line. Many of the instances of alliteration in my work are directly traceable to the use of the device in the names of the paint colors created by Behr. The instances of assonance appear to be derived through the assembly of the found words and phrases into poetic lines. It is therefore very difficult to find an occurrence where the Found Poetry I have created challenges the notion of lyrical poetry. I would state that the source material used in this work renders impossible the possibility of creating a non-lyrical poem.

Many of the pieces Mackowski presents in *View From a Temporary Window* are narrative in nature, most notably the six poems presented under the title "Case Studies in Metamorphosis." Narrative poetry by definition includes characters, dramatic situations, and in the cases of epics, ballads, or lays a definite meter. Mackowski's poems are written in free-verse. Their narrative evolves from their use of character and plot as each of the poems tells the story of a person who undergoes a fantastical transformation.

Narrative is not a word that can be used to describe my Found Poetry. Character and plots are not to be found except for the appearance of a first person "I" and the implied idea that the "I" is engaged in mental reflection in my poem "Triptych." The inclusion of the "I" was not to create narrativity in this piece, but a

formal choice to simply divide the poem into three sections. The poem, like the others in the series, is purely descriptive. I would argue that the poems are more akin to pastoral poems in their focus on landscapes than to any other genre or mode. The third stanza of “Death of the Aboriginal Doe” is a good representation in this regard: “Bavarian cream cougar / above the brown ridge canyon trail / underneath the dusky violet Japanese maple” (5-7). The line describes a scene. The cougar is observed but it is without any type of personality or character traits that would place it within the realm of a character within a narrative poem. Additionally, there is no dramatic action. The cougar simply exists under a tree. There is nothing to indicate what the cougar may be doing under the tree, where it was before it arrived under the tree, or where it will go after it leaves the tree. The lack of dramatic action within the lines clearly places this piece outside the definition of narrative poetry.

The Found Poems I have created for this thesis are lyrical and non-narrative. They contain an active soundscape primarily composed of assonance and alliteration and they richly describe countless pastoral scenes that give little indication of their found source or their intertextuality with that source. These poems represent the most original work that I created during my studies in the graduate program. I consider them to be a work in progress as there still remain additional techniques and lenses through which the poems may continue to evolve. The poems were a joy to create and as with any creation, I am eager to see them mature into their own.

One

Five Dollar Invocation

In the distance,
a raging sea of foxgloves
& agave fronds across the lavender
sparkle of heron's hidden peak.
A prelude to the downpour of grey timber wolves
on the Silverado trail
& the solitude of skyline steel sparrows
beneath the Rocky Mountain sky.

Hieroglyphs for Isis

Cozy cottage of aspen aura
among wild honey desert willows;
a quiet refuge of brook trout puddles
beside the gentle doe creek bend.

A sweet breeze of rum spice
across the pebbled courtyard
of castle stone.

Inside, the suntan glow
of the brick dust stone hearth,
weathered sandstone like heirloom lace.

Between light mocha Amazon stones
& turtle dove artifacts,
toasted nutmeg hickory sticks
and sugarberry upon cracked wheat
stable hay.

Hydra Hercules

Around wild porcini
& burnt almond Arabian
sands beneath a Florida
mango iced tea and toasted
wheat Sahara sun.

Over earthtones of classic
taupe chocolate curl
and whimsical white
Caribbean coral rum spice.

Towards a puddle brown
thrush near Victorian
mauve & Gothic amethyst
slate pebbles.

Triptych

Before I ponder ,

Bison brown

& thyme green

grasshopper wings

in the mauve mist of a desert sunrise

Pepper spice Spanish

raisins & Boston brick

tree bark outside

Italian villas of melted chocolate ceramic glaze.

Now I ponder,

A heavenly song of a tiny fawn

of semi-sweet cinnamon cake

& mulling spice inside hazel woods

Athenian green deep aubergine,

the amber glow of glorious gold

and purplestone frosted

pomegranate rain drops.

After I ponder,

Ash white wild sage

& cool lava olivine

Raked leaves in the deep

space of a shaded spruce

Needle in a Monet Haystack

Whispering pine,
desert willow,
& sweet maple;
Distant thunder of the midnight dream

Dusty mountain
of violet shadows.
Lovable.

Wild sage,
winter oak,
& deep orchid;
A lazy Sunday delectable.

Cheerful whispers
of golden crickets
in fiddle leaf wine frost.

Calico rose,
Victorian gold,

& Peruvian violet;

Fond memory of a fading sunset.

Cinnamon coco squirrels

dark as night.

Mesmerized.

Vincent's Flowering Garden

Fudge truffles, Cheyenne rocks
& silver hills: the majestic mount
of cloudberries beneath deep smoke
signals. Violet shadows of Colorado
spring in tender twilight.

Blackberry mocha Mojave sunsets
follow tiny fawns among Victorian
mauve heirloom orchids & dried palms
of smoky topaz.

Strawberry rhubarb under Japanese
maples, wine frost amidst French pale
gold & light copper blue chaises.

Wild wisteria opposite agave fronds
round mulling spices & saltwater.

Beluga Amazon moss;
the indigo mood of the icy brook.

Subdued hue of toasted wheat harbor
mist versus earth tones of rum spice
mulled wine. Foxgloves in pastel violet
behind dark lilacs & new chestnuts.

Painted turtle myths of sea ridge
windjammers during enchanting ocean
cruises to the moss landing of brown
rabbit & chai spice.

Scotland isle ryegrass wheat
bread. And blackbean & dolphin fin
grape leaves before the hidden
peak of Bahia grass.

Sandstone cove lilacs murmur
chocolate froth for road runners.

Cornflower blue dark storm clouds
during heron's snow ballet ponder
naturally calm sterling gothic amethyst
in gulf stream hues.

Homage to R Mutt

ash white pensive sky

subtle touch distant thunder

no mellow yellow

Three Bathers

I

Pervian violets among vintage grapes.

Beneath the plum shade,

blackberry wine of deep aubergine,

deep garnet, and plum raisin

upon calico rose rose potpourri in

rosy tan.

II

Dark lilac wanderers,

sorcerers of fond memory.

Antique pearl mauve mist

above the indigo mood pink water.

III

Twilight chimes the midnight dream.

Sweet truffle Gypsy magic outside

the milk chocolate dark cavern.

rose garland inside a painted leather

mushroom basket under mystical

shade.

IV

Silverberry magic spell;
a country breeze from feather
grey.

V

Goldenrod tea, within a woven
basket of Windsor moss.
Fresh pine rainstorm through
the amethyst phlox wilderness.

What Cameron Frye Saw

A stone brown

centaur upon

the rosy tan

& purple essence

of copper mountain.

A magic spell of

blueberry buckle

& antique pearl

wild thistle.

Death of the Aboriginal Doe

Deep garnet phantom hues
before the light mocha & new chestnut
cliff rock.

It's only natural.

Bavarian cream cougar
above the brown ridge canyon trail
underneath the dusky violet Japanese maple.

It's only natural.

Deep aubergine smoky topaz
Pueblo sand & medium terracotta
southwest stone below the peanut butter
and burnt almond bitter briar.

The desert echoes of calm air,
and another cinnamon cocoa melted ice cream.

Wisteria on Distant Fuji

Mountain haze

(A winter garden of lilac mauve and twilight gray.)

of chocolate froth,

(Frostwork silver drops within a Midsummer dream.)

hazelnut cream,

(A fading sunset of lavender lace celery ice.)

& plum frost.

(Velvet sky beyond blue willows upon ryegrass.)

Be Still

Still, brown rabbit -

burnished mahogany

& deep aubergine.

Still a wooden swing -

sweet Georgia brown

English saddle... but still,

a Mayan red chocolate cupcake.

Ripe wheat -

glazed pecan

still peony pink.

Still black swan stealth jet.

Still chai latte

& new penny.

Still Mississippi mud

& classic cherry

The winter garden that's still

a still haunting melody.

Garden of the Muse

Luscious cherry cobbler,
ruby rings of California
poppy and a red hot
cinnamon cherry Chianti.
Sly fox nears the glowing
firelight, A volcanic blast
of sweet mandarin
orange peel.

New brick in summer
heat like ground nutmeg
& falling leaves in the
pumpkin patch
of Hawaiian passion.

Festive green
aqua waters after a forest
rain of blue luxury

Spiceberry song bird
above the sapphire sparkle

of the moonlit pool.

A quiet storm fireside

of Hawaiian cinders.

One dried leaf of tawny port

& black suede.

Medusa of the Rocks

Sorcerer of winsome rose?

Wildflower of heirloom lace?

Near the apricot lily, a bed

of roses autumn white

& plum swirl.

One nectarina.

semi sweet interlude.

Mona Lisa Poster

An autumn mist beyond the crocodile
and olive shadows of the sequoia grove
nears the yellow gold & Mayan red
of the Mojave sunset.

Copperleaf and toasted walnut
Arizona brown thrush in desert caravans
near the painted leather dusty mountains
& the French pale gold desert moss.

Chivalry copper smooth coffee
and semi sweet brandy butter
near the wild manzanila wine barrel.

Two

Bag of Chips

Soft morning light illuminated the dusty antique wood bookcase which stood below a Van Gogh reproduction of French olive trees acquired during a visit to a New York museum. The scent of Earl Grey tea flavored the air of the small home library where the author sat immersed in the white glow of his netbook and the story slowly taking form on its screen. Yesterday, as he was feeding his gang of noisy zebra finch companions, the author envisioned writing a collection of short stories modeled after a bag of potato chips. Each story would be a “chip” and a common “flavor” would bring unity to the whole. The author wanted the form of the stories to resemble the condition of the chips inside the bag. How he would present whole, cracked, curled, crumbled, and burnt "pieces" for consumption the author did not yet know.

The author saw himself as a progenitor of worlds, a literary demiurge of sorts, and his characters were his beloved children. He was pleased with his creative idea and as his fingers hovered above the keyboard of his netbook, he thought about which character he would bring forth into the world first. It seemed sensible to begin with the protagonist of the "whole" chip, but sensibility gave way to the notion of free will and the author simply began to craft. Six keystrokes later Joshua entered existence.

Joshua sat under his favorite tree on campus with a copy of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. He could barely keep his eyes open despite the bursts of bright sunshine dotting the crisp autumn afternoon. His fingers fondled the pages of the book as he tried to focus on the words.

“I hate this tedious shit,” he said to himself.

A large brown squirrel dived into a freshly raked pile of leaves near the sidewalk that lead from the parking lot to the Student Center behind him. Fall was Joshua's favorite season. The distinctive smell, the warm colors, and the crunch of the brown leaf carpet that covered the ground almost everywhere invigorated his heart and stimulated his mind. He closed the book and looked up at the sky above him. Fluffy clouds, remnants of the storm that passed through the night before, raced overhead. Joshua sighed. Fall was bliss. Herman Melville was not.

The author knew that Joshua's dislike of reading *Moby Dick* would cause those readers who enjoyed the story to question why this was so. He thought about crafting a more detailed explanation for this, but quickly vetoed the idea. Tediousness would be enough for now. Besides, it was more important that he begin to breathe life into the two new characters that appeared in the paragraphs he had just penned. The author decided to indulge in one more bite of Joshua before moving on to them.

Joshua closed his eyes. He dreamed of being a novel writer and he imagined himself living in a nice country home composing his bestsellers in the comfort of his cozy library. He would travel for readings, stay in nice hotels, and meet intriguing people who adored his work. Everyone would enjoy reading his essays, poems, short stories, and novels. Unlike Melville, his work would not induce an average undergraduate to sleep.

Little Leaf was relieved he was still in one piece despite the trauma of the previous evening. The weather forecast had predicted a strong storm with gusty

winds accompanying the passing of a front through the region. Little Leaf and his family had been through this many times before, but the strength of this storm had been underestimated by them. The winds had steadily increased as evening gave way to nighttime and the bright stars of the warm fall night disappeared behind a wall of clouds. Strong gusts began to shake the world around them. Suddenly, there was a loud crack and in the confusion that ensued, Little Leaf found himself separated from his family. He was scared and began to cry as the fierce storm continued to rage around him.

The author paused his typing before moving onto to his next creation. He needed a feminine name but could not immediately think of one he liked that matched the temperament of the character taking form in his mind. The scent of the Earl Grey tea was too much to resist and after taking a few sips of the steaming beverage, the author opened his internet browser and posted a message on Facebook: I am writing a story about a female squirrel and I can't think of a name. It's driving me nuts.

"Hey man!"

Joshua's gaze drifted slowly back to the voice that spoke. Before him stood a lanky figure dressed in orange sneakers, holey jeans, and an oversized black hoodie. It was Kyle.

"Hey."

"What you reading?"

Kyle sat down next to him and reached for the book Joshua held in his hand. Joshua shrugged and handed Melville to him.

“Ah,” said Kyle. “Good book don’t you think?”

Joshua smiled.

“The whale should die and the boat should sink by page three.”

Kyle laughed and gave the book back to Joshua.

“I’m done reading this crap,” Joshua said. It’s time to cast Melville out to sea.”

Joshua stood up, brushed a few leaf crumbs off the back of his jeans, and started walking towards the pile of leaves near the sidewalk. Kyle rolled to a standing position and began to follow him.

The author stopped typing again to check if anyone had responded to his post. He was delighted to find a few replies from close friends. Two suggested Hazel and one offered Pearl. Another advocated Foamy. The author chuckled. It was an appropriate name if the squirrel was rabid and crazy. The last suggestion piqued his interest however. An old high school buddy proposed Twitchy. He liked the sound of the word but it needed a slight tweaking. The author saw his squirrel as having an elegant and sophisticated demeanor so he decided to name her Ms. Twitchell.

Little Leaf could feel the damp coldness of the ground under his back while occasional showers of sunshine warmed his chest and face. The black night and storm cloud wall of the previous evening had been supplanted by day-lighted sky and large off-white puff-ball clouds. It was quiet except for the repetitive sound of something scraping the ground not far away. Anxiety began to build inside Little Leaf as it dawned on him what the sound was. Outside of fire and wind it could only

be one of the most dreaded creatures imaginable to someone like him. Little Leaf's pulse quickened as a dark shadow passed over his body.

Ms. Twitchell made her way down the old oak that sat next to the big red brick building the humans called the Student Center. She set off across the lawn to check on the walnuts she had buried near the sidewalk that lead from the building to one of the campus parking lots. She stopped occasionally to sniff the ground and to take visual cues from the area so she could accurately locate her hidden treasures. Her senses told her that two of her nuts were located near a pile of leaves that had been freshly raked only moments before. She began to examine the ground more closely as she neared the pile and to her disappointment she discovered that her nuts were concealed beneath it.

The dreadful sound disappeared quickly but not fast enough for Little Leaf. He had been caught up in a torrent of leaves, twigs, and sun-dried grass that swept over him just seconds after the dark shadow had passed over his small body. He came to rest atop the jumbled mess, dizzy and feeling grateful that this second trauma, following not that long after the first, had not been worse. Bright sunshine again warmed his face and he began to examine the area around him to see if he could find his home.

A knock on the library door interrupted the author. He stopped typing and rose up from his chair glancing briefly at the screen of his netbook as he did.

“Just a moment,” he said to the anonymous knock.

His story was reaching towards the climax. Everything was going to come together around the pile of freshly raked leaves. The author smiled as he walked over to the door, opened it, and left the room.

“So what’s the author going to do with us?” Little Leaf’s voice cracked. His nervousness was obvious.

“Everything is coming together at the leaf pile,” replied Joshua. “Who knows what climax the author has in store for us? We are mere puppets for his creative imagination.”

Joshua looked over at Kyle who simply nodded his head up and down in agreement. They both turned their heads to focus their eyes on Ms. Twitchell who was busy sniffing the ground around the pile looking for her nuts.

“Well Twitchy,” said Joshua. “What do you think the author is going to do with us?”

“Don’t give a bloody damn as long as I find my nuts,” replied the squirrel.

Little Leaf frowned.

“Given my luck in this story so far, I’ll probably end up being set on fire.”

The door to the library opened at that moment and the author reentered the room carrying a large vase of fresh cut roses.

“Looks like we’ll find out soon,” said Kyle.

The author brought the flowers over to the desk where he was working. The bottom of the vase collided with the cup of tea that was sitting next to the netbook.

The cup began to fall over and Earl Grey splashed over the keyboard and across the glowing white screen of the humming netbook.

“Son-of-a-bitch,” exclaimed the author.

The tea began to seep down between the keys and into the circuitry inside. The hard drive began to sputter as the liquid interfered with the operation of the device. A small wisp of smoke drifted out of a USB port and the glowing screen began to flicker.

The ground beneath Joshua and Kyle’s feet began to shake. They looked at each other and then gasped in horror as the world around them began to disintegrate in nothingness. The Student Center crumbled. Joshua’s favorite tree disappeared. A sharp cry was heard behind them. Turning around, they both witnessed Little Leaf burst into flame. Ms. Twitchell was frantically digging near the remains of the leaf pile.

“I’m not leaving without my nuts!”

She promptly imploded.

Joshua and Kyle continued to watch their world fade away. They knew they would be gone soon, their young lives cut short by the author’s love of murderous Earl Grey tea.

“Guess you won’t be reading any more Melville,” Kyle said to his friend.

“Yeah,” replied Joshua.

There would be no more reading of anything. His life and his dreams would simply fade away, accidentally crushed like a bag of chips caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The author watched his small netbook fade away despite his efforts to clean up the tea with some facial tissues he kept on the desk. Joshua, Kyle, Little Leaf, and Ms. Twitchell were gone. He could feel a tear beginning to form in his left eye.

“I should have saved them,” the author said aloud to himself.

He had neglected to save his work to his portable storage device before he left the library. If he had done so, his children would have survived this sad disaster. The author finished wiping off the netbook and then removed it from the desk setting it on a small table nearby. He then cleaned up the few small puddles of tea on the desk that remained, glancing repeatedly at the dead netbook as he went about his work.

“I should have saved them,” he said to himself again.

He sat down in a chair near the window once he finished his cleaning and took a small pad of paper and a pencil from a basket nearby. The author was a literary demiurge, a creator of worlds. He would simply recreate his children again. He smiled and began to write as he glanced once more at the dead netbook.

Soft morning light illuminated the dusty antique wood bookcase which stood below....

Three

Recycled Me

My beloved

mirror

is broken

The material

dream

of me long

crafted

in its abstract

glass

lies shattered

upon the floor.

The man

of informed

opinion

is to blame

for my

fragmentation.

I feel no anger

towards him,

only pity

for the
thoughts
that confine
his educated
mind.

He has done
the kindest
of deeds
to me. I am
dēmiourgos,
the craftsman.

From the shards
of my ruined
looking
glass,
I shall fashion
a new
reflection.

Karma

Awkwardly you follow the muddy river towards the Tappan Zee

zonked from shots of gin and rainbow sherbet vodka

belching the words to Happy Birthday,

yawning loudly as you pick a crusty kabob

crumb from your shirt pocket with a used Kleenex.

X's "Wild Thing" wails from a closed Delta Sonic

Detail Shop, thumping and bumping the waiting room window

where a fat calico cat sits cockeyed and pacified

eyeing Canada geese honking north in a double V

vanishing over the naked granite ridge a mile away. Some
fabulous evening this was. You remember the time you

unfairly accused your father of neglecting his duty. If

God was your witness you would never say that

to him again. Nice job asshole. Go take up sewing.

Harpoon your lips with the longest bodkins.

Sailmakers and milliners might work too. That which
is sewn together is mended from persistent slander.

Repressed false memories he hurls your way like ~~hi~~wi

Jello nailed to the dining room wall on cue.

Quick-wit was always his best weapon. Nicki Minaj

kicking “Pound the Alarm” from a passing jeep

pulls your swollen head back to the present. A chipmunk
licks a sunflower seed and you send a curious mosquito
on to its next life. You are trying hard not to feel
more than anger at your behavior but your inner friction
needles you and you resolve to somehow make it up to him.

Never again you say and this time you mean it. Spam

marinating in hot oil scents the air as three small children
overflow a rusty red wagon with empty soda cans and quarrel
loudly over who gets to drive and who gets to
pick up all the cans that will spill onto the sidewalk.

Kayakers drift downriver and you stop waking to light up.

Queasiness begins to twist your head like DJ

Jazzy Jeff spinning tunes, but unlike the Star Trek character “Q”
reality won’t let you wish it away. You burp a hint of broccoli.

I’m not going to make it home you say as your stomach swills sour.

Swearing for forgiveness, you dream of passing out on the couch.

Heaven decides to deny your plea. You stumble down concrete stairs
towards the short street that brings you home and find snoozing
gaggles of Canada geese between you and salvation. Shit.

Under the humming sound of fluorescent street lamps, you set off

for the far side of the flock invoking every god from Allah to Vishnu.

Violent spasms seize your gurgling innards and you begin to heave

everything you ate and drank . "Misery" by Maroon V

whizzes through your mind but your pain has only begun. You've roused

dozens of dreaming birds and now they're angry. Loud quacks spew
exclamations of revenge and wings begin the epic

chant of a full-feather beating. You go fetal and wait for the climax.

Your back is bruised black and your limbs turn numb.

Bills continually pinch your sore skin then stop. The geese fly away
zigzagging between the houses that line the river. You know it is instant karma
and you lie quiet in a pool of sick, bleeding and feeling like a total yutz.

Once upon a time,

three black birds, a fat squirrel and a old man lived under a big
forever-flowering magnolia tree.

One day, the tree was struck by a meteor and it burned down.

The three black birds took to the sky. The fat squirrel scurried off to find
a suitable tree for a nest. The old man didn't know what to do so he passed away.

Only a ladybug sitting on a dried leaf wedged between two blades
of grass noticed a magnolia sapling sprouting from its parent's nourishing ash.

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