

Five poems: Made of the breastbone of his muse, a poet's harp sing the Unamable (two pages); Four observatons regarding fly medicine; Field of skulls; Belfast keen; Cuckoo Jack

Made of the breastbone of his muse, a poet's harp sings the Unnamable

Sixteen years old and drunk on mead
when banshees forced his lips to the sacred stones,
Jack bruised his tongue and chipped his tooth
as he drank milk from breasts of his muse.

Forests and deserts and sweat of laborers
mingled with menstrual blood and shit in his mouth.
Jack went mad or became a poet, or both,
went riding boxcars through the spirit world.

Too young to utter G-d's name,
midway across the bridge to the Underworld,
Jack held John Berryman's jacket when he jumped
and broke his body on the rocks below.

When Sylvia in her London flat put her head in the oven,
Jack placed towels to keep gas from seeping
beneath the door of the children's room
where they were sleeping.

Jack heard the saddest poet who ever sang of love
spin the chamber and pull the trigger.
Seagulls cried Brautigan Brautigan and circled above
oceans of watermelon sugar.

Jack recited last rites for Anne Sexton,
and absolved her of bipolar-driven sins
when she closed the garage door
and started up her car within.

Jack breathed New York City smog
as Dylan Thomas inhaled his pneumonia.
Jack drank Glenlivet in the fog,
as Welshman's wet brain swelled within his cranium.

Jack raised Kerouac's last empty to the light
as he drowned in esophageal blood.
Saw the beat poet's ghost trapped, so shattered the glass
and released Kerouac's Dharma to the road.

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Jack sat beside Woody Guthrie's bed
in Creedmoor asylum, and gently squeezed his hand.
He exhaled his last breath . . .
poet's mind and body becoming this land.

Jack stood at the crossroads at midnight
learning blues poems from Robert Johnson.
When the devil showed up, shook hands all around,
then Old Nick and Robert went on down.

Jack sang Sundance songs as he mopped up brains
of Iron Range communist and friend Al Nurmi,
salvaged his manuscripts of poems and tall tales
from the public-assistance high-rise.

In the alley behind the Memphis blood bank
Jack's old mentor chants *The Idea of Ancestry* and recites toasts.
When he drank, he crapped his pants and stank.
Jack still tells lies to Etheridge Knight's ghost.

Jack learned poetry in the ancient tradition
of panhandling wine money on street corners
where he dies in the gutter a thousand times
until a miracle of maggots falls from his lips,

metamorphose before they touch the ground
into Lunar moths and honeybees.
Only the poet in the parallel universe,
speaking with G-d, tells the poem.

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Four Observations Regarding Fly Medicine

1. Sacred task of the fly in the Garden of Eden

At our Sundance on Rosebud Reservation, so many flies swarm in outhouses that if they organized, they could lift the outhouse right off the hole.

Next thing: Flies eat the dead. If there were no flies, road-kill would pile up. Flies clean all that up. And maggots of bluebottle flies in battlefield wounds eat putrid flesh, saving injured warriors from gangrene and amputation.

2. The fly teaches man humility

Look at the fly. What creature is more courageous? We are humans, top predator on planet earth. Everything takes off before us. Birds fly away, deer run, wolves slink out of sight. We are the apex predator of monster myths. Every living thing fears us except the fly.

The fly is in your face constantly. You swat but it ducks and weaves and comes back at you again. After more effort than it takes to hunt a deer or catch a fish or change one tire, you may kill one fly. But the fly is relentless and keeps coming and coming and finally you get so pissed off that you take the watermelon they've been swarming on and throw it into the woods. And guess what? Victory for the fly!

3. A young gangbanger doubting the intelligence of the fly

So you put up flypaper, and it's dangling from branches around the camp kitchen. Observe the fly, stuck in flypaper. You think its homeys would see the fly stuck there and stay away. *Look here*, says the fly, *I'm sitting in the county workhouse*. The other flies says *Cool* and now they're all on death row.

4. Flies expose the absurdity of war

There's a commander fly saying
'We must take that flypaper at all costs. CHARGE!'
The commander never leads the charge. He keeps saying
'See all our brave brother and sister flies stuck up there on the flypaper. You don't want them to have died in vain, do you? Give us enough flies and we will succeed. CHARGE!'

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Field of skulls

Schoolboy blows up the leopard frog with firecracker down its throat.
The next frog utters a small sound, a cry. Boy Buddha awakens too late
to snuff the fuse, guts across nose and chin.

This week a rogue soldier goes house to house in Kandahar, shoots two
old men, five women and nine children as they sleep. Today I read a poem
by a friend unable to turn off her lights at night for the last twenty-five years
after she was raped.

Sometimes I'm on the gallows deck waiting for the floor to drop. Familiar as
the racial memory of head lice, familiar as Agamemnon and Achilles brawling
over the right to rape and traffic Briseis.

How many ages before Troy and Kandahar does a soldier, gun held to his
head, go from hut to hut raping girls, bashing babies skulls against the cobbles,
executing boys over twelve, maybe letting some go with just the loss of an
arm?

Christ at 13, conscripted into the Roman army, a boy soldier who saves no one
then journeys home for decades before Magdalene will let him sleep with her.

For sixty years, a combat vet hallucinates gore upon his hands. The old man,
impotent to protect Anne Frank, imagines shooting boys wearing hoodies on
the corner.

My foster children, orphans of atrocity, have thus far survived the 7th Cavalry,
small-pox infected blankets, Hotchkiss machine-cannons mowing them down
at Wounded Knee. Perhaps they will survive.

Succeed or fail, Buddha at times laughs and weeps, imagines himself redeemed
as he makes himself useful in a world no longer his. Buddha's heart breaks
as he watches children take on monsters of their own history.

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Belfast keen

Along fire-bombed buildings, alone by the river,
beneath the lamps of the Belfast streets,
I want the best friend I ever had,
I want you more than my own flesh and blood.

Constantine wire shrouds Belfast at night,
holding my heart in its terrible grasp.
Soldiers with rifles check papers of lovers
along fire-bombed buildings down by the river.

Soldiers drive by in their armored lorries,
car-bombs wake me from my sleep in the night.
I cannot hold hands with you down by the river
nor feel your lips pressing mine in the rain.

You held me closer than sister or mother.
Sleet fills the clefts in the glistening pavement.
I loved you more than my own flesh and blood.
You hold my heart in a terrible grasp.

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Cuckoo Jack

A child I knew well lived with his wife in a tree.
They never fell, and lived on mud pie and tea.
But I became a sailor when the bhang was slipped into my ale,
kidnapped aboard *The Cuckoo* on a wonder voyage,

went seeking coital adventures with the Jinn King's daughters,
forgetting Jill straight away. Years later I was haunted
until the magi restored my memory to me. Sailor Jack am I,
of the alchemist school.

I stole from the devil a tinderbox that contained Faust's soul.
Faust warned me of the viper—when it sheds its skin by moonlight
then the Jinn King's daughters take mortal lovers,
and Billy Faust would know.

Twenty years went by, I returned home once
to visit my daddy as he lay in state,
recite the Bardos into my Da's ear
and pray he amend his drunkard's fate.

With a butcher knife he slaughtered snakes in the air.
He nearly took my life.
He had the shakes when I left that shack.
I took the belt he beat me with from its nail on the wall.

What became of Jill, says I? Jill, my spouse
when I was a child? Tresses of gold, we'd make mud pie,
together fetch water from the hill, name our children
who never would die, and dream of the house Jack built.

What became of Jill, says I who became a sailor?
What became of Jill, says I who went to sea?
What became of Jill who wept and swore to wait for me?
But it was I who never returned, nor shall I ever.

There's a tree in my heart where Jill and I dwell,
golden tresses, mud pie and tea, scolding parents
when they find us naked in the woods. Only you and I
were not alone when we were with each other,
for no one else knew us, not ever, not even now.