

Creating in Chaos

When my own boy
was seven

he went wandering around
inside my head

from the back seat
at freeway speed

he casually said
just how did your father die?

Of course that was exactly
what was on my mind

the ever-present longing
for the missing man

the source of who I am
taken from me

before I could complete
the construction of my character

leaving me forever
mystified by what it means

to be
a man, a dad

now reaching passing speed
as I negotiate the lane change

around the flatbed truck hauling
a monstrous rock crushing machine

bound for some unknown mine
where it will release

the glister and the gleam
from the veins of ore trapped in stone

solid memories
of some supernova explosion

creating in chaos
the atoms that would become the three of us

my father my son
and me.

Head in the Clouds

In my dreams I can fly without wings
after I take a running start

I jump, sort of heave
myself into the air

and I find I am floating
rising above buildings and the trees.

This effort demands
tremendous concentration

and force of will
to propel myself forward

until finally I must gently ease myself
down to the ground

where I pause to recover,
catch my breath

then run again and leap,
renew the thrill

inhale the wonder of the view,
and oh yes

there is music in the air with me
as an invisible orchestra

plays mystical melodies
scoring my dreams

Ghosts of War

Instead of the wounds of war
let it be an everlasting peace

we forge in the minefields
that still destroy our children's futures

in the fields where they play
the same games we played

hide and seek, tug of war
and echoes of each blast

crater the landscape of generations
scorched by the blaze of napalm

laid down from blue sky
as memory murmurs the names

of lost loved ones
whose last message is contained

in an unopened letter
covered in flame

its meaning rising in smoke,
now gone with the ghosts of war

who wail with the wisdom
of their own shame,

listen to the silence of bones
separated from bodies,

carry the dreams of so many
so far away from reality.

All for Profit.

Yes, I say it loud:
Those who make the money

on the massacres
shall be hunted down,

held to account
without mercy

as one by one,
you and I together

prepare the path to peace
in our new kingdom of dreams.

Opening Words: A Novel Idea (A Cento*)

You don't know about me
The boy with the fair hair

In my younger and more vulnerable years
Someone must have been telling lies

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces
A flattened and drying daffodil was dangling

It was a bright cold day in April
Early in the morning, late in the century

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day
A screaming comes across the sky

If you really want to hear about it
It's a dream, but then it isn't

At night I would lie in bed
In accordance with the law

You know how it is there
Everywhere there was somewhere

People know me here
It's on the edge of a canyon

Let me begin again
How did I find out

God was dead: to begin with
The honeysuckle was everywhere

If you ask me how I remember
I look at myself in the mirror

Somewhere beyond my line of sight
They are watching me

I can feel the heat closing in
On the human imagination

I don't know why I am writing this
Under the light of a wide-eyed moon

But, you may say,
It began as a mistake.

These things I may tell you,
They're out there.

It is a truth universally acknowledged,
All this happened, more or less.

*The cento is a poetic form dating back to the 3rd or 4th century C.E. in which the poet creates lines by using words from other authors, originally Homer or Virgil. For this poem, I devised just a few rules. A line must begin with the very first word of a novel and each word that follows in the line must be in the exact order it appears in the novel. All of the punctuation in the poem is also exactly as it appears in the novels. The line need not be the complete first sentence, though it may be. I chose not to use any line that contained a name. Composing the poem was not so simple as choosing some novels and jotting down the lines. Hundreds of novels had to be consulted in search of lines that would touch or grab me in some way without yet knowing what the final poem might convey. Then began the process of choosing and ordering the lines in some coherent manner, much as I would while employing any other poetic form. Following is a list of the novels and authors in the order they appear.

Novels & Authors Used for "Opening Words: A Novel Idea"

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain

Lord of the Flies, William Golding

The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald

The Trial, Franz Kafka

The Sound and the Fury, William Faulkner

Breath, Eyes, Memory, Edwidge Danticat

Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell

White Teeth, Zadie Smith

Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte

Gravity's Rainbow, Thomas Pynchon

The Catcher in the Rye, J.D. Salinger

There's a Man with a Gun Over There, R.M. Ryan

The Secret Life of Bees, Sue Monk Kidd

Invitation to a Beheading, Vladimir Nabokov

To Have and Have Not, Ernest Hemingway

The World Is Round, Gertrude Stein

A Gesture Life, Chang-rae Lee

Fra Keeler, Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous, Ocean Vuong

My Son's Story, Nadine Gordimer

Winter, Ali Smith

The Love Letter, Cathleen Schine

Robinson, Muriel Spark

If Beale Street Could Talk, James Baldwin

When the Thrill Is Gone, Walter Mosley

An Unsuitable Attachment, Barbara Pym

Naked Lunch, William Burroughs

The Deerslayer, James Fennimore Cooper

The Silent Patient, Alex Michaelides

Red Mountain, Boo Walker

A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf

Post Office, Charles Bukowski

East Wind: West Wind, Pearl S. Buck

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Ken Kesey

Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen

Slaughterhouse-Five, Kurt Vonnegut