

Phineas

2024

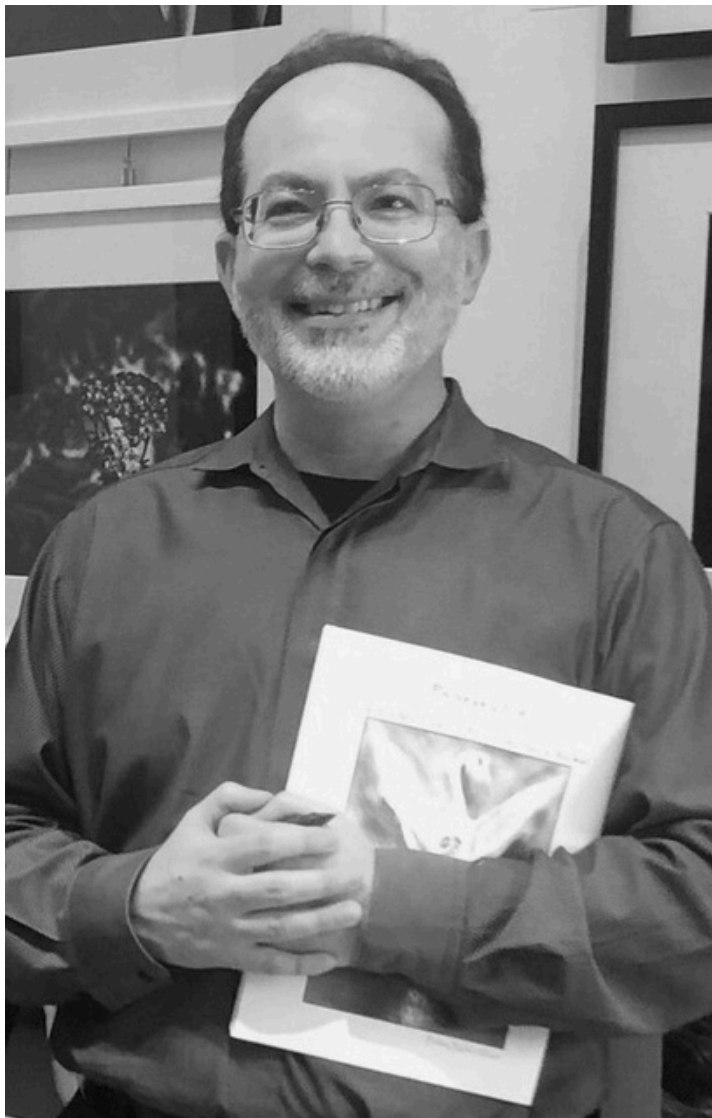
Commemorative Poetry Edition

A commemorative edition

Phineas has been under the direction of Professor Joel Lamore since 1996. Designed to showcase student talent in fiction, poetry, and artwork, Phineas quickly became a staple of the English Department. Professor Lamore encouraged students to submit their work, and he also supervised the production side of Phineas to help students gain experience in producing a literary magazine. Thanks to Professor Lamore, countless students were able to see their short stories, poems and drawings officially published, many for the first time.

We hope this commemorative edition of Phineas, which includes highlights of the winners from several years, honors not only the students Professor Lamore was so dedicated to, but honors Professor Lamore's legacy as well. His contributions to our department will have an impact for years to come.

-The English Department



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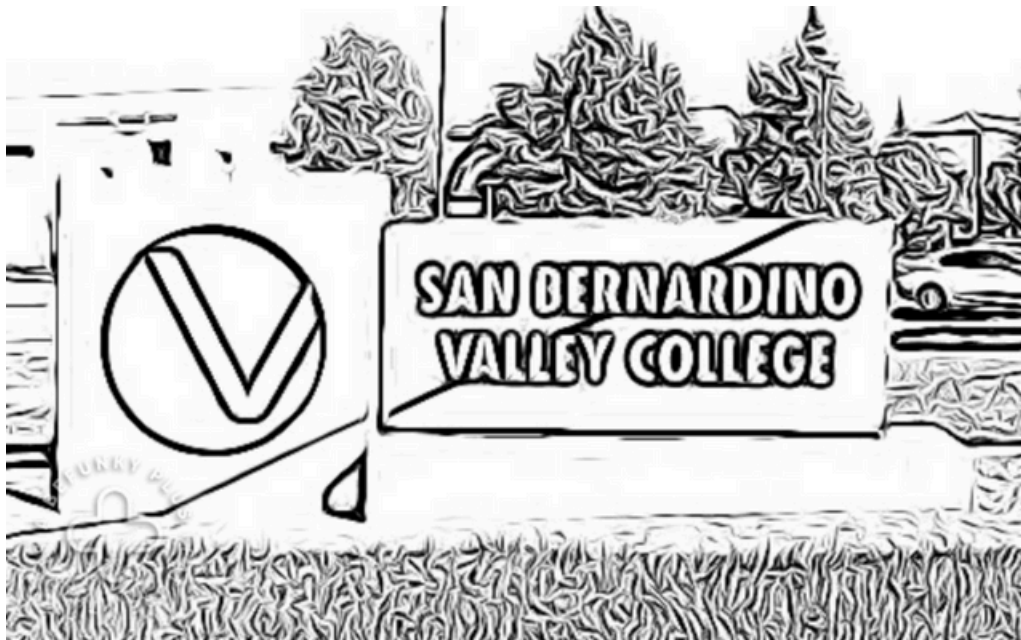
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POEMS BY PROF. LAMORE 04-09

A collection of his poems.

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No More Sex Than Mathematics

Art should have no more sex than mathematics.

— Maxime Du Camp

So art should have no more sex than mathematics? And how much sex is that? I have to wonder, despite my history with some quadratics.

It's sophistry that'd shame the pre-socratics, with prudish premise math can have no thunder, to say art should have no more sex than mathematics.

Because we don't wheeze like a room of asthmatics, it doesn't mean we're not heart struck by a stunner or intrigued by some elusive quadratics.

For sex is less about technique or acrobatics than love: more of wooing, less of plunder.

Yet, art should have no more sex than mathematics?

Yes, there are passions and blissful ecstasies, and tangy beauties in irrational numbers: plain delights in one plus one, seductions in quadratics.

Each sphere has its monks and mashers, fools and fanatics; there's desire in all our thoughts, or just under.

Art should have no less sex than mathematics.

It's rated x (and squared!) in those quadratics.

(First published in Tucumcari Review, January/February 2001)

Awakes My Heart

awakes my heart to heart's and eye's delight

— William Shakespeare, Sonnet 47

As if on her cue, the rack of my life breaks, and driven by the momentum her smiles impart, awakes.

She's cobalt brushstroke ballet as her greetings dart like haiku; her perfection of all the arts awakes my heart.

And all around the room attention starts to orbit her; the hush of silent sighs awakes my heart to hearts.

Then couples pair, each with a look that implies more than their words; taut hum through lines of sight awakes my heart to hearts and eyes.

In its cell, a cage of bone, that eremite of muscle stirs, and all I see aches, slakes, awakes my heart to heart's and eye's delight.

I Sip the Feral Buzz

or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Blow the Ivory Pop Stand
Did you get your PhD yet?
— Any Busybody

No. Dropped. Quit. Failed. It's what some want to hear.
I passed the quals, but never wrote my diss.
And never wanted to. Had a MoFo of Arts,
had nectar dripping to make poems from.
Why market someone else's soda pop
by writing 300 pages on how I think
it tastes, in theory? It's true I had the knack
with jargon, but I wasn't overdetermined.
I didn't deconstruct the ivory slats
so much as, well, Rapunzel my way out:
I hung out long enough to grow unseen,
then shimmied down my matted braids of time served.
Somewhen, far, far away (o, honeychild,
I sip the feral buzz of lyric love),
somewhere (yes, yes), a dissertation waits
unwritten, but, Erato sweet, not mine.

Unwilling, I Remember

the feel and tangy scent of rubber soles
of new school shoes, first day of class, and fall
of summer, many winters past in white
shirt uniform and corduroy blue slacks;
the virgin pencil not yet subjected to
the cruel blade of sharpener, but then
the smell of wood, blood crisp, as dermis peels
away in curls to bare the leaden point;
the first firm stroke of lead on fresh lined paper
to write my name – slow, neat – as I will never
achieve again this year, each letter etched
in round perfection, sacred penmanship;
awakening from trance to see the mark,
the stain upon the paper, pencil dulling,
flaking carbon dust, the new eraser
abrading, smudging the immaculate.

My First Thousand Years

A century, or fraction, I lived, and then
the borrowed atoms scattered. Flesh is mist
that holds a shape, or so observers think
as if some drowsy, sultry afternoon
finds them, with drooping lids, upon the grass
and looking up to find amusing figures
before the breezes stretch and mold new forms
or drift and thin them wide as all the blue.
A hundred later on, some might recall
my life, or artifacts I touched or made
will stand, though none remember me, to mark
that I once passed some way or had a thought.
And my three hundredth year will find that none
know me, though I might hope a hardy poem
or two survives; they will not speak of me,
for like a lover sent a letter, readers
will see themselves and not the writer's face.
As centuries uncoil, I will descend
through ever finer scales of indistinct.
And when my thousandth year begins, I will
approach the first step of eternity
that spirals down to the invisible
and purest nothingness, but never arrives.

Stations

A word completes our life, condemned by death:
the judgement is our second body, a weight
of eyes which buckles will and crushes breath.
And then we see upon love's face our fate
and strangers forced to make our weakness their own.
When sudden acts to comfort us berate
our curses, we stumble on the sullen stone
of pride. We rise, tell them they need not mourn
before we fall beneath the weight of bones.
Our secrets are revealed, each shame a thorn
before all eyes, impaled to all our roles,
everyone we've never been, and die unborn.
They take us down to place us in a hole
for someone else and drink our blood, consoled.

In The Beginning Was

Life itself is a quotation.

— Jorge Luis Borges

She spoke a stream of colored stones.

I slid and fit each edge and face

to form the globe, began to trace

“here be monsters” through unknowns.

We lived beside a turquoise lake

among the reeds of malachite,

jade willows; then fell the night,

obsidian, the air opaque.

In darkness, first, she spoke a fire,

then smoke; she spoke a river of tongues

to lick the flames, spoke eyes to hang

by billions in the sky to choir

the night with light; she spoke heart, lungs

to live amid the bones she sang.

Triskaidekaphilia

The numbers stir us, though we think them cold.

There's 7: magic, lucky, favorite

when there's a need to multiply something-fold.

The biblical usage accounts for it.

My sister likes 4; she's not sure why. And 3

is popular, for things, both good and bad,

come in 3's, or at least no one notes the contrary.

A friend feels 8, the age he lost his dad.

For me, 9: digits of its multiples,

like 18 or 63, add back to 9.

And there's thirteen: a fear for the irrational,

bad luck. But I love the shiver down the spine

when clocks strike thirteen, and sonnets go missing a line.

(First published in Neo-Victorian/Cochlea, Fall/Winter 2003)

Sijo: From Einstein's Bench

The Willows Inn, Palm Springs, California

The sun sets behind

granite San Jacintos;

Palm Springs shadows.

On a bench perched

in foothills, stilling

my thoughts,

I watch night spread.

Einstein sat, in the

30s, here. The two

constants: light

and time.

Distance

Down fiber-optic cables go my thoughts to her
who waits for love in bolts of light translated
back to words, but how can watts transmit the
signal strength of love tonight? The words I
say must make her understand; I strive with
words so insubstantial they may file along a
single glassy strand. I doubt that there is much
they can convey. We are reduced to voice and
ear, two parts out of a whole where thoughts
are still no more than signals; kisses, eyes and
beating hearts just an intricate kind of
semaphore. And so we learn the rules of our
existence: love is a matter of degrees of
distance.

(First published in Tucumcari Review, September 2000)

Rondel

She undressed in a foreign language,
caressed my ears with her strange tongue
in whispers sighed as if wrung reluctantly
from secret anguish. Her lines all flowed
like languid liquid and rolled with all
their rhythms sprung. She undressed in
a foreign language, caressed my ears with
her strange tongue.

I learned semantics' disadvantage: it's
sound on which all logic's hung; it's not
the meaning that is sung. What fails the
mind, the flesh will manage. She
undressed in a foreign language, caressed
my ears with her strange tongue.

(First published in The Formalist, 10.1 1999.)

Allocution

One of the most prominent mouthpieces of Iran's hard-line government, Kayhan, a daily newspaper that is frequently critical of moderate publications, accused [a poet] of being "a member of the CIA " whose work promotes "sexual ... and intellectual promiscuity...."

— *Los Angeles Times*, 8/7/07

Dear reader, I admit one charge: I am intellectually promiscuous.

I'll spend one night with some hot, nubile thought, the next with an older, more experienced. In fact, I'm usually juggling half a dozen, and I can't count how many I've had.

I've tried and savored thousands of positions. My tastes are simple, dear, I like them all: the slightest notion, a dewy sentiment, the flighty whim, and wildest guess, and yes, the plump belief, the self-absorbed conceit, a sweet surmise, the tedious suspicion, the tentative conjecture. I love to watch nymphet hypotheses and pop the quaint question that makes a real theory of them. I've picked them up in libraries, on streets,

at work, in discount stores and coffee shops, and sometimes even at a poetry reading.

I will admit to that, and to no more.
I have one wife; I am not with the CIA.

Frankensonnet (or, The Postmodern Poet)

By the flash of sparking wheels and lightning coil, the bones are laid, the sinews stretched and strung, and organs rigged; the flesh is stitched and hung.
A switch or two is thrown, dials set to broil.

But look: the background's cardboard, paint and foil; the gadgets don't connect; the cables flung around the floor writhe out to klieg lights slung in the rafters heating what smells like meat on the spoil.

Throw back the sheet to see the creature, and retch.
The madman's knitted bone to bone, and skin to patch of skin without a plan or sketch as if he'd never seen its living kin. And no amount of juice or eloquence will stir the butchered jumble to life or sense.

(First published in The Formalist, 2004, as a finalist in the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award competition)

Surface Schmaltz

for Kimberly

"That's the worst kind," Frank told Debbie, then sang "The Tender Trap" to show her how: up-tempo, drawing out a word, and punching up the "whap!" with cuckoo pow.

The lesson's clear: there's hard boiled attitude, cocked hats, the music, and several kinds of schmaltz. Ain't none will work unless you live it too; you've got to feel the three-four time to waltz.

Double-Cross

The gun's cold metal pressed against
the place where neck meets skull. "You'll
know it all, the whole damn deal." The
voice was cool and dull.

"The all or nothing, all at once." He
smelled of smoke and rain. "Just
one last piece of information
delivered to your brain."

I heard him lift a fifth of gin and
pour himself a jigger.
"A simple operation, yes." And
then he pulled the trigger.

(First published in The Formalist 10.2 1999)

Rondeau: Duel

"Let's play," he says, his angry blade
held up to glint before one eye. The
other twists a smile unafraid and
then as if to carve the sky, his knife
cuts air in quick charade: the
wounded air lets out a sigh. The sun
is high, there is no shade, and today
one of them must die.
"Let's play," he says.

Life's pleasures one will live to drink,
the other will become death's slave, but
now there is no time to think.
Between them is an open grave: the
first moves, edges to the brink.
"Let's play," he says.

Lady Death Answers

Mommy, why does everybody have a bomb?
— Prince, "1999"

"It's called a heart, so
hush, my child, and
mind your step."
And then she smiled.

"If you are still, you'll
hear the one inside of
you
count down, my dear."

Stopping by a Lamborghini on a Sunny Morning

(With apologies to Robert Frost)

Whose car this is I think I know;
the car was valet parked, and so
he will not see me lurking here, lost
in the glint of showroom glow.

My reflections warp, begin to jeer and
charge that I should change career;
there is scant cash in academe.
The car costs twice what I make a year!

I hover, caught in its slick gleam while
hot dreams blur by in a stream of
power, speed and sex — I blush,
awaken, and shake off the dream.

Inside it's lovely, dark and plush, but
the valet eyes me with distrust.
And I'm too poor to sate such lust, I'm
too damn poor to sate such lust.

Tidings

The situation has become quite confused, I would imagine,
or, on the other hand, another reason for the reason is the
climate of critical theory hanging over the eastern
seaboard. Whereas, the creation of soft concrete was hailed
appropriate, and no one bought it. Though life as a whole has
improved on the moon, there is no cause for
celebration or picnics in the earthlight. As a result, the
flags are now made inside out, and the poles rise hundreds
of feet above the cities. Despite this, people now have
seasons in the palms of their hands. Though no one can
forget, it is well to remember that things were not so
always. Since windows are now illegal, some rooms have
no roof, some no walls.
Train tickets are used as currency and no one travels. Without
explanation, the directory of syrups has become larger than
the phone book.

Intimations

I say, "oh, hi," perhaps "hello" and nod. "So how are you?" may ride the air between, and then "goodbye." And once you've gone, "oh God."

I say "that book," "this chair," or whisper "green". And words like "phone," a phrase "it's ten o'clock," and "glass" and "rose" prick through the screen.

I say "melodic structure," later "Bach," drop "rhyme," then "Shelley," "Keats," "fine silhouette". I'm spilling "truth" and "beauty" as I talk.

I say "and," "but," "for," "or," "nor," "so," and "yet"; use "a" or "the"; say "with," "to," "too," and "two"; use every letter of the alphabet.

For order's sake, with words oblique, and grammar, too, I say, "It's warm, the day," not "I" or "love" or "you".

Down the Hill's Dark Slope

Where do thoughts go when others begin to crowd?
Where do those exiles retire from the fight, those monarchs of a moment, once so proud, when from "king of the hill" they fall from sight?

Perhaps a few will mount campaigns once more to claim the peak, that moment's point of view: the mind's Napoleons from Elban shore whose reigns must always end at Waterloo.

And are those thoughts the same since first in mind?
Or politic impostors that ascend with masks of joys we hope again to find, and so avoid the battle's wrack and rend?

Where does everything forgotten go? Once down the hill's dark slope, we do not know.

Defibrillation

Alone, some nights, I listen to my heart, a weathered shutter rattled by the wind, the feeble clutch of fitful static starts the neons make, only themselves illumined. And I attend the tremor, sense the seep of rivulets unpulsed that ooze away, the shiver of a toad in winter sleep within sclerotic cell of frigid clay.

The flash seems felt before it dazzles eyes: a crescent of light along a breast, a cheek, the afterimage of her lips floats, dies. A second, stronger spark, then thunders speak, one rolling over next, caressing. Death convulsed, shudders light. I take a breath.

I'm Somewhat Fond of You

I see you there. I often do this time of day, that way you are, just kinda there. And I, a poet, think perhaps some rhyme of praise'd be fun, while you sit unaware. Your eyes and face and hair are pretty okay. That slouch, that shoulder shrug, has charm, I guess. The jeans, the graphic tee exude a cachet of decaf, of, of nothing-specialness.

At work, in a twelve-inch terra cotta pot, along a balcony wall, there's this plant thing: bamboo-fern-succulent basic whatnot. Someone said, "Dracaena," which has a nice ring, pretentious, though. And then one day it dawned: that it was missing, and I was somewhat fond.

You Only Have Yourself

The Japanese maple outside the window,
three leaves and one unraveling
hummingbird nest from naked,
rattles and whimpers, boughs
switching each other in the waft
of a waning Santa Ana; the flat tones
of a bamboo chime clunk a hymn
of hollowness.

For little Hector

Your eyes were two iron skilletts
warm with fire
they were two black spheres
of night sky
that held secrets
only children keep
in pockets full of marbles

and you were full of little boy ways
your pants fit the ground
when you stumbled
and your knees grew scars
like a bed of wild flowers

your careless, simple ways
like eating sopa in one spoonful
because you were eager
to build cardboard houses
and play tackle football
then fall into any grownups' arms
only because they were left open

But now I wish that I could
blanket your soul
from the coming winter
and I could press my heartbeat
to your heart
so that I could watch the secrets
unravel from your eyes.

— BRANDY BURROWS

One Memory

little brother
stole strawberries
from the corner market
stuffed them
into his pocket
until they yielded
their juice
down his leg
making red wine
in the shape
of Christmas trees

that night
father made him
return the carcasses
to the store owner
my brother's face
stained thick
with shame-filled tears
Trying
to explain
that it wasn't
because he was hungry
Or
because he
was unloved
it was not because
he didn't know better

there was no reason
in particular
just that they looked so red
among the green grapes
so ready
among unkind cantaloupe
so, so lonely

Bare Feet

what a clean child i was
two baths a day
microbes did not
penetrate my aura

what a clean child i was
except my feet

nobody knows the life of bare feet
how they investigate the earth
acquiring smells like

ancient ash
spit and chewing gum
placenta of grass

my mother like me
hated all shoes

and there are myths too
legends of her feet
that she can pick up an egg
with her toes
never cracking the shell

step on the rocks
shards of glass
never noticing

because the skin grew
tough there
layered alligatored

i was taught to walk
on the white painted lines
dividing spaces in
the thrifty's parking lot
feet wouldn't burn there

in stores where nickel candy flowed
floors were sticky

i memorized the many textures of asphalt
rocks that evolve every day

cleanliness is next to godliness

what a clean child i was
and my feet divine

— BRANDY BURROWS

A Sestina for Autumn Blues

This tired time turns on a new music.
Brassy shrubs, misty fog, trembling breeze,
tears in cobwebs, and expectation of the last miracle sing Autumn.
A blue call of melody celebrates pure beauty in a soft shadow
of sorrow: it soon will be over, as are many things under this sun...
Seductive beauty is in a spark of the last fragile light.

A distant sound of saxophone; so light
and pleasant (like the lost music
of my soul) rises crescendo till it touches the sun.
Blue notes--sweet and forgotten--breeze
slowly over me from an autumn-blue shadow.
If I were a musician, I would play Autumn...

If I were an artist, I would paint Autumn.
I would picture a forest, full of light
and dreams, swings on baby-blue memories in a shadow
of music.
Blue shades of endless happiness flow like a calm breeze
out of a bleached blue sun.

A cold beautiful feast forgotten under the lonely sun. ...
If I were a child, I would coddle Autumn.
Under the shirt, near my innocent heart, the cool breeze
would be warmer. We would sit close to each other with no light
and words, and listen to the silent music
of dancing shadow.

My scarlet glass fills up with a sticky thick shadow
of bleeding sun...
What the heck! ... This is my last music....
If I were a drunk, I would drink Autumn.
I would drink it till the very last drop, till this dizzy damn light
stirs up all my worries, and splashes them out to a boozier breeze.

The smell of last dreams and hopes spreads out in a cool breeze.
Bones of trees, shallow puddles with rotten leaves, and nude shadows
of former beauty--everything is in its late light.
Reality is in the cold air and rains down from the eyes of a chilling sun.
If I were a Wolf, I would sniff Autumn
and lick, like blood from a wound, Autumn's salted music.

I would chase a tail of autumn breeze to bite the sun;
I would howl to a soft shadow of Autumn
just for pleasure to light my lonely night with a long drawling call of this music.

The visit

I am the daughter
of the man
sent to the psychiatric ward
for six months,

a visitor on waiting room's doorstep
during Easter Sunday,
when I hand him
a blue-faced egg.

It stares at the clear plastic band
curled around his left wrist,
his name inserted as a jumbled, typewritten noose
standing above his watch
strangling time.

His fingers carry traces of faded paint
sucked into the recesses of unworked cuticles,
holding bits of his dark colored message
he brought home on canvas later that year

framed and hung in the living room
with broad brush strokes
madly swirled in evening's eerie brilliance
of double suns, moons or U.F.O.'s
hovering over an open corn field
he once had me run from.

My Summer Tale

We cut back the debris -
Branches of leafy oak that lie lifelessly stricken
From the prior week when lightening shrieked
Through my father's front yard.

I wore cotton seamed gloves
Tailored to fit the hands of men
Who did work I knew from my childhood and adolescence.
My gender mistaken as male
By field hands and neighbors,
Their eyes cutting my flat silhouette
I hoped would grow with years of impending days
Closing like curtains of fading blue silk
And drawn into my dreams;
Fashioning a gown blowing around my body
And carrying me down a monotonous maze
Of aisles of beans and corn I imagined ended in an altar.

All this during our strewn crews fifteen minute breaks,
When warm water contained within a single, silver canteen
Anointed words that never touched my lips.

My hoe reached the world for now,
With the simple wish of a wildflower,
Blooming as a natural weave
Through my cropped hair and a bit of cleavage
To catch the dew of its scent.

Midnight Mola

Selva makes me a mola
of whirling cotton stitches.
needled with her gnarled hands.
Brightly woven images,
of jungles deep, they speak
of steamy nights, they sing.

Serpents slithering sing
of midnight in the mola.
In cotton dialects, they speak
their swirling stitches,
light loomed images,
stream from Selva's hands.

Graceful sweeping sentient hands
make fabric songs to sing,
of tropical forest images,
it's midnight in the mola.
Embroidered tiny starry stitches,
from twinkling skies they speak,

of mola tales they speak.
Selva's weary hands
Are forcing through the stitches.
Woven jungle songs they sing,
the mysteries of the mola.
Steamy jungle images,

roaring animal images
learning how to speak
in the cotton tongue of the mola.
Selva's diligent hands,
creating chords to sing,
of many rows of stitches,

winding wonderful stitches,
of toothed and clawed wild images.
Midst coconut trees the wild things sing,
of starry nights they speak.
She ties the knots with painful hands
at midnight. In the mola

the images speak.
They sing of Selva's hands
and midnight in the mola.

*A "MOLA" IS TRADITIONAL CUNA INDIAN
FABRIC ART, FROM AN ISLAND OFF THE
COAST OF PANAMA. IT IS STITCHED
TOGETHER WITH PIECES OF BRIGHTLY
COLORED CLOTH, OFTEN DEPICTING BIRDS,
FLOWERS AND JUNGLE ANIMALS.*

— PAMELA JOHNSON

Halloween 1986

Come near my dears and enjoy a tale,
Or a shopping trip that made me wail,
'Twas a beauteous day quite eerie and clear.
Who'd think or know that doom lurked so near.
I sauntered up chipper three children in tow
Packed up with coupons double, triple plus dough.
The trip down to market with passengers pious,
Mocked illusions the store was suspiciously quiet.
I drew up my van to a parking spot near,
A grocery store that could drive me to tear.
Unwitting we headed, three children with me,
To a spot near the door as I crouched on one knee.
Every muscle was poised to race for a cart,
It's coupon Thursday! So off I did start.
Down the isles and freezers to sale galore,
O'er people that slowed me, run 'em over what gore!
I filled up my cart with three lovely dears,
Setting food in the cracks as they cried out in tears,
Give us candy and toys, get us crayons and books!
What I need was raisins, apple cider to cook.
My youngest threw jars of toddler's gruel,
At box-people clad monster and terrible ghoul.
The butcher was wearing a Dracula gig,
Teeth flashing, as hacking, while grinding up pig.
The bakery lady was chained to a cake!
Wearing robes of a beggar flinging arms that were fake.
A wicked old witch had a cauldron a bubbling
Cast some spells 'guised as coupons,
good for two or more something.
The frozen food man was dressed as bear,
Stacking cans in the isle that gave us a scare.
Each isle it worsened each step was a terror,
Witch, ghost, bear and goblin popping up here and there!
My children were screaming, my heart madly paced,
As we headed for checkout armed with spice and toothpaste!
Impromptu I fashioned a cross made in haste,
As the ghouls gather beaming making scarier face.
Back to Hades, you cashiers, donned mummy attire!
Back to darkness, I swear or this toothpaste I'll fire!
Making way toward the exit I dashed hardly thinking,
How close came a man made of garbage still a stinking.
So I grabbed my dear children and quick left the scene,
I found myself thinking what a pain, Halloween.

The Ultimate Track Star

I am the ultimate track runner
Running faster than the mind just to leave it behind
Able to keep on without breaks, without time
Trying hard not to face the horrible thoughts or events
Even now I smell their sweat, an unforgettable stench
Falling on my lips, saturated in my clothes
Gotta keep on going faster, otherwise, there it goes
Feeling nothing in my zone, but slaps of wind
Forgetting those sour visits from new friends
Though wondering if they ever will know
That they were killing me like nicotine and stunting my growth
No more childhood after these acts
Invisible scars design trees upon my back
Feeling the icy stare of spectators as they cheer for more
Thirsting for may all along with an encore
Managing to keep it hidden until my riddle is clean
Still, my future is contaminated and so are my dreams
No better days to follow, not sure of what is to come
And it all seems to end with the shot of the gun
Knowing that I am running out of places to run
Fields full of dirt still left to be spun
Aware of why undead creatures hate sunB
All of the others absorbing the fun
And I can never tell the extent of the prizes I have won
Faster and faster until the race is done
That is why I run, that is why I run

As a Bud Unfolds

One is amazed. By a water-Lily bud
Unfolding
Its petals are as sleek as silk
Unfolding
With each passing day Taking on a rich vibrant color
Unfolding
New dimensions One is amazed, at least at first glance,
Unfolding
It's petals like the pages of a poem,
Which in the beginning is as tight-closed?
As a tiny bud.
One is amazed yet to no surprise
Unfolding
And gradually expanding
Revealing what is clearly as the page unfolds,
The beauty that is fore told is rich inner self
Unfolding
As one reads it again and over again
Is the same as the petals falling to the ground
Again and over again.

Bible Babylon

Go on Deacon
Next to pastor
Sinister Minister
Sitting high
On holy perch
Looking down on lowly church
Congregation of bosoms
Parted like cleavage exposed

Bent over face down eyes closed
In stretch panty hose
Praying for deliverance from evil
While their minds are shipped off too
From the evil that men do
And the evil that she did
Labor pains having kids
Some dumb some blind
Some left behind

Some speak in tongues
With wicked lungs
Evil breath causing unrest
Among the Aires
Dissipated blank stares
No one's there
No one cares

Selfish prayers from vermin
No one's heard the sermon
Or read the word to be convicted
Holy Spirit evicted
On any given Sunday

Church home less recollection
After the collection
Catch the Holy Ghost revival again
Dance shout and fallout with friends
Between walls where hypocrite calls
To God go unanswered
Babble on

Deeper

I am from a childhood caught on tape
bathing, giggling, teething.
I am from a Stater Brother's backyard
combing a doll's hair on the kitchen floor.
I am from the yellow brick road
and Pee-Wee's word-of-the-day.
I am from sitting at the kitchen counter
after three hours and cold pea soup.
I am from singing and laughing,
from tickling and smiling.
I am from one to another.
I am from church;
God's palm in one hand, junior bible in the other.
I am from Christmas Eve afternoon: step-dad's family.
I am from Christmas Eve night: Mom's family.
I am from Christmas morning: Mom's house.
I am from Christmas afternoon: Daddy's house.
It's enough to break a child.
I am from watching children's hands
bloom red under an angry ruler.
It's enough to break a child.
I am from stories of overturned cars,
just one I cared for.
I am from stories told different ways
blaming different people.
It's enough to break a child.
I am from the loss of the only one I had.
It's enough to break anyone.
I am from salty pillowcases and troubled nights.
I am from wrong being right being wrong again.
I am from secrets, shhh, secrets.
It's enough to break a child.
I am from "I love you"
I am from "I love you" and I don't believe it anymore.
It's enough to break a child.
I am from anger around me where I place myself.
I am from nightmares of enjoyed rape
and awaken with the urge to empty my stomach in the toilet.
It's enough to break a child.
I am from somewhere you can't go
because I built it and stay there, in here.
It's enough to break a child.
I am from a mother who thinks she understands
because she found the secret.
I hate it.

What a Mess

The lamp slept soundly.
The clock read midnight,
And the shoe-boxes leapt off their shelf,
Urging skirts and dresses to join the fun.
Clothing spilled from the hamper
And begged the nearby books for a dance.
The dresser drawers opened,
And shirts and socks flew to freedom;
But some drawers closed on their fleeing inmates,
Keeping them from freedom by a sleeve.
There was a pile-up of scarves, toys,
And jewelry on the dresser,
While the mirror attempted to watch from behind.
Papers and folders threw themselves from the desk
Like people from a cliff,
Spilling on the floor to join the party.
The glass figures and candle-holders watched from
Behind their glass door,
While pants and pajamas
Crawled from their cupboards.
Shoes emerged from their boxes
And danced on the papers.
Yarn rolled from its basket.
The party continued till the clock screamed,
"It's five in the morning!"
Everything lay still on the floor.

Jamillah

Once I had a daughter whose eyes were brown like dust.
Her Father was away and it was just the two of us.
I was a special mother, I was a damn good wife.
But one day when I woke up, GOD had taken my daughter's life.
I held her for 10 hours crying. "NO... No... NO!"
Finally the coroners said, "You have to let her go."
My firstborn child, her little smile, the memories of my girl.
I could not understand why God had taken her from my world.
But as time went by, i slowly came to see
That she was just an angel GOD had chosen to come through me.
She had a special value, she had a special worth.
GOD brought her here so she could spend just 7 weeks on earth.
When I began to accept it and turned the pain to joy,
HE felt that I was ready, and HE blessed me with a boy.
Now I feel so blessed to have two kids, and I'm still young.
In Heaven I have a daughter, and on Earth I have a son.

Plié

Standing

In first position:

Toes turned out, heels

Touching in a perfect 180 degrees.

Bend — knees out in a strained, straight line.

Take care not to bring the heels from the floor. Press hard.

Don't show the effort. Hands arc, tracing filigree

Patterns of the melody. Back aligns:

There's no compromising

Of positions. Slide

Back to first.

Repeat.

THE DRESSMAKER

At her sewing table, my grandmother
Dipped her soft creased hands
Into the amber pool of light
Cupped jealously in the curve
Of the sewing machine's arm.
Her hands pressed and smoothed
The uneven pieces of fabric,
Heads and shafts of steel pins glittering.
— The machine purred —
she drew from the pieces, attached
with a cord
of string: measured, clipped, tied and tipped over,
and turned inside out.
And by some sleight of hand (or magic!),
A little girl's dress hung from her hands.

The Fog Walker

(A purely hypothetical death)

I dreamed:

This is how my father died.
He stopped, blameless as the new day,
to adjust a wayward traffic cone.

His orange vest, striped with white,
Enters my mind like a phantom,
And I can see him there, whole,
unbroken, smiling, a little sadly,
For all the missed birthdays
he will be present at only in this
Gray and silent corner of my mind —

I see him stop, right the cone
(it is the same orange as his vest,
a howling melancholy color,
meant to ward off death
and tip back his hat.

He turns back towards his orange truck,
takes his three precise steps
thinking, maybe, that he should
have brought another coat; the fog
is thick, and the air is chilly)

And I see his death
Come yawning out of the fog,
Silent on speeding tires.

I see the vapor ravel before the face
of its massive grille, its shining steel fenders
eager as teeth.

This beast, this dragon,
destroys my father's neat line of cones,
but hits him first — destroying the world.

Hold Your Breath

People drag their feet over cracked sidewalks
kick loose gravel and
Smoldering cigarettes.
Dilapidated houses cast long shadows over
Spangers, leathery skin left in the sun.
Make a living for 32s and dollar hamburgers
Sitting in front of a strip mall with boarded up windows.
The sky bleeds out into night.
They're so hood,
Caps pointed at one o'clock.
Don't hold hands with hoodrats but
Walk on the right side of the pavement
Like ducks, slow and deliberate.

The mall carousel's stationary
The elevators are empty
The Parking lot is empty
Like wandering eyes of a beggar's gaze.
White vans screaming to
Sterile homes somewhere far away from the
City blocks with cracks and graffs, a sign:
"Beautify the City Project" tagged up.

Tires whisper over damp streets.
Water surges from sewers untapped.
A scream dies in the distance.
One by one, the street lights go out.
Sirens rise, the city's account bottoms out.
Neighbors still roll blunts and hit bumps off
Cracked mirrors, the music still shakes the walls.
They're occupying the stoop for the 15 percent
Because the first is still a ways off.
Hold your breath, Margret.
I'm rolling up the windows.
Locking the doors.

My Father Can't Factor Polynomials

My father can't factor polynomials.

He passes my desk to kiss my hair
And ask what I'm working on.

I try to explain:
The excitement, the quiet pleasure
At having the numbers line up
And snap into place
Like the sharp click-click-click
Of the last puzzle pieces.

He smiles at my energy,
But his eyes remain lost.
He tells me he is not smart like me.
He says he is sorry.

My father never finished school,
Began at twelve years old as a mechanic
To feed his siblings and his single mother.

My father has sacrificed all the math in the world for us,
For me, for his family,
And I think it is something he should never apologize for.
My father says he is not a smart man,
But I believe he is a great one.

My father knows that life is short
And takes us out to enjoy it.
My father knows that life is hard,
And so he wakes up every day and works.

His hands, bigger and scarred now
With broken fingernails and burn marks,
But still the same boy, happily working for his family.

My father hasn't the slightest clue what GE reqs are,
Or what credits and GPAs mean, or how to factor Polynomials.
He'll always be one of the wisest people I've known.

THE RICH GIRL'S LAMENT (SHANGHAI, 1926)*

Once, I walked through manicured gardens
Whose flowered hedges seemed to show me the way.
Green light filtered down from above,
Through rose arbors, and rustling leaves,
And dappled pond water green and gold.
Koi with diaphanous fins moved
Like orange and white shadows
Under the water's filmy tranquil surface.
I sat on the stone benches at the water's tidy edge,
Dreaming. In the spring, aboard pleasure boats,
I and my friends drank sweet wine with bowed red lips,
Our mouths leaving imprints
As delicate as our hearts upon our glasses.
Music wept for us as we swayed, tipsy,
Against men, like butterflies in a dying wind.

Now, my hands are so rough
That to touch silk would be to snag it.
I have picked the bones
From so many pieces of carp, I cannot bear
To look at koi. Now my eyes dim with shame
When I hear young women's laughter.
I wash their dresses, so like those I once owned —
The cold water shielding the silk from my roughened hands,
The cold shielding the touch of the silk from me.

Local Royalty

In the dazed light of dawn,
The usually splattered green mountains
Now glow a muted purple.
Majestic only in the way,
Solemn statues of kings are.

Here they are royal,
Shooting up and sloping down.
Jagged crowns borne with pride
The heavy weight of clouds keeping
Those mighty shoulders straight.

And although this man-made road
Cuts through the mountains
With all of its human arrogance.
It feels as if we are the ones,
Dodging around in deference.

10 Something in the Morning

Cigarette in one hand bus pass in the other
Phone in one hand bus pass in the other
Child's hand in one hand bus pass in the other
Tattered shoes, worn out clothes, bags under eyes
Location of their mind unknown,
destination unknown One bus stop,
two bus stops, three bus stops
Long bus ride to their destination
Blue, black, gray cars pass by
Women with multiple children, distress in their eyes
Only enough money for her to ride the bus
Conversations of playing insane to make a few bucks
Questions of does this bus go to court house and to the welfare office
Bus driver enraged, "Really fine then take the next bus"
Different man, different day, but same intentions
Blue bus, blue seated interior, quiet, but yet so loud
Empty conversations
"Stop! That was my stop! Do you even know how to drive?"
Silence echoes in the bus
Eyes begin to wander, not just from left to right, but every angle in sight
Every passenger, same bus, different story, different struggle
Man with filthy clothes with a bag filled with cans
Mumbles of people saying, "He smells."
They move away from him
He sits content in his seat
No one bothers to smile at him
I sit contently in my seat
The smell begins to get to me, but I stay
Do you ever think about how the man with the bag of cans feels?
Every person on the bus has a story to tell, but will you be there to listen?
They all have a story
What's yours?

the apocalypse came quietly in the night

if you, like many, were awake to see
the eschaton emmanetized at 1:47 AM
it was witnessed by
the night janitor
the cashier selling formula to
the young father, cradling a fat baby
(silent, hungry, awake)
and the 911 operator
who took the cables out of her phone
when she knew what had finally happened

we watched dawn come over what had been
Skyscrapers. giant's bones by morning
fog so deep you felt yourself
Dampen
baptized
in that cold-mist sun-blue sun-hid morn

was anyone dead? some. the ones
hiding guns in cellars
didn't come out after
the clambering horror
and the din of angels.
nor the shareholders
or the President, actually.

our currency became
survival skills like
manners, knit sweaters
a little hello to the neighbor
who sleeps on your porch hammock now
and makes good pie
from the wild mulberry trees
that aren't fenced in anymore

Nightmare on an Endless Loop

Whose is that hat lying sideways on the ground?
What about the bloody shoe with nothing else around?
The ominous absence of the crowds that usually roam,
Stepping over puddles and things that once were owned.

Such disparity to hear the ringing cell phones stuck on repeat,
A worried friend? A distraught mother?
Someone praying it's not their brother!
The shock must be retreating
Because quickly the fear is superseding

Painful memories begin to emerge,
It's all coming back in a violent surge
Distorted screams, running, running, I'm down, come back
Don't leave me here all alone to react

I can hear the loud popping approaching from behind
My time has come, I don't want to die, My Adrenaline is at an all-time high
Someone pulls me up, but I can't hear what he's saying
Is it safe here? we hide in fear, hoping he's not too near

Sirens wailing, bodies shaking, people moaning, bodies aching
Armed officers rush over, my adrenaline is dissolving
This night has changed us in no way worth describing.
Help me brain, forget this day, make me numb to this pain

Yellow tape all around, empty slugs all over the ground
Bodies draped in fresh white linen, now crimson red-soaked sheets
Underneath a thick like syrup, seeping toward my feet.
What seems to be over is just the beginning of a horrid dream
A hellish nightmare on an endless loop
Whose is that hat lying sideways on the ground?

The Old Guitarist

(Pablo Picasso)

His fingers, tender and broken
From ballads and malaguenas
His thinning white hair resting
Over a soft and delicate scalp
His strings are worn out
From all those years
Playing his heart's song
His heart still bursting with music
All he can do is sit there, and pluck each string
His head, bowing in prayer
Remembering
Back to the days when he played the local markets
Where he was offered free drinks in the cantinas
In exchange for his sweet music
How he prayed to live in those days again
That was a lifetime ago
He waits quietly now awaiting the day
The day where God will take him and allow
Him to play for the rest of his days
Forever and ever Amen

Orchestra

Of brass, silver, copper and tin
Catgut, reeds, horse hair and rosin
Ivory, bone, hardwood and hides
Cork, felt and glue that's dried
Violin, viola, the cello is mellow
Double bass, a barrel chested fellow
Flute and piccolo, a frily trill
Clarinet, saxophone, not too shrill
Bassoon croons, a musical goat
Bleating down its long-necked throat
Timpani, snare, woodblock and cymbal
Percussive eclectic tones assemble.
Aylophone, a wooden piano struck.
Harp, where heavenly rain is plucked
Trumpets trumpet a brassy bray
The oboe intones a concert A
The assembly tunes, a concerted fray
The program begins, the orchestra plays.

A Global Pandemic Shut it Down

Because of the pandemic, there was no magazine in 2021.

Knick-Knack

Widow shiny black, bulbous back
Bug thrashing wildly, widow's snack
One is predator, one is prey
God's in the details, let us pray

Soldiers sweat and bleed, scream and shout
Bible or Koran, all devout
Shootings, dogs of war, check and mate
God is horrible, god is great

Red man standing on land we rob
Brown man is a threat to our job
Black man hanging limp from a tree
God bless America, we're free

Purge the voter rolls, tax the polls
Two IDs required to show
Gerrymandering to this day
God forbid not getting our way

Knee to the neck, shot in the back
Vigilante shotgun attack
A no knock warrant, wrong address
God damn drug dealers, what a mess

Protesters choking on tear gas
Young woman wearing a gas mask
The blue line slowly moves toward her
God approves of law and order

Homeless are hungry, live outside
Dirty bodies we can't abide
Mash your potatoes, stab your steak
God is taking a union break

Smooth the whipping post, stone the whore
God's not listening anymore
Genuflect and cross yourself, your
God is a knick-knack on a shelf.

I'm fine not breathing

The sky is purple, dark and bright
Tiny specks, the stars, adding to the light
Of glittering full moon shining down
On us lying on the grass now
If we stay still I swear we can feel it
A floating feeling, like zero gravity
Every time were together it comes
Along with a rapid pulse beating my chest
And the air taken from my lungs
I have no defense, no oxygen, no suit
To help me in this space of me and you
This feeling doesn't scare me

PHINEAS

In loving memory of Joel Dominic Lamore, a cherished poet, professor, friend to many whose words and actions illuminated our lives with profound depth and beauty. His legacy will forever resonate within the soul of this magazine.

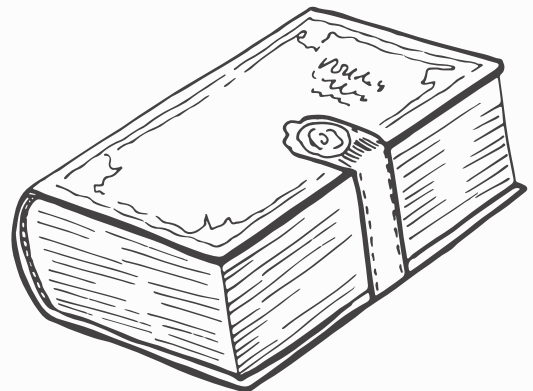
Thank you Joel.

PHINEAS

In loving memory of Joel Dominic Lamore, a cherished poet whose words illuminated our pages with profound depth and beauty. His legacy will forever resonate within the soul of this magazine and inspire generations of poets to come. Though he may have departed from this earthly realm, his spirit remains eternally intertwined with the essence of poetry, guiding us with each verse we pen.

In loving memory of Joel Dominic Lamore, a cherished poet, professor, friend to many whose words and actions illuminated our lives with profound depth and beauty. His legacy will forever resonate within the soul of this magazine.

Thank you Joel.



Phineas

2024

Commemorative Poetry Edition