

Spring 5-22-2020

## Dictation from the Moon

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### Recommended Citation

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Dictation from the Moon

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Creative Writing  
Poetry

by

Leland Monson

B.A. University of Nevada – Las Vegas, 2017

May, 2020

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## Abstract

Much of my poetry concerns twelve-step recovery, brushes with suicide, and other related incidents. With more poetry coming out, there was more recovery and other influences. Some manifested themselves through imitation. Sometimes they came through form. Sometimes inspiration manifested through language. Some came from goodness knows where. An accumulation of all of it, each poem follows one or more of these guiding principles.

Key Words: recovery, suicide, homelessness, New York school, Greek myth, New Orleans

## Preface

In his poem “what makes,” Charles Bukowski’s persona is asked what a makes a writer, “‘well,’ I said, ‘it’s simple, it’s either you / get it down on paper or you jump off a / bridge’” (lines 12-14). Until about seven years ago, I was not getting “it down on paper,” so I had at one point “jump[ed] off a bridge.” With my recovery, poetry came out. With more poetry coming out, there was more recovery. Along with the larger-than-life Mr. Bukowski came other influences. Some manifested themselves through imitation. Sometimes they came through form. Sometimes inspiration manifested through language. Some came from goodness knows where. An accumulation of all of it, each poem follows one or more of these guiding principles.

Much of my poetry concerns twelve-step recovery, brushes with suicide, and other related incidents. “Prelude to a Forty-seven Page Epilogue,” the first poem in the manuscript, sums up at least twenty-six years of my life. The last full stanza ends on an upbeat note of what current events are like. My experiences of homelessness inform “Slumming & Snipes” and “Poetry, Georgia.” A poet is nothing without something to write about. Near the end of the collection, “Pope Jan” concerns how twelve-step recovery led me back to school. The last poem, “finish here,” concerns my suicide attempt. At least for the moment, suicide is something I can apply my dark humor to, as I do in “Duplex for Bob Kaufman.”

While introducing me at a reading, one of my classmates tried to convince the crowd my favorite poet is Frank O’Hara. Admittedly, I do like Frank. I imitate his work with “The Day the Queen Died” and “The Busiest Seven/Eleven in the World,” both New York Schoolish. However, I like others even more. While not strictly an imitation, “Poetry, Georgia” is heavily influenced by Deepstep Come Shining, by C.D Wright, from which, among other things, I stole the idea of a mythical town name. I had content but not form for that poem until I read Wright’s

book. Though somewhat tangential, “A Survey of Modern & Postmodern Poets, & How They Figure to A Contemporary One” relates here in that I compare my potential writing lifespan to other poets'. Granted, it is more homage, albeit strange. “Duplex for Bob Kaufman” is an adaptation of the nonce duplex form invented by Jericho Brown, which draws inspiration from the sonnet, among other forms. Brown is also the inspiration for the more conventional imitation “Pope Jan” was inspired by one of Jericho Brown's poems in his first book, *Please*. I suppose Homer (and Alexander Pope, for his translation) earn a nod for supplying the story for “Andromache.” “Elegy for Spicer (Imaginary)” is inspired by Jack Spicer’s own *Imaginary Elegies* right down to the epistle-like ending.

Bashō is the sole impetus for the two haibun herein. The older one, “Slumming & Snipes,” was, like “Poetry, Georgia,” a marriage of content with form; once I discovered the form, I knew where to put the words. For “The Narrow Highway to the Deep South,” the material and form came together nearly at the same time.

There are a number of syllabic poems, starting with “Andromache.” I adapted it from The Iliad, and the syllabic form is 9/8/5/7 for each quatrain. Other syllabics include “The Map to Golgonooza,” an adaptation of a prose paragraph, and homage to William Blake, which follows the pattern 7/7/5/2/4/5; “Composed while Reading Pleasures of the Damned” which includes five-syllable lines; and “Elegy for Spicer” (4/8/4/5(3/2)).

My imitation of Clifton’s “begin here,” “finish here,” started as a syllable-by-syllable copy and soon turned into the slightly shorter poem it is now. After cutting two lines from a draft, I made the phrasal couplets conform to a syllable count: five, six, seven, and seven, yet another regular nonce syllabic form. Then, while looking at the fourteen-line poem, I immediately thought, “sonnet.” Then, I noticed an accidental rhyme scheme (abbcdbefbgcbbb),

largely due to a repeated word (a single letter rhyme at the “b,” and the “c” as well). I had invented a nonce form—eureka!

A number of the poems defy the notion of having ancestors. Though “Andromache” is obviously derived from Greek epic, some of the given circumstances of it are invented by me. Similarly, “Abandon All Hope of Having a Better Past” is in syllabic form (five each), but is an allegorical, biographic riff on existence. The poems “Bugs of Southeastern Louisiana” and “Breakthrough” are just hyper-local meditations on my current environment. I am a fan of Bob Kaufman, and it would hardly be right if, while here in the town where he was born, I did not explore some aspect of him. So, for two hours or so, I walked where he had walked, writing “RUE MIRO 2019,” the longest poem of my relatively brief, interrupted career. It turned out to be not only a dialogue with the poet, titled after his poem, but also other parts of his life and work inform the content.

I consider eight poems, more than a third of the poems here, to be elegies, most of them syllabic. I sit down, get a repeating pattern, and go. It is like dictation, for now I will blame the moon. Also, the elegy “Slim & None” was inspired by things my father has said over the years, culled from my sister’s and my memory. I have been told it offers “no consolation,” but will constantly remind me of the depths I can go, as do the others. “It’s simple,” says Hank Chinaski, Bukowski’s persona from paragraph one. So, here I am, getting it down on paper.

## **Prelude to a Forty-seven Act Epilogue**

The fog was rising once upon a time  
That's just the weather in Elysium  
I don't remember any prior lives  
No one can go & do a check for me  
But Gallifreyans maybe Doctor Brown  
I do not know the math that makes that work  
I cannot see beyond the dark of night  
I'm now approachable & still alive

My head is full of stuff that did not work  
I don't come up with good ideas in snug  
Refrigerator wombs, benign & safe  
Before I saw a tyrant held me chained  
I only needed you to exile me  
I saw a dream tiptoe across your brow  
Capricious god, astrologer of doom  
I'd rather take dictation from the Moon

Anonymous, a concrete bed I made  
Nowhere to go, remember how it was  
Remember how it feels to sleep outside  
All night behind a store I slept with crows  
A suicide of words I made a plan  
As once upon a time my mental health  
Made me a hermitage of one I had  
Not plotted any murders save my own

The hearse disperses once upon a time  
An intervention from the universe  
Ensured my kidneys would not stop for death  
The only way to win is not to play  
I only want to write, engage the Mage  
It's all intentional attention paid  
For what remains let all our fears depart  
I'm now approachable & still alive

That's just the weather in Elysium



## Slim & None

If ever something were impossible  
or at least unlikely  
(the parameters varied),  
Dad would make it clear  
that there were  
*exactly two chances:*  
*slim & none.*

*Is that right?*  
was Dad's go to phrase for anything  
with a tinge of obviousness to it,  
specifically  
the blatantly obvious.  
The joke became  
"Mr. Monson, you have two seconds to live."  
"Is  
that..."

A common extended family activity was nickel ante poker  
for Dad a useless hand was  
*paregoric*  
"a pair o' nothing."

he shone  
he was sunny  
no shade

Dad diagnosed me as "Hyper-kinetic" before any doctor.  
I was prone to having *a connoption do-dangle*  
*and fall right in the middle of it.*  
Still do, now & then.  
Dad was a noted proponent of corporal punishment  
prior to that medical conclusion.  
The beatings ceased after it.

Dad had been known to expect compliance in the  
*extremely immediate future*  
a nine-syllable stand-in for  
"now."

The closest Dad ever came to an F-bomb was  
*lord love a duck.*  
His only profanity (typically "shit") came  
after some damage he had done to himself  
or during fights with my sister.

he shone  
he was sunny  
no shade

My sister is now his guardian.  
He has been diagnosed with some form of dementia,  
his mind gone all  
*paregoric.*

Now, all he has is the  
*extremely immediate future.*  
*LORD LOVE A DUCK!*

he shone  
he was sunny  
no shade

So, what are the chances he recalls he has a son?  
*exactly two.*

## Poetry, Georgia

Reported to be West of Rome, Georgia.  
Not much West of Rome that ain't Alabama.  
No doubt guarded by an angel with a flaming sword.

The light of that flame keeps me up at night.

I slept just north of Paradise, Nevada, on a concrete slab shared with a black widow.  
'Charlotte' was there first, so I let her stay  
or she let me stay.  
That's the serenity to accept things.

*Put a little love in your heart...*  
"If you have five bucks, I will let you suck me"  
*Shake the snake awake*  
Now he knows an old poker player with no teeth.

I lived south of Paradise for nine years,  
with a different widow.  
It was my geas to keep her in the manner to which she had become accustomed.

*Down the drain, like a goldfish at its funeral,  
Like a coyote hanging in mid-air, holding a HELP sign,  
Like Gollum, hunting for the one snipe,  
They adore the acquisition of ventilation.*

That's poetry, Georgia, sweet Charlotte.  
No angel guarding Paradise.

When your roommate has eight legs and crawls on you at three AM, you evict her.  
It's only then that you have the nerve to do it.  
That's the courage to change things.

Down the drain.

I lived eighteen years with that other widow who happened to *be* black.  
Then she threw me out for the second time.  
I stayed gone.  
That's a little wisdom to know the difference.

Now, I live *in* Paradise with megaresorts.

Where the light of the flame  
doesn't keep me awake.

## Slumming & Snipes

Warmed by two summers  
A concrete slab my mattress  
I made do with that

I found a place near my twelve-step meeting room, an electrical box on a concrete base with just enough room for me to lay down. A few times, someone beat me to my spot, so I lay nearby. On one such occasion, I woke to find the squatter gone, so I reclaimed my spot.

I slept undaunted  
A secure space to my left  
Bag, shoes, and backpack

Learned early to sleep shirtless, later to sleep shoeless. It was trial and error. I prefer sleeping on my right side, but sleeping on my back worked best, no pressure on my shoulder. I toyed with configurations of pillows, positions, and linens. Eventually, I had to put something under me, pants usually, because of my back sweating. Every few days, I would change before bed; it was secluded enough at night for privacy.

By some friendly flies  
And the sun of summer, bright  
Awakened at six

Because of the sun, I was unable to sleep much past seven. Plus, I had no desire to be rousted or cited for vagrancy or trespassing. The cops and the people who had the store I slept behind knew I was there. I was left alone. Only once stolen from, my Tootsie Roll stash.

I set the alarm on one of my cell phones, to be up around seven. One morning, I let it snooze, and some lady on the sidewalk lambasted me to shut it off. Couldn't she just keep walking? I lay on. Eventually, she left.

Three hours to kill  
Raiding the local ash trays  
For quality snipes

Snipes: cigarette butts that still have some meat on them. Many places to look. Days, I would hit the plaza I slept at, Fashion Show and Boulevard Malls, and the casinos. The casinos are serious. You learn to be sly.

Shower every week  
Whether I need it or not  
Laundry every two

I smelled usually, as I have been informed. I would go to the day shelter at St. Vincent's shelter, usually Saturday, to shower. They supply a returnable towel, shave cream, a razor, soap, and shampoo. People in my program helped with cash, for laundry, occasionally a bus pass. I had

to walk most of the time, the trip to the homeless corridor the longest four miles away in the summer.

There was a gentleman's club just west of the strip that had coupons for free drinks. I would sojourn there some wee hours on my cleaner days. I sucked up some A/C, scored some snipes, and enjoyed the company. A couple of the ladies even took me on the tour of the VIP skyboxes once. It was nice to have the social interaction, even under false pretenses.

On the Western side

Found another box and slab

My 'vacation' home

The experience lingers. I still put off showers, still indulge in the occasional snipe, and still hoard things, like napkins. Back in the day they were eyeglass cleaners, general hand and face wipers, emergency toilet paper. When I cannot sleep on the futon my friend gave me, I sleep on the floor. Some urge overwhelms me, to be uncomfortable, to remind myself.

## **Abandon All Hope of Having a Better Past**

The steps black & brown  
solid rough-hewn worn  
from wind & rain &  
feet thump when mounting

There is one landing  
about halfway up  
Stairs' apex hidden  
by green foliage

The bluff at this spot  
just yards from the sea  
is too sheer to climb  
any other way

The rails creak & sway  
bearing any weight  
Foregoing the rails  
seems the safer way

Safer still to stay  
on the beach or go  
the long way around  
might take thirty years

## Pope Jan

You'd remember  
us sitting in the same club  
at the same twelve-step meeting,  
you in the corner chair  
controlling the climate,  
well, the thermostat,  
responding to another relapse with,  
no doubt, "whatever,"  
your shortened version  
of the third great prayer:  
*Thy will be done.*

You'd remember  
a trio of first anniversaries  
separated by relapses.

Finally, you'd  
lifeguard  
pulling me up,  
before I went down  
a third time.  
Kept me out of the deep end,  
until my sponsor taught me how to swim.

Now, I have five years,  
pushing six,  
sick with recovery.  
We should sing  
"happy birthday" to me  
anyway, at the same time:  
you in your afterlife,  
me with my only life, here.

Though it hurt something awful,  
days before you left us – me –  
I made you laugh twice.  
I consider that  
a job well done.

## The Busiest Seven/Eleven in the United States

*In memory of Carl*

I.

My first human contact of the day, after struggles with age, gravity, breakfast, among other things before class, was Seven/Eleven for coffee

There would be “Joe”  
really Carl

but his name tag said, “Joe” & he looked like one, as I suppose any guy looks more like a Joe than a Carl

Anyway, Carl would sell me a coffee for the refill price in my refill mug only after I swore it’s a refill by raising my right hand,

Another clerk, Tony, repeated “A refill, I swear” back to me  
Carl though was the one that started the whole raising the right hand thing.  
Carl (and Tony) charged me for my refills every time, while Swing shift, not so much

More about Swings, shortly

One guy, close cut grey hair  
name escapes me, married to a lady on Swings (don’t recall her name either)  
Would wave me through for free

Anyone who gives you free coffee should have a name  
I will work on that

& that one lady  
white hair... no idea

And two guys, one with dark hair... nope... & one with a push-broom moustache, Gary the  
HMFIC, wears a St Louis Cardinals t-shirt, under his unbuttoned uniform shirt, casual &  
color coordinated, a boss I like

Swings was two ladies, typically, one guy, relief (don’t recall their names)  
& Rita

First time I saw Rita in a day we said, “What?” to each other

*Tradition!*

Second time she’d say, “You again?” as I said, “Me again?”  
We worked out a third encounter exchange, but neither of us remembers it



Two guys share Graveyard shift, & I don't see them enough to know names  
I'm an ex-Graver, no names needed

Anyway... Swings

Saw them the most, usually a free refill, but I was always ready to pay, & I'd get a new Super  
Big Gulp™ cup every week or so

I make them charge me when it's a new Super Big Gulp™ cup

I have standards

Rita waves me through or 'forgets'

LadyMarriedToTheDaysGuy claims that the button is broken she quit once, came back, quit  
again

II.

Rita was the one that told me that Carl died

Fall my senior year

One day, well before then, I broke a jar of Ranch Dressing

offered to pay via Carl

"Don't worry about it"

"Don't do it again"

Replaced him & the Lady with three guys

One of the guys didn't last long

pissed *everyone* off

& two more guys whose names I didn't know

I should have known all their names

That May graduation day I went in for coffee in my own, one-use red uniform no reaction other  
than smiles

just another day

I worked convenience store & other late night retail, "yep, done that"

the show goes on

Three months later I loaded up the rental car off to New Orleans bought coffee in two refillable  
cups that I still had & put them on the counter in front of that Days Guy

He's Matt

M.A.T.T. like an anagram

Running nametag joke like Carl AKA "Joe"

He waved me through

## **We Real Dorks**

THE FANTASY ROLE PLAYERS  
SEVEN AT THE COMIC HUT

We real dorks. We  
Fight orcs. We

Dig caves. We  
Roll saves. We

Play late. We  
Don't date. We

Watch Dune. We  
Shower soon.

## Duplex for Bob Kaufman

*After Jericho Brown*

Bob says, “the Ancient Rain is falling again.<sup>1</sup>”  
When I answer what I am writing<sup>2</sup>

(The Rain blurs the pages while I am writing)  
“The Great American Suicide Note.<sup>2</sup>”

Lots of damp American suicide notes.  
Everyone trying to get it just right.

All that competition means I just write.  
There are volumes of my wet suicide notes

With elaborate annotated footnotes.  
I would die for them to see the light.

I could just let each page dry at City Lights.  
They must be perfect before I check out.

Why would I ever need to check myself out?  
Bob said the Ancient Rain is falling again.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “THE ANCIENT RAIN” Kaufman

<sup>2</sup> “BONSAI POEMS” Kaufman

## The Narrow Highway to the Deep South

-August Eighth: I filled up my two coffee refills cups, one bought, one found.

I said goodbye to the Seven/Seven crew. I figured out the GPS. Eight hours of driving over four days at 60 MPH. I-40 had a speed limit of 70; I went 75. I had not driven in four years, but it was like getting down off a duck. East of Albuquerque a simple green highway sign: Continental Divide.

Been thirty-six years  
away from Continental  
Divide's sunrise side

-August Ninth: I filled up my two coffee refills cups, one bought, one found.

I could have driven a little longer per day, but that would have meant two days in Texas. So I stayed in far East New Mexico & far West Louisiana. In Arizona, New Mexico, and Louisiana, I-40 came down to residential level quite a bit, less so in Texas. Hours & hours of flat nothing. I entered Texas. At the border was a (corporate?) cattle ranch. My family farmed, so I know the smell of manure.

First sniff of Texas  
quality fertilizer  
never smelled so rich

-August Tenth: I filled up my two coffee refills cups, one bought, one found.

The disadvantage of starting out in the wrong direction in Texas is that it will be a while before you can turn around. I had to get my refills up the road. Even the GPS couldn't figure out the twisty exit. So, I got to listen to her say, "recalculating" for twenty miles. A jam near Arlington (?). Took me about forty-five minutes to get through it with no hint of overheating. An hour out of Louisiana, I found a timely rest stop. Made the sleep-over stop in Natchitoches. I don't recall the towns in New Mexico & Texas.

Natchitoches in the  
verdant Bayou State land of  
the Spanish mossed trees

-August Eleventh: I filled two coffee refills cups, one bought, one found.

Four hours to the "river" side of Lake Ponchartrain, leaving two hours to spare to get to a compulsory meet & greet for the Creative Writing Workshop. Wending through New Orleans made it almost five, and nearly another hour to get a money order. I found the venue just in time, after changing my shirt. All through more humidity than I had experienced in thirty-six years, if ever.

Out of the desert  
to enough humidity  
for a rainy day

August Twelfth: To the airport & back to return the rented hatchback.

I anticipated radio silence during large parts of the trip. Surprisingly, I found classic rock almost the whole way. There were convenience stores for morning coffee, & McDonald's almost always handy (thank you, Joan, for the gift card). I returned the rental car to MSY, the return to campus three hours by bus. Luckily, before I started back, I returned to retrieve my graduation tassel that I had hung from the mirror for the trip. I told the woman who got it back for me, that it cost me twenty grand.

## Bugs of Southeastern Louisiana

Bugs, Mr. Rico. Zillions of 'em. – *Starship Troopers*

I noticed the dragonflies first  
I'm sure they show  
on NORAD's RADAR  
I am six-foot-four  
We have had  
what is called in air traffic control  
“near misses”  
I understand they don't sting  
& mostly eat other bugs  
I can appreciate that

Next I noticed the cicadas  
I was unaware that we had any  
in Las Vegas  
A friend assures me we did  
Though I guess they are quieter there

Here they are full-throated  
They no doubt revive Broadway shows  
“One (two, three, four)  
Singular sensation...”

Maybe even communicate with the mother ship  
in the Delta quadrant  
calling down an airstrike  
that will take a few light years to arrive

My other friend in California  
doesn't want to know about the bugs  
New Orleans teems with  
The thought of them gives her nightmares

I have proof of mosquitoes  
beyond the ones I catch in the act  
They are generally darker  
& shorter winged  
than the ones I've known

All the tiny spiders are here  
& some more

They are very industrious  
I walk past light poles  
with no anchor structure  
within ten feet  
& I will still run into a web

Then there are the grasshoppers  
I think

I met one with a Day-Glo green head  
& coffee colored body  
with exceptionally long back legs  
& mantis-sized forelegs  
but still grasshopper-*ish*  
or grasshopper-*y*

I took note  
& went back to reading  
until it landed on my knee  
I gently scared it off  
“Look  
I will share the neighborhood  
but you can’t be crawling on me”

Now I’m talking to bugs  
the conversation entirely one-sided  
yet satisfying  
in a weird sort of way

## **Breakthrough**

I was able to throw a balloon across the Mississippi River. John Bel Edwards saw me do it. It was filled with xenon gas. That's why it worked. The buoyancy of amazement. I did it on the deepest darkest day & did a cartwheel after. Stretch saw me do both things & put them in this poem. A week from Tuesday, I will do the same with a balloon filled with neon. I am that close to perfecting it. The key is chromium, chromium balloons. One day, all these chrome balls will come galumphing back. "Frabjous!" Stretch said to me. He had shared the secrets of trans-river balloon propelling lore with me. Before my xenon/chrome balloon majestically soared over Lake Pontchartrain.



## **Andromache**

My love Hector visits Troy today.  
The nurse of our young son told me.  
Cassandra told her.  
Cassandra just knows these things.

It seems he could come home more often  
With the war just outside the walls.  
I should not complain:  
This war could be leagues from here.

I have the nurse bathe Astyanax,  
While I bathe and perfume myself  
For greeting Hector  
In the city's high tower.

If Hector wanted to see us both  
He could have just come to the house,  
But the nurse reports  
He comes to us way up there.

That post overlooks the battlefield.  
Maybe that is Hector's plan.  
I go there often  
Trying to glimpse my lord's plume.

So up Astyanax and I go.  
I should not call the baby that  
Around his father.  
Hector would be scandalized.

Astyanax, our neighbors call him:  
'The Defender of the City,'  
Like Hector's duty,  
My little prince's nickname.

Our son is Scamandrius, named for  
Ilium's defending river.  
We will play the game  
As if we were still courting.

I will wail as the abandoned love,  
Hector pleading as ardent mate  
Then, holding his son,  
Will give a father's kisses.

The siege returns Hector to the field  
The defender of the city,  
And I will go home,  
Scamandrius to a nap.

I must recall to use his real name  
When I see Hector on that tower.  
Nurse says there is talk  
My princeling will not be King.

He is son of the heir apparent.  
Of course, he will be king in turn,  
The same for his son  
For as long as Troy's walls stand.

It vexes me to hear such stories.  
I ask Nurse where she hears them from.  
From that Cassandra!  
But what does Cassandra know.

## **Golgonooza's Cartographer**

William Blake was an odd duck  
obscure poetic genius  
*Blake was never mad  
enough  
to be locked up*  
A.E. Housman said

You should not call Blake mystic  
While making Golgonooza  
those voices he heard  
(Spicer's  
own were *Martians*)

Even if they were  
genuine emanations  
(heed spectres spirits angels  
daemons or *Martians*)  
they are  
active beings  
Poetic Genius

Blake was never committed  
While making Golgonooza  
Blake had his daemons  
had his  
Holy Spirit  
& that was enough

## A Survey of Modern & Postmodern Poets, & How They figure to A Contemporary One

I decided to be a poet  
when I grew up  
at fifty-one.

John Keats started at *twenty-one*  
died at twenty-six of TB  
a five-year career.

They tested me when I was a kid  
& TB isn't a thing like it was then  
So, I made it past the five years.

What if other poets began like  
William Cullen Bryant,  
prodigies at age ten,  
& wrote poems until they died  
how long do I have to go  
to match their longevity?

Prodigy Wilfred Owen  
died at twenty-five  
fighting in World War I,  
one week before the Armistice;

that would be fifteen years after age ten.

I am too old to draft  
or volunteer for that matter.  
If I can avoid war zones  
and mustard gas  
I have a chance.

Can I go until  
I am sixty-six?

Sylvia Plath died at thirty-one,  
making twenty-one years from ten.

I tried suicide once.  
It didn't care for me.  
I'll have to stay vigilant.

Can I go until  
I am seventy-two?

Frank O'Hara died at forty,  
run over by a dune buggy  
on Fire Island.

That's thirty years  
he wrote after age ten.

If I look both ways  
and sleep in protected areas,  
I can avoid accidents.

Can I go until  
I am eighty-one?

George Oppen died at seventy-six of,  
well, being seventy-six.

...minus ten

Can I go until  
I am one hundred-seventeen?  
Wouldn't that be nice?

George Oppen  
sometime around age fifty  
after twenty years of doing other things  
started composing poetry again  
(sounds familiar)  
& at the age of sixty-one  
won the Pulitzer Prize.

I can make it to sixty-one.

**Poem starting with a Line from “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota”**

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly.  
Bronze cannot be so aerodynamic.  
Though aerodynamic planes are metal.  
Metal designed properly can float.

A flotilla of battleships is tons of metal.  
Metal, that in another form will sink.  
I would be sunk if I tried to design one,  
As would those foolish enough to sail it.

The design of the first sail was surely an accident.  
Accidentally hung linen moved the boat  
Toward the end of an unedged earth,  
An Earth that had no edge to fall off of.  
No edges to a sphere, or, rather, an ellipsoid.

...meanwhile there is that butterfly  
Butterflies, like sails, use the wind,  
Or the wind works against them like with bees.  
Bees should not be able to fly,  
But they do fly those do-bees.

**Composed while Reading *The Pleasures of the Damned***

The professor asked  
What we were reading  
So I said Bill Knott  
Charles Bukowski  
& Montaigne's essays

One of my classmates  
Said they didn't like  
Bukowski I said  
Well he doesn't care  
Because he is dead

I don't like Plato  
T.S. Eliot  
William Wordsworth or  
Ezra Pound & they  
Are past caring too

But even if he  
Hadn't passed away  
(He'd be ninety-nine)  
Charles Bukowski  
Really wouldn't care

## Elegy for Spicer (Imaginary)

Stammering is  
the native eloquence of us  
fog people, Jack  
The fog is  
    rising

All elegies  
are imaginary, Jack, none  
of the dead can  
hear them through  
    the fog

but you knew that  
The dead don't write you back because  
no post office  
past the fog  
    Hell, Jack

you won't hear this  
but please tell Lorca I say hi  
enjoy your death  
& the fog  
    Love, Lee



## The Day the Queen Died

It's about 11:30 in New Orleans on a Thursday  
Four days before the Fall semester  
Yes it is 2018 & I will go get a cup of coffee  
I will catch the 6:30 55 bus  
to get to the monthly Dogfish reading at 7:30  
weather permitting

I walk across the muggy quad  
& it's sunny  
for now

Even if I go to Dogfish  
it's up in the air if I will read or not  
Even if I don't  
I will see what some of the other poets in New Orleans  
are doing

The barista smiles while she gets my coffee  
as I insist on telling her  
"biggest cup you have  
regular hot coffee  
room for cream"  
an order she already knows

As I carry coffee to the library's river side  
to the only working outside outlet  
I think about which book I'll read  
on the bus & whether or not to have a po' boy  
from Eat @ Melba's before the reading

I log on to Facebook  
& the Dogfish page has posted  
"The Voice of God"  
a poem dedicated to Aretha Franklin  
as elegy

& I am sweating a lot from New Orleans in August  
& thinking of a lyrical by Frank O'Hara  
& a lyric by Steely Dan  
& listening to 'Retha belt out lyrics  
as only she could

I guess I will be reading this first draft at Dogfish

## RUE MIRO 2019

I start walking N Miro,  
Seventy-seven years or so  
Since Bob Kaufman walked it.  
From Elysian Fields to Canal,  
Two-point-one miles.  
Thin slabs of sidewalk  
Nearly overgrown by grass,  
Bob Kaufman's childhood domain.

Bob liked to tell how  
Dad was a German Jew  
Mom a voodoo Queen  
From Martinique.  
He was begat by  
A half-Jewish, half-black Pullman porter  
& a local school teacher.

At the 2020 block,  
I come upon a spectacular  
Stand of bamboo:  
An Urban Lot Primeval.  
Fenced off  
So I couldn't get closer.

I settled for the picture:  
"Bamboo with Mailbox  
& Old Tire."

At the next block,  
An Annette Street address  
The Miro Street School,  
Now Valena C. Jones Elementary,  
Would have been there when Bob was.

The historical marker says,  
*Established 1918*  
*Renamed for Jones 1923,*  
A black woman.

Bob would have been five  
In 1930,  
Surely they would have  
Let Bob attend.  
(Did you go here, Bob?)

One of the first things  
An editor of his poems  
Told me was about Bob's  
'Buddhist' vow of silence  
After JFK's assassination.

Fenced in & dilapidated  
Like Mt Carmel Baptist Church  
Across the way,  
Jones Elementary stretches  
From Annette's corner  
All the way to N. Galvez,  
A huge New Orleans' block.

Somewhere nearby  
Was Mom's (unofficial) Kaufman Library.  
Bob's mother would raid  
Estate sales for their  
Poets and drama.

Till the end of  
LBJ's folly  
(Two parts Vietnam,  
One part Nixon),  
Bob ended his ten-year silence,  
Reciting poetry  
Of two sorts in San Francisco  
(I hope you climbed up on a table, Bob).

Mona Lisa,  
The Scholar Dr Saloy,  
Theorized Bob's memory  
Eidetic, commonly 'photographic.'

Bob, on that day in '73  
Quoted Thomas Becket  
From *Murder in the Cathedral*  
By T.S. Eliot, of all people.  
I long thought he had recited  
Shakespeare's *Sir Thomas More*  
Followed by something his  
Eidetic memory composed  
During the Buddhist vow.

Sweating, I find myself over-dressed  
for New Orleans, again.

At Saint Bernard  
Bear left.  
First though  
I'll rally my hunger  
& cool down  
At Rally's.  
Obviously not there  
When Bob was,  
1925 until '42,  
Give or take.

Next,  
While making my own  
Neighborhood poem project  
I come upon the Neighborhood  
Story Project  
Corner of Miro  
& Lapeyrouse.

Then there is a high sign  
Sharing *LOVE*  
At 1513.

“WOULD YOU WEAR MY EYES?”  
Bob asked long ago  
(I'm on it, Bob).

At 1449 I find a tree  
Vs. sidewalk collision  
The tree won,  
Earthquake-like.  
Another clash at 1435 & 7,  
The sidewalk wins,  
For now.  
These oaks were surely  
Around when Bob was.  
They don't need ID.

At Miro & Dumaine  
There's Phillis Wheatley  
Charter School.

Between Orleans &  
*Lafitte Greenway* (la-di-da),  
Quite possibly at one time  
“Galvez Greens.”

The trees,  
So young,  
Not even close  
To winning any ground  
From the sidewalk,  
So young.  
Well-trimmed lawns surround  
Copy-cat apartmentcondohomes.

So, the Vietnam War over  
And his vow,  
He began with  
“They speak better than they know,  
And beyond your understanding...”  
& ended with his own  
[All those ships that never sailed].

The other side of  
The Greenway,  
From St. Patrick  
To Bienville,  
Is not so gently used  
& people wander out  
Between games.  
The Saints play later.

No Saints in Bob’s time,  
Save those  
Already in general use.

Beyond here  
Is the final approach to Canal St.  
& its STOP *LIES* sign.

Two-point-one miles  
& two hours later  
Wet with sweat  
Taking pictures along the way

& miles to go  
(& an entire Saints game)  
Before I sit  
At Parkview Tavern  
& miles to go before I sit.  
(Did you memorize  
Any Bob Frost, Bob?)

In 2025,  
For his Centennial  
I want to recreate  
Bob's performance  
Somewhere  
(If I can, I'll even climb  
Up on a table, Bob.)

I'll take the streetcar from here.

**finish here**

*After Lucille Clifton*

finish with the shade  
stretching to the East  
wait

finish with a mickey  
like bullets in a gun  
wait

finish in a hidden copse  
where a body's hard to find  
wait

finish lying on a slab  
which will happen anyway  
wait

just  
wait

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## VITA

The author was born in Clifton Springs, New York. He obtained his Bachelor's degree in Multidisciplinary Studies from University of Nevada – Las Vegas in 2017. He joined the University of New Orleans Creative Writing Workshop program to pursue a Master of Fine Arts degree as a poet.