

*canon*



**canon**

**mx jen durbent**

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## **Content Warning**

Sexual Assault, ACAB, R-Slur, T-Slur, Violence, Drug Use

*Our documents are useless, or forged beyond believing.*  
—The Church – *Destination*

For J.



# On Her Existence (2018)

*A poet more than thirty years old is simply an overgrown child.*

— HL Mencken

Excuse me! Excuse me! Sorry to bother you while you're reading your book, and I'm sorry if it's creepy, but I can't help but notice that you put non-dairy creamer in your fairly-traded, organically-grown, coffee-shop coffee. Well, maybe that's not creepy.

But I'm pretty sure that it is creepy that I can't help but notice the cut of your skirt, the height of your heels, and you might want to pluck your eyebrows.

I'm not saying this as a judge, but you might like to know. I just notice even when if I can't look at myself in the mirror and take my own advice. I don't want to say more and I can't help myself and I know you might be offended and I apologize. It might sound weird coming from someone that looks like I do that I can't decide if I want you or if I want to be you.

I know that it's not OK. I know you are a fully formed person and that your presence is not an invitation. My brain is limited.

JENDURBENT

These couple pounds of meat is no immovable  
object against the unstoppable force of unwanted testosterone.

But I'm trying.

The latter might be more interesting, but it's grown difficult  
to discuss, though I will try. I am afraid  
I can't help it. Just remember when I say the light in my soul  
went out: you had nothing to do with it.

Inside I have my own goddess and she is hope for proper gnosis.  
Is it shame that I do not believe in her? I'm afraid  
I can't help it. She is barely a breath, nearly invisible  
like the steam off chai. I don't think I am being clear.  
It's not really my fault; but it is.  
I am afraid.

Let me just say it.  
Part of me—part of this him—  
is a her.  
And I'll be damned if she isn't fabulous.  
She comes out to say to the universe, "I exist."

But this him pushes her away with tears and  
the iron and food and hate and says,  
"Just wait, please." She is patient, but  
she doesn't want to wait, not really. She is beyond waiting  
and chastising me for edging into cowardice.  
I can't blame her. Would you want to be trapped inside  
this terrible visage? So I tell her:

CANON

“You should never want to be real.  
Because the world is worse for hope;  
because dreams never ever come true;  
because dessert never is as sweet;  
because fury never is as righteous;  
because sex never is as dirty;  
because crying never is enough release;  
because love always is lopsided  
because whoever gives less has more.”

She doesn't believe me. At all. Logic cannot dissuade  
her, especially when she's not constructed of logic;  
she is the result of the mathematics of synapses, sinew, and hope.

Enough about me, or her, or us!  
You inhabit your body, your poise  
and your pose  
and your placement of leg atop leg  
and hand on handle  
and the way you hold that book. I can see roots  
in your dye job;  
somehow that makes me envy you more.

So when I get up to leave, please remember as I pass homeless  
teenagers warming their hands over unlit tinders: I do not stare  
just because of lust (though I cannot deny that). I stare  
because you are beautiful to the one sharing my heart and she  
wants to ask you how you became  
so beautiful, so real, so true.



## to break your own heart

To break your own heart,  
find a seam  
previously mended  
and place it on the edge  
of a desk,  
intended for great novels  
but used to write  
suicide notes.  
Grip either side of your heart firmly,  
as if this were murder  
(because it is),  
and  
p u s h.  
After the snap  
tells you it's done,  
mend the injury  
with tears, ice cream.  
Add a dose of silence  
and compassion for her  
because she never asked  
for your love.



# Nolo Contendere

*for Zinnia Jones*

I have transed  
the boys  
that were  
on the internet

which  
you were probably saving  
for capitalism  
and war.

Forgive me,  
they are girls now,  
so treat  
them good and right.

They need love,  
estrogen,  
and blankets  
because  
they are sweet  
and your world  
is so cold.





# the blind woman in love with medusa

*Inspired by an illustration by Dahui Wang*

Smell of the sea wafted through ruins  
already ancient before we took up residence.  
There was the warmth of the sun on the roof,  
the singing songbirds, the occasional breeze  
dimpled our skin.

There was me, Tiresias, a prophet. The gods  
made me a woman, too. But I laughed. They think  
womanhood a vile and horrible curse, but it is  
a blessing. And there was my love, Medusa,  
the serpent-haired beauty. Beauty? Those who saw  
her turned to stone, such is the curse when glimpsing  
her perfection. Trust my words; I know things that gods  
keep secret. That is why I am blind: sight stolen by  
small gods for a long forgotten slight.

We lived for years, her flesh soft and mine as well.  
We lived as woman and woman. We lived with joy.  
We lived with love. I knew her beauty, I felt the chill  
of stone in my bones as my fingers traced her face  
still warming my heart. Her kisses sweet to make  
the finest fruits as rotten meat.

We both had needs, and I tended to hers.  
I went to the market for her fruits: grapes

## JENDURBENT

and pomegranate firm and ripe. I placed them  
in my knapsack when I heard her screams.  
I let my cane guide me homeward bound.  
When I arrived, I found new pair of columns  
made from men and my Medusa, my dearest,  
without her head. Her beautiful voice, her touch,  
her smell replaced by the rot and putrid stench  
of a man's lust for glory.

I cried out, "Where are the righteous angels  
who carry death in their purses? Why are  
you not here for me?" I cried and the curse  
washed out of my eyes and I could see  
again and my first vision was the woman I loved  
struck down. I wailed at the vision, so I scraped  
out my own eyes and held her fast and tight.

I pray the vultures come quick and take  
our bodies to heaven. Now I lay next to her.  
I strike my own wrists with the sword of gold  
and a wait for the end, for us to be together  
again.

## leap year

Shattered amber glass bottle shards  
sparkle across the alley as stars.

(Sterne waren schöner,  
als ich  
ein Mädchen war.)

Discarded needles point up  
like antennae to heaven.

Flowers bloom  
in February sun and lilacs fear  
no frost from our dying land.

We have stretched patience  
and prudence  
to cowardice,  
as taffy pulled and pulled and turned  
and stretched and then burned,  
covering all the fields  
in forgetful ash.

Two children play in front of a garage  
The games are as before.

Forts  
from coffee cups  
once protested fiercely,  
mended together  
and measured out  
with coffee stirrers.

JENDURBENT

The brown-haired one flicks  
a marble  
fast  
and laughs as structures crumble.

Across the alley from them: a high-rise.  
Built in some forgotten age and  
carved from concrete and decorated with  
more rotten pine-wood patches  
than windows.

I turn down a road and find houses  
made facades, only the front remains.  
Through windows I see  
sky where living rooms had been,  
where Christmas trees held presents,  
where hard discussions were had,  
where quiet nights were spent in front of televisions.  
Buildings stolen, mortar made mush  
their bricks picked like vegetables  
and shipped to artesian bricklayers  
building behind gates with guards.

In Wetsoff's husband's words,  
"Und nur der schweigsame Tod, der weiss, was wir  
und was er immer gewinnt, wenn er uns leiht."

The past is gone,  
that hostile foreign country.  
I only remember

CANON

Sears Tower's shadow reaching into the lake,  
antennae like a claw.

Last time we went  
all there was were  
dead gulls,  
a sailboat shattered near a fallen pier,  
and a tide way out.



# Flight of the Hippopotamus

They flew in the food on Thursdays  
until last week, when the plane went  
down, smashed against the mountain  
ridge, less than a mile from here.

You can see the burnt out skeleton  
from the village's highest hill, over  
the trees and against the granite,  
decomposed, ashamed of nakedness.

Hopi, they say, is better suited to discuss  
quantum mechanics than English.  
Maybe that is true. Everything is  
better said through other people's words.

But I do know that when we screamed  
at the explosion in the sky like children,  
my own voice was merely an  
echo of everyone around me.

And, on the fourth day, the elders and I  
passed a decomposed camel corpse,  
on route to the plane to scavenge; all we  
carried back were razors and burnt t-shirts.

JENDURBENT

The heavy-handed lesson of survival was:  
I left on the sixth day. My plane came  
from the west out of the sun. I flew  
to the sunset, violent chrysalis behind me.



# flood

wish

for

the

path of

least

resistance

Lest

we

let out feelings and they are too much for the dam to hold.



# A Loving Myself Ghazal

*Write a poem, Jen, about all the reasons people rightly love you. I expect  
no less than 10.  
— Jenny V Simile*

Unsure, a woman on a balance beam for first time in many nights.  
I am to enumerate loves for me of all sorts, both by day and night.

I held him as his wife died. He looked at me with a heart wounded.  
I held him in my heart and nursed him back from his soul's dark  
night.

A woman sees me with her esteem low, "At least I don't look  
like that," she says. Her laughter echoes through the night.

Looking up, her one uncovered eye a mix of lust and fear: grab her  
hair, point her face toward me, our kisses explosions in the night.

The mat sits in front of our door, covered in mud, mold, and dead  
leaves.

"Welcome," it says as she stands on it, fumbling with her keys every  
night.

"Mom," she says and looks at me. "It hurts." Me gentle hand on her  
tummy,  
the cramps tightening until she sleeps. I stay with her all through  
the night.

JENDURBENT

If absence makes you grow fonder, then I will be the source of all  
delight! My fears of being a burden, plans of leaving keep me up all  
night.

My mother says she loves me; she calls me and tells me I am a  
beautiful  
girl. I hate it and don't know why. I still cry almost every goddamn  
night.

After a show, a trans sister gave me a hug, thanked me for  
performing,  
for being visible, and she ran off with her friends ran into the night.

We held each other, our legs intertwined, our fingers interlaced, our  
lips  
locked, the curtains pulled tight and drawn, making a facsimile of  
night.

The mirror is kind today! It reflects a proper color light; perhaps fat  
has moved subtly. Now I see a Jen. I see a girl worth holding all night.

## bury me as a woman

The ground  
is the only thing  
I trust  
to hold me true  
and hold me forever  
as I am  
and always will be.



## the raft (2018)

It is hard to see  
log lashed to log,  
in the waning  
moonlight.  
The raft floats  
on the open  
sea.  
Its tattered  
sail pointing toward the past  
like a monument.  
The lone passenger—  
oh captain—a girl standing  
with red sun-bleached hair—  
looks to the bow,  
guiding herself  
by the stars her father  
taught her nigh half a world away.  
Those same eternal lights  
in the sky his father's  
father taught his father  
who taught  
him.

JENDURBENT

The waves rise up  
up and crash down but  
her ship's close hauled sails  
take her toward a place  
she used to call  
home.



# Meaninglessness

A submarine sits, broken in half,  
crossed akimbo on the sea floor;  
the skeleton of an almost-survivor  
is a floating home to fishes.  
Coelacanth rests in the ribcage  
of a once-man. Dinosaurs, evolution  
of man: trivialities. In death  
there is a use for this man;  
before, he just took up space—  
him and all his neighbors,  
lovers, parents, and siblings.  
An ancient fish thought extinct  
doesn't concern itself with sunrise  
after any solstice or white dunes  
on the seafloor.

The skeleton is as unimportant  
as the president; an artificial reef  
bisects the hull with vicious colorless  
barnacles.

These fish will see the sun boil  
off the oceans as it grows larger  
and reddens the sky. No-one will  
ever catch him with a hook and lure,  
shoved through the cheek.



## Ruins of a Memory Palace (2018)

I don't memorize my poetry because  
I don't trust my memory.  
My memory does tricks like  
"You coulda" and "You shoulda" and  
"You asked for it."

I keep kind notes in my purse  
I keep them safe.  
I keep them so  
I remember  
people like me  
people love me  
my dog feels what dogs feel but  
at least his tail wags, shedding hair  
I will sweep up later.

Without the kind words  
I just remember:  
I hate you.  
you're ugly.  
nobody wants you.  
you're retarded.

My memory does tricks:  
when I see a cop, I remember  
when I was 4, I was handcuffed  
and laughed at and fingerprinted.

JENDURBENT

{ As an aside: this ruined bondage  
until I discovered leather, latex,  
and rope. }

When I smell pot, I remember  
the man  
who tainted  
the joint that we smoked  
and all the ones I  
turned down after.

Despite my best efforts I do not  
clearly  
remember  
the birth  
of my children  
and I don't know if that's because of my  
awful, terrible, no good brain  
or because I was the second most exhausted person  
in the room, and  
then the third.

[Do not tell them, not  
like they would remember either.]

Texts from the woman  
who says she hates me  
once  
are 1000x more in my memory  
than the countless I love yous.

That part is true  
that she tells me she loves me.  
I wrote it down  
just now  
just so I would have something  
to trust.

I hate my memory.  
I hate scenes never forgotten  
and those long gone.  
My memory does tricks after all.  
If you're too good to me,  
it might make you disappear.

I feel as if I have lived two lives,  
the first life with evidence,  
what my notes say,  
what loves,  
what recommendations,  
what money and therefore symbols that people give  
when they say, "your words are worth something,"  
and the other life of memory,  
what I remember,  
what I wish I could forget.

I might have missed the point here.

I meant to copy pasta, to trans scribe  
the good parts of my life so I can't forget:  
My daughter braiding my hair

JENDURBENT

Her helping me learn to  
Wing the eyeliner just so.

[You can make over a tran  
and she's cute for a night;  
or you can teach her  
and she can be style  
her whole life.]

I meant to write the thank yous  
that the kind words deserve  
that the days I wake up and read them and  
that gets me up and out of bed and through the day,  
including this morning,  
to read this to you.  
Thank you all you bright and rising angels.

Despite what RuPaul  
and the self-help books say,  
I can love you.  
I hate myself better than anyone  
but I love you,  
too.  
And that I will never forget.

## one deep breath away from weeping

One deep breath away from weeping we buy our pickles and salt.

One deep breath away from weeping at nothing at all.

One deep breath away from weeping, we decide to move forward  
and never stop.





# Pagliacci

I have this joke  
About when cops took me from my parents  
when they cuffed me  
What I leave unsaid is  
I hyperventilate when I see men in uniform.  
I do not feel safe when they are  
anywhere. They are all dirty.  
I don't finish that story  
because who knows who is in the audience?  
That thin blue line  
encircles them all like a witch's ward,  
the blue stripes on a racist flag for a country  
promised hope and gifted horror.  
Hashtag not all cops.

I have this joke  
About how I do not want a vagina  
Because I saw my wife  
Give birth.  
Twice.  
I can't compete with that.  
What I leave unsaid  
Is  
I cannot mother like that.  
I cannot hold a child inside.  
I cannot stand thee insides.

JENDURBENT

A baby will never call me “Mom.”  
I don’t finish that story  
Because they don’t pay me to cry on stage.

I have this joke  
about how Bible Thumpers  
Told me I need a man.  
I found it validating that  
they saw me as a woman.  
What I leave unsaid  
is that when they called me ugly,  
gross,  
and all the rest.  
I don’t finish that story  
because I need to project confidence,  
even if what the preacher man  
said was true.

I have this joke  
about killing myself.  
Only stopping so the driver  
didn’t have to do the paperwork.  
What I leave unsaid,  
is the look on her face  
when she sees you  
and knows  
and you don’t want to break her heart.  
And what of how the wind pulls  
you in if you stand too close.

CANON

And the smell of diesel exhaust at  
60 miles per hour  
is ineffable.



# Haiku for My Fellow White People

Let those people speak.  
Why don't you shut the fuck up,  
then go punch Nazis?



# Boketto

Lady liberty, trans woman,  
sits on the cement banks of the Potomac.  
In her left hand, cherry blossoms  
from last year. She plucks one at a time  
with her right, then tosses them  
in the river. They ride the current  
out of sight. Will she live to see  
them bloom again?

A kerchief (from her murdered  
sister justice's eyes)  
pulled down over her nose and mouth,  
keeps out tear gas from  
containers behind her proudly made in USA.

A moment of doubt: should  
she collect rocks in her pockets? Should  
she fall into the water? Let her strength  
seep away. Perhaps. But not today.

She stands, looks, crosses the street  
unseen by police, walking home  
to a small apartment far from K street,  
far from Pennsylvania avenue,  
far from the mall,  
where she can get to work.





# American Canon

Listener, I and I and we witness  
the death of the American empire.  
When it falls  
it will be fast and sure.

We know why the caged child screams.  
Ripped from parent's hands  
by collaborators who cover their faces with hoods.

When America says to the universe, "Sir, I exist,"  
the universe tells America to fuck off because she is  
pissed.

Two paths diverged in a wood,  
and America traveled the one far too narrow  
for everyone to fit.

They revel in freedom  
for those who only desire the  
freedoms  
of whiteness  
of straightness  
of cisness.  
But cheer, "We are free!  
Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then I contradict myself,  
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)"

JENDURBENT

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
hatred out of dead industry, mixing  
false memory and desire, stirring  
nostalgia with hate.

We measure our lives in Trump tweets and Senate votes;  
fill up the phone lines  
to beg Senators us to not kill us today.  
Their staffers answer the phone,  
"Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori."

Workers marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
But limped on, blood-shod, unable to pull themselves  
by their own straps. They cannot hear their children ask  
"Why the hole in the roof big enough  
for me to fly out but the rain can get in?"

I, too, am America.  
I take these words  
-like others white me have  
taken, co-opted  
(even if they are part of me)-  
and made them fit-  
a stolen corset  
shaping me  
in a flattering light.

{ Lest though we think we are  
kind [let us be  
kind]  
we should never forget [

CANON

never forget the smallpox blankets is one story among  
thousands never forget that we left queers in  
the concentration camps never forget we love  
celebrities more than our children { more than  
our little girls (more than our big girls) } never  
forget that AIDS was ignored never forget that  
we love our racist sexist homophobic xenopho-  
bic bigoted poets writers artists never forget the  
drug war is waged for discrimination never for-  
get Stonewall was a riot never forget men with  
torches { tiki torches of all things (!) } marching  
never forget we invaded countries just because  
we could never forget he shits in a golden toilet  
never forget insulin used to be cheap never for-  
get we can be hurt too never forget who cannot  
breathe never forget none of this happened long  
ago

never forget not  
for guilt  
but so we don't repeat  
history  
] that some  
poets  
were among the worst and }

JENDURBENT

Pull the stars from the American flag and  
use bullets holes instead.

Our parents shot the american  
dream long dead, left it  
decomposing behind boarded windows  
in redlined districts.

The bite  
of the dog is fast.  
And the cruelty  
is the point.

America would not stop for history,  
So she kindly stopped for us:  
her barge contains forgotten glory,  
oppression, ever broken trust.

We answered freedom's manifest destiny,  
with flurries of bombs that would embarrass a blizzard.

We saw the best minds of our generation discarded be-  
cause of a man's career, starving hysterical men  
dragging themselves  
in senate chambers prowling  
& stalking  
angry power.

Dark angel claims justice burning for the ancient con-  
nection to the fading dynamo in the machinery  
of democracy.

CANON

This generation greets death as an Internet friend  
hugs and kisses and fucks and sweet oblivion.

We saw this coming.

We should have named our generation Cassandra—  
we always saw this coming and they don't believe us.



# The First Man I Loved

I fell in love with you as we ran  
from the cops down alleyways.  
When we finally stopped,  
bent over,  
hands on knees,  
laughing, our trespasses  
forgiven  
misdemeanors in our minds.

The sunlight bleached  
graffiti we tagged  
years before,  
on the then-new homes,  
their erection postponed  
by distant corporate  
bankruptcy. The piles of dirt  
left by unpaid contractors  
littered with beer-can pull tabs  
from long dead parties. They  
poked out of the mud  
like manicured fingernails.  
We laughed. Our misdemeanors overshadowed  
by fraud somewhere far away  
in a shiny office building.

JENDURBENT

Even more years later, you got me high;  
we watched shark week.  
You rolled, you lit the shake again,  
then passed it to me first.  
I should have known the blank  
eyes of a predator,  
but I trusted you.  
After you dosed me,  
after you fucked me,  
you took a shower while I cried.  
You were  
laughing, your trespass  
no crime in your mind.



## a dream of undoing

I was an 11 year old boy when I fell off my bike  
jumping  
over planks of wood  
laid  
across  
bricks  
scavenged  
from alleyways.  
from new construction, in lots recently made empty.

The falling never hurt.  
The cut from a broken bottle I landed on [hands out (super hero)],  
didn't hurt.

Nothing hurt until the bike ride home, bleeding  
bloody,  
& broken,  
and I didn't know if I would be beaten  
or cared for.

As the doctor made rough handy work on my huge hands.  
Chicks dig scars—he said, as he laced my hand like a sneaker.  
Do they? I don't.  
The pock marks on my face,  
the scars on my knees from falling,  
the cuts across my hands from stunts gone awry and washing hot  
sinks full of half-sharp knives,

JENDURBENT

the slashes across my stomach and legs and arms I put there with  
purpose,  
the scratches from cats (lest we forget them): chicks dig them?  
Do they? Do we? Do I?  
I do not. Not my own. No.  
Later, the stitches from my life line  
to my love line  
perplexed the palmist in the family.

Maybe your scars tell a story of interest and intrigue,  
the time you fought a bear,  
the time you ran into a burning building,  
the time you got drunk and visited a body art parlor and saw  
a rose-petal scar on the artist, and you obsessed over your  
own de- sign until right as she branded you and you smelled  
the smell of the hot metal in your flesh and the smell of the  
hair on your arm burning.

But mine only  
my clumsiness,  
ineptitude: I cannot see  
my skin as canvas of scars,  
added by years, with the slow process of  
a patient artist,  
master of the most methodical methods.  
I see only the failure  
to know I would some day  
be a 40 year old woman.  
cupid bow.

CANON

“Tran Valentine’s the name,  
love and gender obfuscation is the game.”  
We live with  
obsequious bottoms  
and persnickety tops.  
Bashful exhibitionists  
and brash hidden lusts.  
Please never forget  
my siblings,  
never ever forget,  
you are wanted,  
especially if you think so  
and especially if you do not.



# 10 simple rules for dating a trans girl

## Preface

Congratulations  
your brand new trans  
girlfriend does not come with  
instructions, but  
proper care of the trans girlfriend  
may ensure a happy life  
and maybe  
a happy wife.

Also note individual variation  
is part of the manufacturing process  
and is not a bug  
but a feature.

## 0

Trans women are women.

## 1

If you're a girl, dating her doesn't make you straight.  
You don't lose your gold star-  
you fucking cliché-  
when her dick isn't made  
of silicone.

## JENDURBENT

If you're a straight boy, dating her doesn't make you gay.  
Even if she comes in your mouth.

But beware,  
we know how creepy you are.  
We've seen some shit.

If you're bi or pan...we're cool.  
Just remember:

### 2

Trans women are women.

### 3

You gotta tell her  
that she's pretty.  
And let her wear the thing  
the girls wore in  
high school.  
She probably did not  
go to high school as herself.  
She was someone else:  
Some sloppy nerd.  
Some overwrought jock.  
Someone else just because.  
We're as varied as the men we never were.  
She never had a girlhood  
quite  
like that.

4

She's gonna read the news  
and about 30 times a year  
a trans woman will be murdered in the United States.  
Most of them will be women of color.  
She will mourn  
for her sisters  
and she'll learn the dead girl's deadname from  
the police statement to the paper  
and she knows the guy who did it  
will claim  
he just  
didn't  
know  
when he swiped left  
on her tinder  
and her profile read  
"I'm trans,"  
right there on the fucking top.

5

If you get her flowers,  
she will cry.  
And that's not a bad thing  
she's had to learn that.  
You should too.

6

Trans women are women.

7

Pickles.

I'm telling you pickles.

It's best to not explain.

8

I bet you thought I was gonna say trans women are women.

You know what: True! But

trans men are men and you better listen to our brothers,

And non-binary people are valid and good.

9

Muffing is a thing

you probably have never heard of

but you should find out with

ENTHUSIASTIC CONSENT!

10

And this is most important

Trans women are women.

Trans women are mothers

and sisters too.



CANON

If you can't tell, it's true.  
And even if you can, it's true.  
Please treat them right.  
treat them like any other girl.  
I hope mostly  
that means you treat  
all ladies well.  
Trans women are friends  
and lovers  
and teachers  
and co-workers too.



# LGBTQisling

There is a man who  
betrays all he is  
for a role.

His role is quisling.

He is the man married to the bigot.

He is the movie director ignoring trans women of color in history.

He is the man in drag who says “she mail” as a gag on TV.

The quisling is a bit of  
self-important bullshit.

Whose “we gots” fester and pile up like a landfill of Styrofoam and  
plastic bags and diapers

The quisling is the woman who thinks women is a womb, man.

The quisling is the friend who makes life harder  
with free speech.

The quisling is me:  
for my exhaustion,  
for my ignorance,  
for my am always  
wrong and often  
furiously

JENDURBENT

The quisling is the abuser.

The quisling is you. Because  
in 100 years you  
will never as good as you are  
now.

And that is a beautiful thing.

# xenoglossia (2018 rev)

Presented in many parts

—On Brueghel The Elder’s “Tower of Babel” For R.A.W.: Fnord in Peace,  
Brother Bob.

**Warning:** This is a chain poem.

Within the next 55 days you will receive  
thirty-eleven-hundred pounds of chains.

*Having conceived Babel, yet unable to build it themselves, they had  
thousands to build it for them. But those who toiled knew nothing of the  
dreams of those who planned. And the minds that planned the Tower of  
Babel cared nothing for the workers who built it.*

—Maria (from Metropolis, 1927)

*The theory seems to be that as long as a man is a failure he is one of God’s  
children, but that as soon as he succeeds he is taken over by the Devil.*

—H. L. Mencken

*“There are no rules of architecture for a castle in the clouds.”*

—Gilbert K. Chesterton

## Nihongo o hanashimasu ka

From scaffolds atop Babel I see gilded cities up  
on the clouds, gorgeous gargoyles keeping watch over  
the plains of Shinar, over us, over our  
humble tower of rock and mud. On another horizon,  
I can see the edge of the flat world, where water falls

JENDURBENT

into I don't know.

What grand architect drafted infinite tortoises on grid-paper? Who conjures them from the four elements? Who mixes fire and wood, draws ashen stains upon their rocky backs like rugs? Who coalesces the jade geodesic carapaces covering soupy-soft innards?

A clever eagle picks up a turtle and drops him from such great heights onto rocks at the foot of our tower—the eagle's meal workers envy, and steal and devour and are happy, like the vultures of Babylon feasting on infants dashed against the stones by water's edge.

I can see the bird's belly above me, down waving like a holy flag after battle. Are eagles allowed to see God when His own image remains blind to him?

I am cursed with a vision of Him, sitting in His cloudy castle, moping and afraid of His creation. We know He is an unknowable deity behind walls, a petty deity who delays coming to see us, an impotent deity who status we will conquer with rocks and muddy masonry.

I am alone within sight of God's flying buttresses and below is firmament and my fellow man. Alone, against orders, I climbed atop and away from it all, to see all creation; I could splash like the son of Daedalus, barely a ripple on the Aegean, arms

splayed; a plucked, panicked, clumsy albatross, flapping against nothing. The castle would stand unmoved.

## **¿Usted habla español?**

Near the quarry, the king no longer hears our words, his words are no longer the words of our fathers and father's fathers. He speaks in gibberish and nonsense: the talk of animals rather than men. Is the king mocking me? I compliment his robes and he mocks me? The other men look confused, like fish getting clubbed on the pier; they are out of their element and facing violencia rhetorica.

What is this? We've labored at the bottom of this tower for years, our reward stripped with no possibility of ascension. We, the many, the soldiers, the workers, the collective hive buzzing at his needs with our next meal, our next rest, our next apotheosis.

What is the order, sir? Nonsense! Nonsense? More taxes? Speaking in tongues and illiterate lips? No chief of state! No-one can respect the red robe and crown with no mind, the body that holds them both trembles like a beaten bitch babbling and incoherent. The soldiers talk all at once, no-one listening. Us workers either. We do not understand any. There is no coup, no conspiracies, no beyond our words. We all speak louder, maybe volume is comprehension.

Self-perpetuating autocracy to mindless anarchy, everyone with their own mistaken identity. I will head

home, south, down the Tigris, to Ur, and see my wife  
and children, nurse them with tales of woe and my small  
farm, but do they know my language? Can I show them  
how to plow fields and how to raise barns?

Can I show them my scars and tell my war stories,  
exaggerated and full of meaning like my fathers?  
Slaves scatter like moonlight in the clouds, and last  
I see of the king is a stomped-on collar, the white  
of that hare is absolutely meaningless to anyone  
without the words–

## **Sprechen Sie Deutsch?**

This hero is the last one on the shore at the foot  
of Babel, my leg dangling off the pier, schools  
of fish just below. God is behind him, a slight  
glow of wisdom and practiced senses of the soldier  
feels the presence, that final visitation.

“The fire of his opal eyes making glowing, living  
jewels, measure steadily.” The soldier’s song:

“The purpose of this is resonant and crystal,  
like air in its transparency. What is your reason  
for fear? What does it mean to you if we the people  
Say ‘let there be light?’ and take your place on our  
own Olympus? What is your damage? Your malfunction,  
imperfect creator? And what does it say about  
your creation, the strongest of the animals?  
What of your disinformation and glossolalia spread



From horizon to horizon?” The soldier continues:

“Who hears me among the ranked angels as I cry out? The one with twelve wings, the snake in our garden, our creation-right, and he helps us break your ignorance spell, the snake is our savior, knowledge over good and evil. Now, we ascend, we approach you and now, here, God, what have you given us? New definitions for old concepts; contemptuous! What is your fear?” He breathes deep and starts again:

“Take this as prophecy: We will not end here. This tower dwarfs you, and towers of the future will look down in disdain at the clouds, and the round world below will be a pale blue dot.”

## **Ĉu vi parolas Esperanton?**

Let me tell you the story of all the monsters of all time. In the beginning was the word, struck one letter at a time with an old typewriter, or a pen so cheap and dry you can hear the scratch of the ball-point rolling in-socket, reaching up into the well to bring more ink to the page. This word was composed next to thousands of others; and lined up in neat rows like soldiers razing a village, collecting slaves to build great works and be lost and forgotten in Moloch’s name.

The sun is setting, and I stand in the penumbra of the tower which stretches across the world to where the sun will rise.

How many rooms are within the tower? As many rooms as years remain.

Did you think we made it to confuse the god Loki? No. What a pitiful Man. We took his daughter and confounded so she could not escape and instead did our bidding for our worship. Because the best way To kill a god is to not believe in him. Hel, Loki's lovely daughter was not always confined to shadow her blue-black face. She is not all she seems. She desires her own worship, and through the roots of Yggdrasil, she found her place. Demeter did not search long for her daughter. Do you believe me? You need not. Someone will.

Bullshit makes flowers grow and that is beautiful.

Have our endless doors made you a rube? Cube after cube separated by endless arches. I have the path. Pay me. There is no minotaur, scraping his axe against the walls, alighting stars into existence. No monster mumbles,

“Let there be . . .LET there be . . .LET there BE. . .”

## **Unazungumza Kiswahili?**

“Since Noah's flood we have become brothers again,” I said to the man before the confusion of his tongue (because I surely was not the confused one).

He gently teased me and said those were the floods of Ogygian. Regardless, the antediluvian times was a long ago past. After we worked we went to his house in the shadow of the tower, that rounded ziggurat against the sky. We laid on his roof and looked up in vertigo

as the clouds passed what was the top of the tower;  
small chunks of sky were consumed by scaffolds  
ladders, and levers. We enjoy the silence.

When the stars came out, he opened his mouth on me  
and I understood as if his words were my own. We traded  
words over tea overflowed with milk and honey. Oh!  
We were not united any differently than in your bed.

Later, after we lay in bed breathing softly  
near one another, his chest hair under my hand,  
we laid in silence. Until I broke it:

“Our words are the words of Adam, and he  
named all things, and that makes him a kind  
of god.” I said this without fear. He nodded, “Eden  
is our creation-right. Together, we will smash  
the flaming swords that guard its entrance;  
we will pass through the valley. We’ll eat fruits  
and taunt the serpents and claim what is our own.”

When we looked up again at the stars, we drew  
lines between them with our fingers and named  
the constellations as if it were the first time,  
As if we were Adam. Sometime after Scorpio,  
he spoke pointing upward at empty space  
and was as if my ears were filled with water.

## **Badakizu euskaraz?**

There is an obelisk at the forest edge, the clump of black combines with the trees against the dawn sky; ebon veins flow out like the fine blue ones of my forearm. Villagers and slaves like me crowd around it and tilt their heads as if we were confused dogs, as if we understand this as more than the block of rock.

This is a moment of evolution; the obelisk was the first firmament, appeared again when Cain slew Abel, when Adam begat Eve, and when we find one on the moon, believe our footprints aren't alone in the dust of this planet.

We all see the monolith as a prize, some solver of all. Merchants see it is a profit. And when a stonecutter puts his chisel against the rock and raises his hammer, suddenly there is nothing there but the dew-wet black forest, moist, like cake, and a heavy hammer pulled back left in the dirt, grass returning to form where its owner once stood, and then no more. Yes! I ran away.

## **Parlez-vous français?**

I address the dirt, my dirt, for I am the king of Babylon!

“Did your ancestors tell you to play with your creation like mashed potatoes and gravy volcanoes? Disaster is not a plaything, malevolent entity. Beautiful volcanoes will not create enlightenment. Giant bivalves

may be amusing, but do not necessarily create the most valuable pearls. Let us pry them apart to inspect them, let us pry the rocks up from the quarries, slabs of Earth held aloft in arches masoned by triumphant mud. For what is mud but where dirt meets water. Even a fool knows this!

“Adam told his son, Seth, that Eve and Adam were born of dirt. When I die—when I am fully grown—I will return to dirt. It doesn’t take a genius to know Adam and Eve and Seth are here in the walls of this building, at the base of all that is holy, of all the world.

“Adam had his own Babel, sowed his own confusion, when he came from the garden, he changed the languages of all the animals; so the cat attacks the mouse. As above, so below.”

I lie. That is what I would have said if I had the words, instead I merely said, “I should have been a mason.”

## **Você fala português?**

I lie because I lie. I write because I lie. And that all is a lie and I don’t know why I tell them. Did I fail you. Though I know it’s not a test this time. I told my mother I didn’t believe in you, reader, and she wept for my eternal soul. Though that is a lie, too. But that is a mother’s lie. There is no soul. Father taught me that.

Lie. Prophecy. The difference is the arrangement of

tea leaves. I will tell you the first human clone  
will be Adam, and he will be perfect in every way,  
like all children.

He will proceed with us through that window like a bullet  
–back and to the left–and the tower of hell and the great  
serpentine of the highest order. He will stray far  
from the ivory tower to a the cusp of the forest  
garden where snakes bloom and flowers flow and take  
his place where he belongs.

The star anise is in season. May it bring us all  
bitterness! Behold the mountain we made at Babel!  
As the once and future Adam watches, it trembles  
crumbles. The sentence for hubris is–

## **Do you speak English?**

I'm sorry; I've been drinking. Send money. I can't order  
beer or wine any longer. So I just drink whatever is left  
in the ashtrays when the bar closes.

The universe is a big place, maybe even the biggest. On this round  
world we're scattered, with continents linked by dinosaur bones,  
raindrops  
looking to join rivers looking to join rivers looking to join oceans.

Can you find you, among masses of men pouring out? Dirty  
water and you dilute you, you think. No! You become more. You are  
the earth plus plastic! You are mere tools to give me what I need.

CANON

Have I found the god in everything who makes the grass green?  
It ain't Eris. That bitch and her golden apple have nothing on me.

Mu is the answer. Says little,  
does less,  
means nothing.

Are you looking at  
the trees? Only you can prevent  
forest fires. Smokey will just steal your pic-a-nic basket.

Or is that me?

Let that motherfucker burn, leave landscape like a body builder's  
muscles standing in relief. Can we laugh at them? Do they even  
lift, brother? Let the handlebar mustaches catch their tears.

Buddha put down his pen and crossword and told you  
not to worry, madness and vexation  
would be your reward  
if we contemplate the beginning. The beginning does not lead any-  
where useful.

Except the end. Can't? Or? Infinity!

You will build broken cathedrals and worship plastic refrigerator  
magnets.

As you are outside yourself, reader, you promote you to godhood.  
You are knowing more than the you seem.  
come with me and step toward omniscience.

**printf(“tlhIngan Hol Dajath’a” &&  
eggplant\_emoji);**

Reader, contemplate:  
the usefulness of  
the little chip-clip as-seen-on-TV.

Thusly, from cans of meat electric this way came:  
disclaims most old of our liability taste  
it also wave tells you  
how conversation between Captain Holding  
and high-jump dragon boat  
festival of your husband-all decoration  
a man came and was favourable:  
and the real green-eyed monster Hungarian  
with graffito satisfaction that showed itself.

And when mutton makes sense as a cake topping,  
next to man and man, man and wife, wife and wife  
and everyone in between and without and outside the false di-  
chotomy of gender  
and then even more  
and undreamed plural singularities  
That will be the day we understand universal grammar,  
and we all know that merciful Cthulu,  
King Kong,  
and Frankenstein  
died for your sins.



## Do I speak English?

The emoji and Latin and the French and the affectation of ironic  
hate and

all all all the words that could exist.

We no longer build do we? Did we ever though, really?

Didn't cross-bound cardinals chastise their children for staring at

the

stars

and dreaming of anything?

And all this-

dear god,

all this-

for a question

from a child

on a picture

on a wall

of a story

from a book-

and a god-

I can't believe in.



# Storming the Foothills of Mount Olympus

## 1.

All you need know: I am a soldier, dressed in a prior hoplisis, fighting against the gods. My goals: succor and gold.

Achlys moves the Earth with her words: “Armies onward towards the crest of this hill and onward towards the home of the Gods; ever forward, forward to usurp these faulty idols. We do not pray, we demand what’s ours and will raze their castles to sand.”

I say, “Those who stopped just before this hubris are what we call, ‘Unambitious.’ They are forgotten soldiers who history clods upon with terrible hooves. Great people: this is how we inhabit history. With ideas and tar and mortar and art. We are dancing stars.”

—We are not the greatest. We would fall under the forgotten tasks of our ancestors.—

Achlys orders us further upwards to lay siege the Home of the Gods. We will starve them of pomegranate and catapult rocks and rotten meat. We will not leave these

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mountains without just rewards, riches carved  
by Zeus; his burdens become our toy models.

I can see the great walls now: battlements  
bare of soldiers are covered with a haze—  
a smoke that refuses to rise. It is dusk;  
I lay my head on the grass; slaves raise tents  
for officers. I breathe deep: their supper today  
is fowl: all save the best officers have gluttonous ways.

The soldiers empty stomachs churn, prolapse into  
nightmares and make sleep exhausting.

Morning. “Xolotl has distemper; the eagle god’s soft eggs  
poach well,” Achlys tells us we will be upon them,  
we will fight the gods and triumph and win and reclaim  
“For we have made them in nature’s image, the hags  
and the dogs and the eagles and warriors!” Then  
she stops short, breathes deep, and pulls up phlegm.

She spits on the ground; it is clear and healthy.  
“We spit upon their throne; we deny their place  
at the head of our lives; we deny them any fame  
or hope or existence. These gods—never the  
way to truth—have occluded our search, face  
to face they tell us that we’re the inferior race.”

My own doubts are still full and fast. There might  
be something to this even still, even still.

“They’re worse than us because they learn slowly;  
 even now, we see that bombs and wrath are tools  
 of last resort, and they act like the unwashed.  
 They are not our betters. We raid brutally  
 but with hope. We will kill those fools  
 who, with our sacrifices, lived petty & fought petty duels.

“And we see their castles brick by brick now,  
 each one white square and arranged by a slave.  
 Imagine such a life! An eternity of toil for naught;  
 for the mere pleasure of an ungrateful sow.  
 Zeus is mine. When I enter His castle, I’ll pave  
 the world with his soldiers, from general to knave.”

—Do her slaves hear her words as she promised freedom?  
 Do they know she lies like every man before her? No.—

Small men—advisors—scurry about. Taking news  
 from scouts and prisoners returned. “Silence,  
 silence!” she says, wills, orders. “Speak, men  
 in chains! What returned treasures from our dues  
 to the gods lie ahead? How shall we battle? Lance,  
 sword, or siege?” Them: “There is barely even a fence.

When we ran to the gates and throw them agape—  
 no longer afraid of terrible white towers & buttresses  
 overhead,” he said, “We scurried, looking to pillage, ran  
 upwards, forever upwards, into empty spires. From nape  
 to foundation, of goods or gods or men.” “What nemesis  
 bound you, stripped you, and held you in place?”

—When gods are gone, who else is left? Who remains to lock them up? Logic says themselves, but it is a cause for wonder.—

“Achlys, we locked ourselves in the dungeon and traded our freedom for fear of blasphemy. We were not afraid of gods but certainly of no deity. Let us return to our holes, bound and miserable and secure.” She looks over faded skin, gaunt and hanging loose, and clothes frayed, worn. She says, “Do you say that when we raid

we, too, will feel this fear, and feel an ache for restraint?”  
“Mayhap.” “Well,” she says, “I have felt deep aches, though I wouldn’t call them aches from fear.” We laugh. “Souls,” she says, after the slow men understand her faint wit, “take a boat to that river and row, quickly, row. Stay midriver. Rocks line the shores. Beware of undertows.”

—Of course you don’t know (do they?) just around the bend and below waterfalls and rocks and hard clay.—

## 2.

Awake again. Unlike in my dream, there was no maiden; only a pile of urine-soaked hay. I regret nothing.

“Our Queen!” someone yells, “The Queen is dead! Smothered under feathered pillows, her last breath still warm on silk pillow cases. Will you, can you, may you not weep, sweet Achlys is dead. Some pious bastard, some fervent brother of some false prophet, some demon or another of it’s ilk

stole the life of her who led us to the honey and milk.”

I ask, “Guards?! Where were the guards? All her guards in this world were as impotent djinni on a vacuous moon. Dead by dawn; her life disappeared before birds tweet. Dead. Now, only by tall tale and legend will mere bards finish her deeds. She is dead, gone too soon, too soon. Now our own quests look just as quashed and doomed.”

The others rise from their beds, find our leader vanquished, and merely shrug and turn toward home. Honorless fools.

“You cowards evacuate even before a funeral dirge reverbs through this valley,” I yell. “Very well! I shall go alone against the gods. Your leader dies, you run! I won’t abandon this war. You, who would simply turn away, are the turds a skunk would not bury! You could not present a bone even for a siren!” Abandoned, I bury her on my own.

So I set myself with a grimace upon the burial of my queen, I took a shovel left by a gravedigger (profiteers, but I don’t envy their task) and planted rocky dirt one pile on another, down until the ground was unseen even if I stretched up on my toes. The grave clear and deep and long: I climbed out, thirsty for wine or beer.

I do not pray. No gods remain to hear my cries. Yes! I mourn but I will not pray. And I do drink deep.

At the end of the day, she lies still under dirt and rocks and some pitiable headstone, and I alone sit here. Even

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the supply train is out of sight, now. It is just me  
and that pitiable, terrible, white castle, its loch  
choked with algae. Dusk erupts, and some un-heavenly  
light flickers from the building. There is no decision

I have made so willingly, to head into that abode to slay  
whatever demons, gods, or men that killed or ordered  
to kill my queen. Thusly and forever, I shall forsake the  
minor desires of life and love, and my thoughts every day  
will be revenge for matricide and execution of brutal cowards.  
I know and ignore that such vengeance makes hearts sour.

Sustain me, Vengeance. I cannot plead with an emotion,  
but may it sustain me for what is surely a forever war.

I sleep again after burying my queen, and I hold no hope  
the night will slacken my rage, but it turned inward.  
How dare I—all hubris and fantasy—make justice? I  
shame at the false words I said. I fashion a rough rope  
into a loose noose and think. I am not a bard,  
I am a fool who makes love sword-in-scabbard

and I am a fool who cannot finish even a fool's errand.  
How dare I—all failures in my crowded heart—propose  
anything but to dive from cliff to rocks. Why try?  
Let me do nothing and not fail rather than to defend  
some concept as honor, valor, pride. I can say to those  
who doubt me, "I am a coward, written in poetry or prose."

But am I? I have lived through more battles



than memories. I know there is valor in beer!

I face the castle and eye its iron fence and surrounding curtilage, again the grounds look idle, not gardener nor soldier disturb the architecture, glamorous white stones stacked and grouted with more glittering mortar disturbed regularly with murder holes, no door visible. This is more keep than castle; a fortress for war

and no other purpose. Fear not, we are at the foothills of the great mountains, and this keep is but the first building to fall. “Coward,” I tell myself, “before the light dims in the sky, add at least one number to your kills.” I breathe, close my eyes, and when I open the curse of fear has cleared and I move to slake my murderous thirst.

The distance collapses as I approach, alone, but the sun sets fast in the sky. Wasn't it morning not long ago?

The dark is no matter for this mission, and there is no restraint upon my violence with what I find on the throne. I'll run though that false idol with my bare hands, and the pitiable souls he's deceived will then be free. The hope and the light is faint, I charge closer to this castle, this keep, into the row upon row of gleaming white bricks towering over the moat's deadly undertows.

There it is! A massive door, and I must enter it. Ground traded grass for rock in front of that door—and yes, yes I am afraid. Solid! Cut from one tree two men's height wide. I see no holes,

for keys nor hands. I push against where the wood is faded,  
and it moves easily, and I can imagine ropes, frayed  
with time, pulling it open. I step in, ready to begin my raid—

The sword is comfortable in my hand, and the shield offers  
comfort like a mother. I press forward, ever forward.

### 3.

The smell is wet and cold and tired, like boots  
worn walking through a shallow runoff in the early Spring.

Of course it is dank and dark and dirty, what clean world  
do I expect in a castle built for war? I must confess a fear  
of bugs bigger than my hand. An unlit torch in its holder  
smells of pitch and tar, so I spark my knives whorled  
Damascus blade against the wall and light it. A small tear  
of flame falls to the floor. I piss it out with my mourning beer.

I belch. After the echo, no sound other than distant droplets  
of some unknown liquid and the crackling flame. The corridor  
branches: two paths diverge and I turn left, opposite a dead cur's  
pile accompanying quiet flies. "And this fecund waste, wet  
with maggots, is found in a castle? Even disgust in war  
is a weapon," and I trudge onward, but I need not travel far.

{ When two gods meet, nude as the barbarous men who  
made them, each believes they are the higher rank. }

The walls widen into a room, the ceiling high, peaked  
and adorned with a story of creation. A single man sits,

cross-legged, center of the room, looking at me curiously, floating. I can smell his vanity from here, the stink of his perfumed self offending even beyond the dog shit I avoided; his face tells me he's not long from mommy's tit.

"I am all that is man and god," he says. I respond, "Obesity should not be a goal of an immortal." The portly hovering man smiles. "Ah. Your joke is unfunny, old, and simply louder. Originality is not your generation's forte. Pity. to waste immortality on a normal person, not a king or someone worth any more than a strand of string."

Either the floor is warped, or my eyes are. Light or this man play tricks! I trust this man even less than light and shadow.

I charge the floating prophet and knock him from mirrorwork. And, sprawled out on the cobbled stones and dirt, white clothes turn dingy gray as he fumbles to his feet. "You fool! What curses you engender! Go on, smirk now, but know," he inhales sharply, "I am surely in the right. You are damned to eternal life, no Goddesses lighten

your load. Your friends—" "I have none!" "—they die in fires. When the world ends you exist. No man shall end you, fool. Even death may die before you have a chance to meet your end. You will wish, beg, plead for your own funeral pyre! Even upon grass that could be put out with a baby's drool, but no. You will live forever, even past the sun grows cool."

I laughed just now, unable to keep it away. Tell a sadistic soldier like me I'll live forever and see how wretched that forever is.

“Very well; I am immortal, and only God can end this life,” I laugh again, “I will gain honor! And how does prophecy change me? I fight for my queen’s memory and her whispered sighs live beyond your lie-strewn oaths!” He says, “Strife will be your life and her memory down the bowels of history. She will be forgotten by everyone, even you eventually.”

“As long as I live, I will speak her name.” “And even the air will be gone around you, and your voice will make no sound.” “I will write her words,” I say. He contends, “The ink will blur among all the words of humanity. But to be just a little fair, some writings will live until even the tablets of stones are ground into powder, just before the sun grows plump, red, and round.”

I say, “You say the sun cools, then you say it reddens and grows. You fool!” He says, “You are a fool. Stars live long lives.”

He sighs and rolls his head around his shoulders, and I hear his bones crack. He stands. “Tell me what you fear.” Again, I laugh, “Have you considered writing comedies?” He coldly reads me, “You fear the terrible enlightening knowledge. Fear knowing I am truthful and right. Maybe just then, at the end of this world, when neither kith nor kin

surround you...Tell me, how is your mother’s back? Her other pains?” “How do you know of my mother?” I ask. “Well, I could never know, except you told me.

You told me of your mother, your family, your pack of wolf-dogs raised since pups to be loyal to no other. Even I doubted. Until your torch lit this foggy ether.”

“You could have guessed all of those things. Tell me more about what you know of my mother.”

“Her back is twisted like a screw. She worked for your gain while your father warred under your forgotten queen.” I raise my hand, “I would not—” “—say such things if I were you?” he cut me off, knowing my words before I do. “You will learn much, immortal one, though she seems great right now, her existence is as ephemeral as steam.”

“Despicable or ephemeral? Choose one!” I say. “Both,” he says, “Evil and good are simple words, you teach this to all the children and monsters of our time; when a whiff of an errant wind could kill you, every day is a trophy to be held and cherished and every night’s sleep is bliss.” He smiles, “My words are weak; my argument is amiss.

“I will show, not tell,” he says. “I was once like you. The only way out is through.” He disappears, and I am again war torn.

*To be continued “When It’s Done.”*



# Afterword

I wish I was a better poet.

That's it.

I wish that when I feel the compulsion (and, dear reader, do I feel that particular word to do things with words, that what I made seemed important and good. But it never does. It never will. Regardless of what I think of the poems, I hope you like them. I hope that you find something enjoyable in them. I hope there is a turn of phrase that brings you joy, an image that touches you, or maybe a sentence that makes you feel a little less alone in the universe.

I just hope...and that, in and of itself, is new for me.

I love you. No matter who you love or what body you inhabit.

Thank you for reading.





## About the author

Jen Durbent is a non-binary transgender woman-type thing who lives in the greater Chicagoland area with her family. Jen uses she, they, or it pronouns. She also performs stand-up comedy and is working on her second novel and screenplay. Find her at [jendurbent.com](http://jendurbent.com) and on the Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and so on as JenDurbent

## Selected works

*Sexts and Sonnets* (Poems, 2017, Self Published)

*My Dinner with Andrea* (Novel, 2018, from HYBRID Ink)



## About the publisher

HYBRID Ink, LLC began in 2018 with its inaugural publication, Jen Durbent's *My Dinner With Andrea*. Borne out of a desire to see more of the publications they loved, Madison Scott-Clary and the editors at HYBRID Ink made it their goal to provide well-versed and sophisticated works of fiction, poetry, and creative non-fiction.

We want writing that gets us thinking about ourselves, stories that span genres, and words that change the way we look at the world.

