



Abstract

“Mycelium and Other Poems” explores themes of memory, loss, the vulnerability of the body, and mankind’s manifold links to the natural world. Expressed in lyrical language and images, these short meditations touch on the fragile connections humans have not only with their own self and fellow beings but also with nature, be it in their wild, untamed state or in environments that overlapped or is in conflict with our own world.

Keywords

Loss, memory,
nature, self,
solitude

MYCELIUM AND OTHER POEMS

JOEL VEGA

MYCELIUM

Breath of white cloud underground,
thread-like your growth, your branching
fungi network a soft gasp
of slow-burning nutrients.

Fashion me a chair, a brick
to build a house, a leather to clothe
my naked back. Invade the unturned
dirt, the dark loam.

Invade the ground with your
silky hair, yours is a simple task,
to clad the leaf-flecked soil,
to grow a minute colony

too small to see—or span thousands
of acres, unfolding a vast carpet of
Armillaria—decomposing a giant
tree, marking the end, the last ring of life.

Accompany this journey
from dawn to dusk, my heart cupped
in your mass of branches. Build me
a boat, a casket of mold

to take me back to the ground.
Fill my mouth with richness
and cricket song, the sky's austere blue.
When I touch the marble-cool pit,

hold the new soil on my back in place,
bind me with scented linen.
Open the doors of your deep rooms,
let the earth tremble in my wake.

ELSEWHERE

The pine tree leans to one side, a few branches lifting to the sky—
A blur of wings, beak, and twig, the shy wren flits to elsewhere.

That, too, is grief's motion: a gradual slide to deeper shadows.

Anger dissipates.
Melancholy tires of itself.
Grief—that unseen knot—tightens,

its calibration knows no midnight hour.
Even the mad snaps out of his stupor and takes heed.

IN PRAISE OF EXAGGERATION

Trees, no, they do not exaggerate.
They stand in winter as they stand in autumn,
shorn but proud, their leaves transitioning
into another season.

Stones, too, do not exaggerate. They sit
in their shadows, unmindful of the world's grievances.

But the stars, oh, how they exaggerate!
Even in sleep they refuse to lean into celestial darkness,
persuading us with splendid whispers,
of the sky's generous canopy.

To magnify the world is to exaggerate,
to find ease in the warm blanket of our bones,
feel the tick of luck in our ribs.
To hum and till the blackened soil
until the garden joins our humming,
interrupting the hungry buzz of bees.

For how can we travel from day to day
if not for the companionship of exaggeration?
To lift the fog requires a kind of buoyancy,
a quality of toughness.

Ants know it, spiders too.
But theirs and our many labors change
or do not change the world,
and yet that switch in our mind says *magnify*.

Exaggeration carries that hope
in its slender hands. Or it carries nothing.

IN PRAISE OF DOUBT

With December's fading light, the more I'm drawn to
uncertainty. Not the blind refusal of Thomas
whose indecision was stubborn unbelief but the unhurried
inconstancy of the mist: weary of the stable ground it rises
to the heights of space. Variable, yes, but seeking the possible,
the yet unseen and unreached for. As the fog lifts, draws back
the curtains, so can the skies reveal the vast lines of latitudes.

ANTS

A line of ants on the garden wall,
moving calligraphy of busyness.

Antlers, legs, a chained curly line
turning left, right, left.

Whatever their direction
there is a fierceness of intention

in their black violin bodies, a pure
desire that not even the cathode

rays of the midday sun can redirect.
There is a laser clarity in purpose,

concealed from the outsider's eyes.
An obstacle of stone, a detour,

a crack on the brick
does not deter their hairline unity.

Tell me, little ants how do you persevere
in the most trying circumstances?

Do you recall your individual stories
when you reach home?

Do you re-tell them without heroics,
over and over again?

MIDNIGHT, 31 DECEMBER

As an old woman, back bent by sorrow
and memory stirs a hot cup of chocolate
in chipped porcelain and peers
outside her wind-lashed window, asking—

Where did they go, all those minutes and hours?
Where did all the bodies hit by steel bullets,
bullets of viruses, by guns of arbitrary might,
where did they all go?

Like a rabbit disappearing in a magician's hat
or a gold ring tossed aside
after a lovers fight, where did they go?

Like the heat tumbling from freshly pressed linen,
or baked bread exhaling its last warm sigh,
where did they all go?

The clock ticking, it's two-tongued
bronze cheeks announcing the hours.

Say *future*, but without judgment.
Say *love*, but without longing.
Say *minutes*, say *hours*,

but without the thought of a clock
plundering the brimming
buckets of time.

NOCTURNE AT THE HOUR OF CURFEW

Two weeks, a month—
What does it matter
if the word itself looks a bit less
but demands much more?

You can't roam the streets after a certain hour,
you can't spend time outside.
Everywhere is no-man's land.
Even the shadows are gutted, occupied.

Only the trees seem to withstand
the tempests. And after each storm,
the things I can collect are meager,
made smaller in the withered nests

that fell from the burning skies.
Let me confide my midnight habits: I ride
my bike across the slumbering city, past
the deserted train station, the shuttered

fluorescent-lit factories. I cut around the blind
corners of streets that saw my youth tumble
like a burlap sack filled with marbles.
Let me confess even more—

I've seen passion shake the hands
of strangers, or should I say that after all
the courage I summoned, love remains
an empty asphalt highway ablaze with lights,

with the neon bending against neon.
Turn to the last page, my dear reader.
You will find me holding a balloon filled
with the halogen of hope.

Or is it hope filled with the prospects
of nocturnal habits? Turn to the epilogue,
your own story will fold in my own words,
and I will retrace the pointed spires

of your spine, pressing hard
against the bony tips, waiting for
the crack of each break,
each resistant split.