

## two poems

by

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*Weather*

1

My mother says the neighborhood swinger  
talks about sex like it's the weather.

I think of all the men who told me sex  
was all I was good for. A breeding ground  
for the faithless, the faceless.

2

I believe whatever is beyond the sky  
will kill us without a second thought.

Both you and my therapist  
are obsessed with the weather,

unlike other men with their cars  
and Coors. I like watching lightning strike

the field, the sound of hail tossed  
like pebbles at a lover's window.

I like not knowing when  
a storm might stir, that everything I love

could perish. Maybe then, I'd make  
some friends. Maybe then,

I'd have a reason to kill myself.

3

Last week, I packed my clothes and threatened to leave.

And in that moment, your tears sharpened

against my neck like razors, holding me,

all I wanted was not to hurt you.

4

*Weather* can be used to denote from which side  
the wind blows on a ship.

Tonight, rain falls

hard like shattered bones,  
a soon-to-be storm gnawing  
its way

through the troposphere.

5

Day fades

like a lamp burned to its end.

On TV, we watch houses

sink like anchors.

Chimneys pass like dorsal fins

skimming the water's surface.

I remember, last summer, being split

like a tree in a windstorm,

a movie scene.

You said that exact thing. It felt like a movie.

Thunder shook the walls

as you texted you were safe up north,

powerlines scattered like spilled pasta,

and that was how, I thought, I wanted to be

loved, with earsplitting intensity.

*Intimacy*

[Upon viewing Gustav Klimt's *Adam and Eve*]

Note the golden hair  
 between her legs, the ghosts  
 of future generations buried  
 in her cheekbones. Note his body:  
 bronze, transcendent, holding  
 her frame as would a vase.  
 She is not a flower,  
 her eyes having captured us, those rosy  
 bulbs of her chest.

Note his temples, sunken  
 fonts of candle wax. He draws  
 his lower half  
 into her back, the muscles  
 of his arms like ripples  
 in a tide cascading down  
 his length.  
 Foreign still, his sex

is sheathed  
 in leopard's skin. His eyes  
 like lidded jars.  
 Note how she tilts her head,  
 watching us  
 watch her, her hand  
 disappearing  
 into him. Blossoms  
 falling:  
 white,  
     violet,  
         red—

*Behind the Scenes* with Christian Paulisich

PR: *I find myself intrigued by the craft elements in “Weather,” such as the numbered, fragmented form and the strong, evocative language associated with violent imagery. If you don’t mind, would you mind sharing some of the factors that influenced your writing of this poem, either before or during its conception?*

CP: Thank you for your kind words! When I was working on “Weather,” a poem of mine with numbered parts was published in another magazine and I really liked how it turned out. I thought I might try this again and it really transformed the drafts I had at the time. By dividing a poem into several discrete sections, the different experiences and ideas within the poem aren’t forced to connect, which allows us to appreciate them individually and form our own connections, whether they be on the analytical or intuitive level. Because there are so many ways to use the word weather, I wanted to play on not only the definitions of the word but how it is used figuratively and idiomatically in the English language. In this poem, weather is not just a phenomenon the speaker witnesses but also a weathering he experiences, a wearing down of the self. I love vivid imagery and agree that I think some of the most crucial insights appear after some of the violent images, a lens through which the speaker experiences the world. One of the impacts of chronic stress and trauma is that, at a certain point, it can become difficult to determine whether our emotional response to any given situation comes from personal memory or from the stories we absorb from the media. And I think that’s what comes of this poem-- in assembling the parts, we join the speaker in asking ourselves how much of our internal atmosphere we create.

PR: *Both “Weather” and “Intimacy” seem to share themes of longing and closeness. Could you elaborate on how these concepts resonate with you as a writer, and if there’s other concepts that have thematically influenced your works?*

CP: I’m so glad you picked up on those themes when reading these poems. I have found that the best writing is honest writing. I feel that from a young age, we’re told to censor ourselves—we’re often taught that a thought or feeling is inherently bad, leaving us with the idea that if we can eliminate or control these complex desires and emotions, then we can be happy. Whenever I’m writing poems, I like to observe the lines and moments when I feel myself pull back and stop writing, when I question whether I should include something in the poem knowing someone might read this one day. When I feel that slight recoil in my gut, the urge to return to safety and become small again, I challenge myself to keep writing and elaborate on the image or idea.

Working as a therapist has really strengthened my belief that just because something scares us does not mean it will harm us. What I've come to realize is we shouldn't avoid expressing something, especially in art, because of the fear of rejection. It's a universal experience. I find myself asking, What can I learn from my discomfort? How can I use writing as an opportunity to grow?

An old professor of mine used to repeat a famous quote from Robert Frost that goes "No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader." If our work doesn't evoke an emotional reaction in us, how will we truly connect with others? In a way, the longing and desire for closeness you picked up in my poems, take that plunge toward connection. The speaker of both poems is expressing vulnerability in the hopes that the reader might relate, and in that shared experience, they form a connection through the page.

*PR: In terms of poetic craft, what would you say were the most difficult issues you encountered when writing "Weather" and "Intimacy"?*

CP: In terms of poetic craft, "Intimacy" and "Weather" challenged me in very different ways. "Intimacy" is the first ekphrastic poem I've written that I've actually liked. Ekphrastic poems are written about and reflecting on a work of art, in this case, Gustav Klimt's painting "Adam and Eve" at the Belvedere Palace in Vienna, Austria. Unlike most of my work, the "I" is completely removed from the poem, which was challenging but also taught me that I can write a poem that is not necessarily autobiographical, yet still reflects a part of me.

On the other hand, "Weather" is a personal narrative that is even confessional at times. While writing from a very "I" centered perspective is more natural to me, creating a complex poem requires both discretion and directness. This relates to what I said to the previous question about how sometimes it's the lines I feel compelled to remove from the poem that are most crucial. Without the speaker's bluntness about his experiences, his forthcomingness, and apparent lack of discretion, I wouldn't have captured his insecurities. I wouldn't have been able to do justice to the desire to be loved, even for those ugly, self-obsessed parts of himself.

*(thanks, Christian!)*