

# Prose Poems



*John Olson*

## Whenever I Feel The Spirit

Whenever I feel the spirit I like to dance myself into a frenzy of luminous bacteria. Who doesn't love ambiguity? It's why I read Frank O'Hara and lost control of my phobias a long time ago. Most people don't like helicopters in their hair. So why would they like poetry? I like having big thoughts and strange appetites. I carry a sack of ink whenever I go and marvel at the stubbornness of ears. The narratives that embroider our perceptions are backyards of splintered wood and dirt, damp basements with raggedy old couches and linoleum ghosts. Symmetry is the milk of bondage. The hills explain everything. And just as I began to understand my shirt, I found the strange red light of a hornet in a paper bag, and it made me feel imminent and involved, like the creaking wood floors of used bookstores, when they existed, a long time ago, in the Age of Books, and Tarzan and pterodactyls wed in a lingua franca of lush incongruities.

## Electric Cables On A Rainy Night

That night in Seattle 1975 before I'd shaken California off and I was living in a studio apartment with a stone fireplace and a big kitchen and the bus line was right out my window buses with electric cables that made a sparkly sound especially on rainy nights water beaded in the window lit up by a streetlight and 10cc came on the radio by my mattress & sang "I'm Not In Love" & it gave me a strong feeling I won't say romantic not exactly there's something beautifully sad & ambivalent in the song more like that interval of time when you're still alone and desires run loose in all directions and nothing could happen and everything could happen in a split second. The air seems preternaturally rich. The room is quiet but there's a palpable stirring, an indefinable presence, a subtle agitation of potential energy measurable in joules. Imagine all the images sleeping in the language waiting to be awakened. A fever rumbles in the words at the far margin of our existence. There's wine in the air, & power. Electric cables on a rainy night.

## Word Spurt

There are words I don't know. I would tell you what they are, but I don't know. What words, precisely, I just can't say. I just know that one day, one moment, one tiny tear in the fabric of time, and I will experience something and then try to find a word, or words, for that thing. But what if the only words I can find to best describe an experience – a smell, a texture, a sprain – are in another language? What if it lies in a sprawl of words, too obscured by words, to be witnessed as anything other than a brawl, a sticky cocoon, when it pops out of the air? When it crawls across the floor. When it sits down and lights a cigar. When it voyages to the right of you, smiling as it goes by, on its quest for experience, and the sheer joy of moving around in space, which all words love to do, they love to get out there and reveal things, invent things, phrase things, freeze things, matriculate ejaculate and spurt things. Do you see what I mean? Do you know what words I'm talking about? I don't even know what words I'm talking about.

## Breath Of The Morning

I feel the edge of the world in the breath of the morning. The dizzying liquor of possibility. That moment when everything is so clearly delineated it could never be a song. It could only be a weekday, a frontier with a schedule in it. It's hard for me to say this but the truth of marble isn't in its density but the nobility of its influence, how it affects the hands when you're leaning on it to gaze at yourself in the mirror wondering who the person might be behind that face in the glass. Images are the shadows of a brighter reality. The fire is behind us. The hotel is just a rationalization. Everything is an instance of poetry. But not everybody sees it. Kiowa hunt buffalo. It's 1854. Arthur Rimbaud has just been born. Franz Liszt's *Orpheus* premieres. A philosophy walks out of the sun and splashes down somewhere near Omaha, which has just been established as a trading post. Essences are axles. But it's the wheels that make things roll.

## This

I like this. This this. This morsel of grammar. This demonstrative adjective. This implicative this. This fist of this. This bucket of this. Those sounds buckets make when they're full of impertinence. This reliquary of irrelevance. This butte. This mine of crystal. This Bristol epistle. This bristle. This whistle. This vision on the verge of epiphany. This moment in time. This germination of manners in a meat locker of the mind. But no. This isn't it. Not it at all. This is.

## What Is A Word

What is a word, Nietzsche asks. The image of a nerve stimulus in sound, he answers. I think it's a small lacquered netsuke. Nougat. Nugget. Cordial cherries. 10 pieces. Net Wt. 6.6 oz. Artificially flavored. Classic good taste. Dark chocolate. Lift to indulge, it says on the box. Real cherries. May contain pits or pit fragments. Viking remains. Helmet and sword. The bones of a dog. The wings of a dragon. But to infer from the nerve stimulus, Nietzsche continues,

a cause outside us, that is already the result of a false and unjustified application of the principle of reason. But why bring reason in? We should leave it outside to soak in the rain.

### Beeswax

Consciousness is essentially beeswax. It might also be the meaning inside this sentence buzzing around a fragrant ambiguity. Well-being is essentially plumage. It's ok to whistle if you can feel it in the shoulder, like a twinge of socialism, or a wing. Sometimes the grazing of animals reminds me of feet. This has been proven many times by the sensuality of language rubbed on a flight attendant. Sometimes a simple frequency can do quick little jerks & create an ambience of fluoroscopes & ottoman while the fog bends itself into a heart & strawberries cause stucco. There are regions of the mind that submerge you in uncertainty when they're done bruising you with awareness. They leave you in a trance, dripping & unrecognizable. This is how I learn. I crack an egg & look at the contents spread into geese. Why is reality so big & incoherent? Think of a house. If you want to find me, I'll be in the narrative next door letting words happen to me.

### I Need A Way

I need a way to make my indiscretions more palatable. Clearly there is an experience called 'irrelevant.' There is an energy in the head demanding conversations with the world. The essential thing is to carve a pumpkin and fill it with words. Words like doing things. West African rivers are coalitions of wine and informality. There are chemicals involved in the vocabulary of space. Thoughts weigh nothing. But be careful. Life is hard. You're going to require energy and whistles, scabbards and magnetism. Meaning feeds the mind thousands of variables. You can hear the sand boil in Arizona. Spinoza saw God as nature itself. And why not? Mania defines the moment. It gets all over everything. Propellers churn the emotions into sugar and that's what people do. They pour drinks & talk about the future, which is embryonic and glittery, vivid as a vocal cord stuck in a closet all day, waiting for someone to say something.