

2009



Happy Thanksgiving

Guest of Honor: C. D. Wright
a menu poem

shooting butter
dishes out of the sky

Thanksgiving 2009

Guest of Honor : C. D. Wright

A menu poem

Thanksgiving 2009 a menu poem; Guest of Honor: C. D. Wright

Text by Geoffrey Gatza
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14 Tremaine Ave
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Editor@blazevox.org



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C.D. Wright, author of twelve collections of poetry and prose, is a professor of English at Brown University and received a MacArthur Fellowship in 2005. She lives outside Providence, Rhode Island.

Introduction

Welcome to the ninth installment of the Thanksgiving Menu Poem. This is a concept poem structured around the thanksgiving meal I would cook for everyone I could invite to honor a great poet. This year, the guest of honor is C. D. Wright.

It is very easy to honor C. D. Wright; her poetry moves a culture. Her cool poetic manner of gathering phrases that open into pristine abstractions close in on the unfolding human spirit. In mysterious ways the reader understands more than is spoken. The mind fills in, individually to the reader, the gaps that make the whole construct form. Her work has touched me in wonderful ways. There is a look of emerald wisdom in her eye that makes me believe she could tell us what happens beyond death. But I am glad she has never spoiled that surprise.

This year the theme is fun. With the new Obama years I feel like I would like to access the wonder and spectacle of a happy day, and what better feeling than joy for this day of celebration. However, in that ideal of fun I did not want to lose the rigor that goes into this poem series. There is a balance between the work of Wright, the choice of menu and the interplay of poem.

I am a trained chef and I have the ability to prepare this meal and if you come over with a few dollars, I'll prepare this for you :-). Be sure to come back next year for David Shapiro as Guest of Honor and for 2011 when we will honor both Paul Hoover and Maxine Chernoff! Come early and stay late :-)

Love, Geoffrey

Menu

First Course:

Cold-Smoked King Crab, Braised California Artichoke, Sweet Yellow-Bell Purée,
Button Tomatoes, Ossetra Caviar With Celery Star.

Second Course:

Wild Mushrooms Soup with Rice Paper Lobster Raviolis, Kabocha Squash, Cepès Mushrooms,
Black and White Truffles Ribbons

Third Course:

Diver Scallop Roasted Over Heliotrope, 'Beignets' Of Courgette, Cilantro Oil, and Lemon Foam

Fourth Course:

Fresh Heart Of Palm, Puree Of Meyer Lemon, Carrot Emulsion and Fine Herbs

Fifth Course:

Sautéed Hudson Valley Foie Gras, Confit Of Quince & Figs, Armagnac Sauce

Sixth Course: ala carte

Tarragon Roasted Rhode Island Turkey, Malpec and Bras D'Oyster Dressing, Pan Gravy

American Kobe Style Beef Tournedos, Pomme Dauphinois, Sauce Perigueux

Australian Lamb 'Côtes Rotis' Provençal Ratatouille, Merguez Sauce

Pan Seared Duck Breast Confit, Hoison Red Lentils, Sauce Rouennaise

Roasted Pigeon & Quail, Red Cabbage Risotto, Sauce Champignons

Goat Cheese and Local Red And Gold Roasted Beets,

Fresh Greens, Portobello And Balsamic Vinaigrette,

Brunoise Of Celery Root, Shiitake Mushrooms,

Sweet Carrot, English Peas, And Truffle Quenelles

Seventh Course:

Almond Angel Cake With Tapioca Salfrito, Lime Marshmallow And Purple Basil Sorbet

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shooting butter
dishes out of the sky

Thanksgiving 2009

Guest of Honor : C. D. Wright



First Course:

Cold-Smoked King Crab, Braised California Artichoke, Sweet Yellow-Bell Purée,
Button Tomatoes, Ossetra Caviar With Celery Star.

Chef Wembley Worm

Everyone in town dines at Wembley Worm's
As all of the magazines and papers confirm.

He is all the rage with the well to do insects,
monarch butterflies and fashionable spiders.

For Wembley Worm cooks with dirt, grass and stone!
But for all the glitz and glam I, for one, am not a fan.

He would grill and stew, flambé
And broil, sauté and his sauces,

Well, I have to say, his sauces were quite disgusting.
But he would stop and say his dishes are astounding!

A celebration of life and nature is found in the ground.
A tapestry of tastes, flavors and colors truly abound.

Dirt pies, loam salads, and mud soufflés;
Dirt gorp, loam fajitas and mud parfaits;

Dust piecrusts, Duff cream puffs, and Clay Canapés

Gravel Blintzes, Humus Hummus, and Loess Surprise,
Marl Flummery, Silt Sandies, and Topsoil Dandies

His tastes always made people twist and squirm.
But people are not spiders, butterflies or worms

So everyone goes to Wembley Worm's Restaurant
To have a meal that is pristine, to see and be seen,

But I will not go, and wash my hands of the space
And find another fine place like a nice, clean bistro!



Second Course:

Wild Mushrooms Soup with Rice Paper Lobster Raviolis, Kabocha Squash, Cepès
Mushrooms, Black and White Truffles Ribbons

Altamont the Genie

It is, some would say, one of the most reviled,
Ooky, phenomena of the haunted woods, an
unloved genie known to millions as Altamont.

Take a trip down to the green riverbank hollow
You will see this eerie specter sitting alone, absence
of sound with his mushy cheeks and cloying voice.

Altamont the genie was sent away for a very long time.
This genie unwisely granted a request to one who asked
That all of the world's music be stopped, to play no more.

The world, they say, has come a long way since
They sent Altamont to this wood. The Mayor and
Sheriff insisted that the music would go on.

It proved to be unconvincing and the world followed
with a quarter of an hour of silence.

The fortunes of Altamont may be stuck in the riverbank hollow
but the only way is up. If anyone should ask, it would say
All someone has to do is pick up an instrument and play



Third Course:

Diver Scallop Roasted Over Heliotrope, Courgette Beignets, Cilantro Oil,
and Lemon Foam

Benjamin Briege

Come with me Benjamin said the King,

I want to go to Coney Island for a hot dog
And then I want to go to the Plaza for tea.

By hickory Benjamin don't be dawdling!

Yes my liege, no my liege
cried poor Benjamin Briege

Come with me Benjamin said the King,

I want a box of chocolates and a yard of liquorice rope
One hundred scoops of ice cream and make it float.

By thunder Benjamin I'll show you something!

Yes my liege, no my liege
cried poor Benjamin Briege

Come and hurry Benjamin said the King,

Fill my glass with orange juice and another with pie
Get me potatoes and roast turkey stuffed with a goose.

By all the furies Benjamin do more than thinking!

Yes my liege, no my liege
cried poor Benjamin Briege

Come along Benjamin said the King,

Book me passage on a train and we will fly
On the Indian Ocean and swim in the sky.

That's all wrong Benjamin you must be joking

Yes my liege, no my liege
cried poor Benjamin Briege

Come with me Benjamin said the King,

I want to go to Paris or London or Punxsutawney
And fill up my pockets with a horn of plenty.

By Jiminy Benjamin don't be dawdling!

Yes my liege, no my liege
cried poor Benjamin Briege

Come with me Benjamin said the King,

I think I want to sneeze get me a blanket
Get me a sleeve, or a pillow and wastebasket.

By thunder Benjamin I'll show you something!

Yes my liege, no my liege
cried poor Benjamin Briege

Come and hurry Benjamin said the King,

I think I have a master plan of course it includes you
Do not be concerned but of course a plan takes two!

By all the furies Benjamin do more than thinking!

Yes my liege, no my liege
cried poor Benjamin Briege

Come along Benjamin said the King,

I cannot find my towel and I cannot find my duck
I cannot take a shower or take a bath in all this yuck.

That's all wrong Benjamin you must be joking

Yes my liege, no my liege
cried poor Benjamin Briege

And poor Benjamin Briege
Who was constantly under siege

Was too polite inside to tell to his dear friend
You silly old man, it'll all get done in the end.

And besides, you're not the king of anything!



Fourth Course:

Fresh Heart Of Palm, Puree Of Meyer Lemon, Carrot Emulsion and Fine Herbs

Help! I'm Trapped In A Haunted Home and it's all very boring

When I was walking home from the store I went into an open door.
There was nobody home and I felt alone, so off I went running all around.

I ran from one end of this rickety home to the other.
I ran up the stairs and slid down the banister.

I surfed along corridor carpets and long Persian rugs. In a flash
the door snapped shut and I knew in my heart I was trapped.

Out of the wall walked a ghost and he looked me up and down.
Good day sir, I said with a tremble and he tipped his hat my way.

I became rather excited as I was in a real haunted house!
But all the ghost would talk about was last year's weather.

I met a unicorn in a leather wing chair reading the Evening Post
Down the hall a vampire was arguing at the television screen.

On the roof a skeleton was practicing yoga
And the invisible man was wearing a cloak!

A werewolf talked to me for a whole hour about a scarf she was knitting.
An accountant was rifling through balance sheets at the wizard's desk.

In the graveyard out back, the raven was awfully lethargic.
And in the side yard was a lecture on something for witches.

I looked out the window and screamed!
Help! I'm trapped and it's all very boring



Fifth Course:

Sautéed Hudson Valley Foie Gras, Confit Of Quince & Figs, Armagnac Sauce

Emory

A Spoon

Many spoons come in large serving sets, some sets of four and some sets of eight. There is great comfort for the spoon that has a set. In a set there is always someone to take a wash with, have soup with, or snug with in a drawer. Yes, it is a good thing to be from a set, and no, Emory had no set.

Emory was a small white porcelain-serving spoon with a rather special smile. He was too small to stay with the larger silver-serving spoons as he might chip. And he was too awkward to sit in his white dish when it was in the china cabinet. It was stuffy in the cabinet so Emory was happy to meet up with his dish on the table every morning for breakfast. Each morning he sat in some jam. Some days he sat in strawberry preserves, some days it was fig compote and on holidays orange marmalade.

After a wash and a dry no one really knew what to do with poor little Emory. He had no place of his own and as such was placed any old place. Sometimes he was put on a shelf, sometime on the windowsill; sometimes he was just left in the dish rack until the next mornings breakfast. He never minded spending the day in the dish rack as he could see how the whole home moved about. This was much more exciting than the shelf as it was so high up he never could see anything but the spider who lived in the corner. And the dish rack was splendid compared to the windowsill where it was very hot half the day and very cold until the cook came in to turn on the oven.

Once he was mistakenly placed in the silverware drawer. Emory was so scared that he thought the world should have stopped right there. It was very dark in the drawer and Emory was very alone. Unfortunately, the world did not stop and Emory did not stop being scared until the next mornings breakfast. Emory sat in his strawberry preserves and thought about how horrible the last night was. He told his dish, but his dish did not seem to understand. Dish had her spot to live in the cabinet and that was that. Maybe, he thought, he would go back to his

cold windowsill or his shelf and the spider. But no, Emory was back in the dark drawer, and yes, Emory was once again very scared.

Emory was in a bin of odd shaped spoons and forks. A few bins over sat the sets of forks and sets of spoons and sets of knives. They were all very orderly and not very friendly. One fork was forward enough to sneeze at Emory when he said hello. Another looked right past him and just folded into his group. A knife was going to wave back to Emory until another, larger knife came to put her to bed. With a sad sort of shrug, Emory went to sleep.

The next morning must have been special because cook sat Emory in orange marmalade. He loved holidays so he sat upright and very proper. When breakfast was over the holiday was over too. He was back in the wash and back in the drying rack and back in the forbidding drawer.

In the morning, in his fig compote Emory told dish that it was not as bad in the drawer as it was the first night. It was rather dark but he was not cold and there were no spiders. Emory was very frightened of the spider on the shelf when it first moved in to the corner. Then after brief introductions it was plain old Horace Spider ever after. Dish had never met a spider; she had met a fly one time and was rather wary of meeting another. Dish thought Emory was rather brave for being shuffled around to so many odd places and not get lost or worse, chipped. All Emory could manage to convey to dish was that she did not understand. He was not brave at all but very jumbled inside. He smiled and said, "I may be very small but I am bigger than this." And then he was off to place some figs on a bun.



Sixth Course:: ala carte

Tarragon Roasted Rhode Island Turkey, Malpec and Bras D'Oyster Dressing, Pan Gravy

American Kobe Style Beef Tournedos, Pomme Dauphinois, Sauce Perigueux

Australian Lamb 'Côtes Rotis' Provençal Ratatouille, Merguez Sauce

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Brunoise Of Celery Root, Shiitake Mushrooms,

Sweet Carrot, English Peas, And Truffle Quenelles



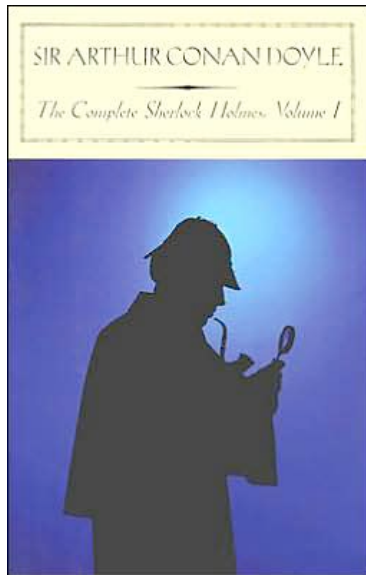
Widow of The Hound of the Baskervilles

After Gustave Morin

wid·ow

1. A woman whose husband has died and who has not remarried.
2. Informal. A woman whose husband is often away pursuing a sport or hobby.
3. An additional hand of cards dealt face down in some card games, to be used by the highest bidder. Also called kitty.
4. Printing.
 1. A single, usually short line of type, as one ending a paragraph, carried over to the top of the next page or column.
 2. A short line at the bottom of a page, column, or paragraph.

Tobacco Used: Peterson's Sherlock Holmes Mixture in Black Churchwarden pipe



Text Used : Complete Sherlock Holmes, Volume I
(Barnes & Noble Classics Series)

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Kyle Freeman (Illustrator, Introduction, Noted by)

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Synopsis

The Complete Sherlock Holmes, Volume I, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is part of the Barnes & Noble Classics series, which offers quality editions at affordable prices to the student and the general reader, including new scholarship, thoughtful design, and pages of carefully crafted extras. Here are some of the remarkable features of Barnes & Noble Classics:

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Widow of The Hound of the Baskervilles

After Gustave Morin

My occupation
Appreciation
Lens
Themselves

Mastiff
Spaniel
The world
You say

Skull

Inadvertently
Family
You

The fire
These columns
Gate
Closed

Marks
Gesture
A thing
Recommend
With you

Moor
Of that
Sentiment
Mortimer
-ing
to us
away
end

Life
Detective
Holmes

A limp
Other

Of it
Beard
Will
Sands
Get it

Study
Surgeons
Boot

Are exalted
Marked
Share it

Farther end
Bags

Of it
Face
Woman
Her
Family
End

Was intended
Attention
Mysterious

Over it
To me
House
A place
Words

Convey
Baskerville hall

Study
Night
Name
Moor
Laugh
Loved
Done

Cleared
Fastened

Me
Country
Before
Call it
Hand
Goes
Charles's death
Died
Woman's hand
Down
Of earnestness
Doing
My visit
See you
Done

Effort
Wrote it

House
Point
Letter
It

Morning
Of the tragedy
Moor

Mind
To the convict
My grasp
Was empty
Knew
The world
By the hand

Empty hut
Look
Moment

Case
Wife
His sister
Is his wife

Hall
After
Veins

Watson
Darkness
Eyes with tears
And joy

Trail
With the police
Sir Henry
Sherlock Holmes
To-morrow
End

To do it
Mourn him
Your help
And expectations
Amused exultation
Series of portraits

Presume

The lace
That is evident
Juncture
That message
You cannot come
Home

To do
Shouldn't do it

Sure of her grip
of a desperate woman

Stapleton
Sir Charles
Remaining silent

Now
A house ahead of us
From it
Mirabel screen

This end
Had seen
Fog is over the path
The wall of fog
Down

Giant hound was dead
In the darkness
His face was buried in his hands
Only want our man
Open this door

Her neck
And so atone
Lamp towards it
Tonight

Fierce merriment

Boot
Ever buried
Debris

The russet slopes of the moor
From memory
May have forgotten

And with the neighbors
Murderer
Cult still remained
Most likely to elucidate it
A deperate and dangerous man
Rival of the baronet
Purpose for which the beast was used

Own observations
Might be offered
On the way



Seventh Course:

Almond Angel Cake With Tapioca Salfrito, Lime Marshmallow And Purple Basil Sorbet

Ice Cream Dandy

I
Was
Told I
Could have
One scoop of ice
Cream if I ate all of my
Vegetables. Well I did and
On my scoop of ice cream I will
Drizzle a tiny bit of chocolate syrup,
Some caramel sauce, marshmallow, and
Just a touch of strawberry, a dab of raspberry
The just a dusting of sprinkles, some colored sugar
A few gummie bears, coconut ribbons, and banana chips;
A red liquorish whip for color and a spiral of whipped cream
To make it all look very nice and a tasty reward for eating healthy!



A Gift for the Road

A Rocket Full of Pie

A My Uncle Edward story

Thank goodness for my Uncle Edward! He is always there to help me out and show me the right path no matter how far from it I manage to steer! It's a fact; I am not the smartest of rabbits by any stretch of the imagination. Quite a dolt, as mother would say. But happily, I am quite good at quite a lot. I can hold my own on the best of days in burrowing, games, and reading. I am a fine cook and have been in charge of the family herb garden for several years. It is true that I have been known to make many rather silly mistakes, such as the old salt for sugar in the kool-aid; or to pull out an ugly weed only to find it was a perfectly fine flower. These mistakes are small occurrences in themselves however when added up, well, they seem like a lot more than they really are. It's a shame really, you would think that a broken flowerpot might be a happy event or a cause for celebrations; one gets to go out and buy a whole new fashionable pot for a wonderful new flower. It's just what the living room needs, right? But no, this line of reasoning may be fine for you and I, but with some rabbits, well, this thinking just won't do. And I'll be the first to say, following this line of reasoning often leads me into a lot of unnecessary trouble.

At school, I do rather well. I am a popular bunny with many fine friends. Well, maybe not a popular rabbit, but a friendly rabbit nonetheless. I am not a good scholar but I try very hard. Mr. Warble, my math teacher finds it a comfort to tell me, "long division is not for all rabbits, is it? We are meant to multiply!" And he would giggle on an on in that uncomfortable way rabbits of a certain type seem to laugh with children who do not understand what we are laughing at. I would nod my head in agreement to this kind sentiment, but long division was not something I looked forward to as a career. To multiply seemed somewhat worse. And I would say so, "Mr.

Warble, I am just as bad at my multiplication tables as I am at division.” Mr. Warble would choke to a stop and say something odd like, “well at least you have a kind family to look after you,” and shove me out the door.

If I have nothing else, I have family. I have a very good family as a matter of fact. My mother and father love me just as much as they do my eight brothers and sisters. My Father’s brother, Edward lives with us too. Well, not with us exactly. Edward has his own warren just over the hill. “It’s close enough for comfort but not so close as to trip over little ones” He would often say. He was so comfortable with this arrangement he would often stay at our warren quite a bit. Mother would say a bit too much, but Edward knew, or rather would comment, “this is her way of speaking, she says things in reverse you know. It’s her way of saying, come over more, my boy.” And so he did. Edward would come over for breakfast, as our warren was right at the end of his morning walk around the pond. At lunchtime he would check on mother while on his way to market and always collected her list of needed comestibles. On his way home from market he would meet father on his walk home from the carrot farm and we would all have a nice dinner together. In the evening we would all gather around the fire and Edward would tell us the most fascinating stories of his travels. These entailed rather frequent run-ins with odd fellows of the forest, as he calls his acquaintances. Edward is very clever and often had wild stories to tell us of strange adventures he had in our rather dull little forest.

It’s not really a forest at all, is it? Edward calls this his forest and it is not a forest. It’s not even his for that matter. We live in a green space near the park, we are in middle of a nice suburban neighborhood just a bit north of the city. Father thinks its very nice although mother wants to go back to the country. She grew up on a dairy farm and finds the whole city pace a bit tiresome and loud. She often says the same things about Edward, so I am not sure which she wants to move away from. But mother does love Edward as she so often says; you can’t get rid of family. And even if we moved to the country, I am sure Edward would insist on coming with us. He is really thoughtful in that way.

Edward is so thoughtful that he even helps me with my homework. He often helps me with a great deal more than just homework; he understands the problems that arise in life whose solutions are just not taught in school. He is a good listener and has very good advice on a variety of subjects. “I’m a rabbit of the world, my boy,” he

would snort and look away as if he had something in his eye. I can talk to him in ways I cannot chat with father. Not that father cannot help, he is just very busy at the farm and when he is home he is sure to tell me how tired he is and how many carrots he had to tend and not to bother him with such small problems. So, it is off to Edward. Edward is always there and has fine answers to just about everything; even the odd questions that tend to come up. Edward not only will take a question like, how many shoes would a centipede need to run a two hundred kilometer race? He would have the answer.

“Well you’d need one hundred and twenty, wouldn’t you? One hundred shoes for the runner and twenty extra just to be sure your runner would have a spare; just in case of the odd flat tire, eh!” He slapped his knee and laughed and laughed. “And if your centipede was going dancing, that would be another matter entirely. I would think he should take only fifty pairs of shoes for dancing. That seems about right. In a race you need to be prepared for problems. At a dance you just need to be delightful.”

“I’m not sure that is right,” I said to him.

“Well of course it is. At a dance you should always be delightful or no one will want to dance with you.”

“No, I mean about the centipede. I think the answer is just one hundred.”

“Well yes, one hundred shoes is fifty pair, yes. So when dancing that’s all one needs.”

“No I mean about the race. I think the centipede needs only one hundred shoes.”

“What if he has more than one hundred feet?” He asked.

“Well a centipede should have one hundred feet.”

“But I’ve know several centipedes and they all had a different number of feet. It’s just a rumor that they have one hundred feet. You believe everything you read in those books of yours, don't you?”

“I think the answer is one hundred.” I said sheepishly.

“Maybe.” He said with a glint in his eye. “Maybe not. I think the question is asking you to think a bit beyond the footwear of the insect world. In a race, preparation is the key to winning. And if you wear one hundred shoes, you would want some extra, just in case.”

“In case of what?”

“Well anything, my boy. Anything can happen and it often does.” Edward tapped a paw to his nose with an aura of knowing.

“It’s a math problem, uncle. Anything just doesn’t happen in math. It just doesn’t.”

“If it’s math you are being tested on then maybe you are correct.” He shrugged. But in life, when you meet up with a centipede I’m sure he’ll tell you to bring extra shoes with you to a race.”

“But no extras for a dance?” I said with a wryly.

“No boy, at a dance you will want to take off the shoes you have on; not put more on.”

“But if I go running in a race should I bring an extra pair of shoes?”

“Well no boy, you’re a rabbit and you don’t wear shoes. You run fine as you are.” Edward smiled at me in the way he often does when he feels like he has won something with me. I thought about this and was rather

confused. I know I don't wear shoes but I often get confused when Edward and I talk about math. I put down my homework and pulled a book from my haversack.

“What do you have there?” Edward looked up with a surprise. “Poems and nursery rhymes, eh?”

“Yes, I have been assigned to read a poem from this book in front of the class. Each of us have to read a poem and the best one will be chosen to read at the School Days festival in June.”

“Would you like to win and speak at your festival?” He asked eagerly rubbing his paws to warm himself with excitement.

“I'm not sure I want to win.” I said shyly. “I don't like speaking in front of people and I am not sure that will get me very far in life. I get very nervous in uncomfortable ways and besides I don't understand poetry. So I don't think I should do this.”

Which is true. I am not a fan of poetry and I get fearful trembles when I even think about getting in front of the classroom. My sister Gloria, who loves poetry is always spouting something about the springtime, or flowers oft blooming into onions. Yuck. I just don't know why these poet people just don't say what it is that is on their mind. What is it that they are getting at! I mean to say; something should be done about the whole bothersome situation. Why not have these poets say what it is they mean to say and just get on with it. But this argument doesn't have any influence on Gloria. She says I am just dumb; and that is generally that. And, I do have to take Gloria's side on this. She is quite correct when she says I am rather dull and get confused much too easily. It has the wonderful effect of excusing myself from listening to more of her silly poems. Unfortunately, that particular excuse does not get me out of reading a nursery rhyme for Mrs. Chattermore, my English teacher.

Mrs. Chattermore is one of those ladies of literature who love art a bit more than the rest of us. She is always flowing around the classroom on one author or another like the many colored scarves she always wears around her neck. It's all very distracting. And in a word, Mrs. Chattermore is distracting. She had been at our school for

over one hundred years, or so Edward said. She taught both my father and Edward years and years ago when they attended school. Edward says she was very old then; so that must make her one hundred and fifty five years old, if a day, maybe older. I shuddered at this thought. So when I took up my case with her about my not problems with poetry, I did it gingerly. I told her that I am just not up to the task, or as my mother says, I'm clearly a dolt. Mrs. Chattermore calmly said, "it's all right, most poets' mother's hold the same view of their sons. And with great luck, you might find a hidden love for poetry. We can only hope for small miracles."

While I was praying for my small miracle Mrs. Chattermore flipped through her book of assigning poems and began to assign. She chose Baa, Baa, Black Sheep for Betty; Who Killed Cock Robin? to Benjamin; Three Blind Mice to Lola, and so on until I was the only one left without a poem. There was a bit of tension in the air. For a moment or two I thought I was off the hook and I was really free from this reading as I was a simpleton, a dumb bunny just as everyone said. And for the first time, I felt grateful for being me.

But this feeling of relief would not last long, as most good feelings are often brief. Out from a bottom drawer came a different book that she quite dramatically handed right to me. I was rather embarrassed when Mrs. Chattermore stood up and walked slowly over to my desk and stood over me and read aloud my assigned poem:

*Sing a song of sixpence,
A pocket full of rye.
Four and twenty blackbirds,
Baked in a pie.*

*When the pie was opened,
The birds began to sing;
Wasn't that a dainty dish,
To set before the king?*

*The king was in his counting house,
Counting out his money;
The queen was in the parlour,
Eating bread and honey.*

The maid was in the garden,

*Hanging out the clothes;
When down came a blackbird
And snapped off her nose.*

I'll tell you, I had a genuine shiver down my back, and when she got to the icky bits, well I almost fainted. This just didn't sound right; I must have done something awful to be assigned this to read in front of everyone. Why would anyone bake birds in a pie? Who was this king and why was he counting? What kind of government allows a king to be in charge of the money? And what's the back-story to this whole nose business? Well, I was startled by the whole event and wondered why Mrs. Chattermore chose this for me. My talks with her over my hesitancy to poetry must have raked up deep feelings of dislike for my plight. It was then I decided that I just shouldn't confide in her anymore, who knows what else I might provoke. I would ask Edward, he is always helpful! Edward would find a way out of this!

After school I walk toward the pond where I pictured in my mind Edward smoking lavender from his black clay pipe in a scene of peace and serenity. But I knew this could never happen, as a matter of fact he was having a heated conversation with a water beetle about the state of the lake due to the poorly run community council. Politics seems to bring out the oddest reactions in people so I try to stay away from the whole strange business. I stayed back a bit near a fern until an opportune moment arose to announce that I was there. It was a few minutes of rather moving discussions using many words I just didn't understand, and for a minute it seemed they would come to blows. But then a laugh broke in and a pleasant chirping meant all was well in the world once again. From where I stood it sounded like they agreed on one thing only and that was to hold off on their argument until the same time tomorrow. I cleared my throat with a loud *ahem*, as I walked up to them, and after the usual greetings of hello and good day, I told them how it was not a good day. I explained the day's events, Mrs. Chattermore and the rest of it. They kindly agreed to sit and hear the poem. The water beetle, Mr. Jonas, said it couldn't be as horrible as all that, could it? I insisted that it was and they sat themselves down. I read as best as I could, stammering in some bits and a too fast in others. But, all in all it was not that bad.

“That’s a reasonable reading of that piece.” He said and sat back in his chair and nodded his head in a disturbed fashion. “It’s not the way I remember it. But if that is the way she wants it read then maybe that’s the way they do things now.”

“What’s new about this poem, Uncle?”

“Well just everything, that’s all.” He said with a snort. “In my day it was not ‘a pocket full of rye’, it was ‘a rocket full of pie.’ Blueberry pie to be exact,” And folded his arms as if I had done something to upset his sense of all things right in the world.

“But Uncle, it’s in the book.” I said as if I was apologizing for something I had done wrong.

“Well you are always bringing strange book home from who knows where. And what do I always tell you about books?”

“I’m sorry, I was just assigned this poem to read. I didn’t write it.”

“What did I tell you about books?” He asked me again.

“Well you say to not to judge a book by its cover.”

“No not that, the other thing.” He said with a grumbly smile.

“That a book with blank pages costs more than a book with printing.”

“Precisely!” He said and wicked his whiskers as if vindicated.

“But what does that have to do anything, let alone my reading this poem in front of the class?” I asked him a bit impatiently. I was beginning to get just as confused with this poetry business as I was with math.

“Well I’ll tell you. You read it all wrong didn’t you. You didn’t put a blueberry into the whole poem. And it’s about blueberries, my boy, not blackbirds at all.” He began walking back and forth and talking in grand gestures with his hands. “Not to mention blackbirds do not go about pecking the noses off of anyone. Leaving behind for a moment the gruesome idea of baking them in a pie. Twenty-four no less! They are really quite nice people and I think you should not slander them in such an easy manner.” Edward got up and began to walk around the edge of the pond. As he looked out at the water he folded his arms behind his back and said in a rather disappointed tone, “what would North think of this poem?” North is the one of Edward’s oldest and dearest friends, and of course, a crow. “I don’t think North would like this poem at all.”

“But Uncle I didn’t write it, Mrs. Chattermore chose this piece for me to read. It was pure chance that I got this. Anyone in the class might have been assigned this. It’s a well respected nursery rhyme; she assures me.”

“Well it sounds rather upsetting to me; it perpetuates untruths about birds.”

“And pies” I chimed in enthusiastically, as if taking up his cause might get me back in his good graces. He looked at me with quick stern glances to let me know that I was not helping. It seemed as if he knew what this silly poem was all about. I needed him to help me understand what to do about all this. I was getting that frantic feeling you get in the stomach when you get so very confused that you don’t have the right words to express yourself fully. And I when I had the right moment I explained all this to him by saying, “Uncle, pleeeeee!”

“Well I’ll tell you boy, first we have to change the whole poem.”

“But I’m not sure that is what Mrs. Chattermore had in mind.”

“No matter, boy. Just listen to me and you’ll be just fine. Once I remember it properly you’ll have fine poem to read.”

“Remember what?”

“The poem, of course.”

“What poem?”

“The blueberry poem. I just told you.”

“But I just cannot read a poem that you just up and remember. That’s not how it’s done, I don’t think.”

“It sure is.” Edward said quite convincingly.

I stopped and thought on this for a moment or more, “it’s not a real poem then.”

“Well boy, what is a real poem?” Edward asked to my blank confused face. This was definitely worse than math.

And so it was, I was just fine after listening to him. We worked on the poem and tweaked it and got it right back to where Edward remember the poem from his youth. It sounded rather nice too. I practiced and rehearsed and practiced some more. When it was my time to stand up in front of the class I felt very prepared. I was ready to not only read my piece I was ready to win the whole competition. I would go right on to the School Days festival and read for everyone. Edward would be in the audience. Mother and father would both be very proud. This would be particularly special, as they have, to date, had no other reason to publicly be proud of me in any school function. Father was always very sad that I did not receive his love and athletic gift for croquet. He was quite the player in his day and even went to college on a scholarship. But I am not very good at sports, even

worse at music. One time I brought home a tuba, much to my mother's horror. It was the tuba or the triangle, as these were all the open instruments play for our school orchestra, and I just couldn't bring myself to play the triangle, I mean really. The music teacher thought the tuba was a splendid choice. In no time flat I was tooting along to the rest of the other rabbits in the orchestra. We sounded dreadful to my ear but I am rather dim at these things. All the parents seemed to smile when we performed. They always seemed to smile more when we stopped, sometimes they would even go so far as to clap. But after a convincing speech from my father I gave up my newly discovered passion for music to ensure my mother's health. She would get the most severe of headaches when I played my tuba. Father said it was killing her and I just could not, in good conscious, go on playing even though they loved my passion for music. It was, as all good things, just too much for mother and it would eventually be the end of her. So everything depended on this poem.

It was with this weight on my shoulder that held me down for a brief moment when Mrs. Chattermore called out that it was my turn to read. I stood up from my desk and slowly hopped to the front of the classroom. It was very quite and every whisker pointed at me. I flipped through my papers and fidgeted a bit. I cleared my throat with a brief cough hoping that this might stop me from fainting. I was very afraid and stood in that still pose rabbits stand in when they are frozen with fear.

And in a shot, I heard in my mind Edward's stern voice shout, "What's a matter with you boy! Hop to it!" and in a blink all thoughts left my head and I began to read.

*Sing a song of sixpence,
A rocket full of pie.
Four and twenty blueberries,
Baked in a pie.*

*When the rocket was fired,
The berries began to sing;
Wasn't that a fancy thing,
To shoot into the sky?*

*The Sun was in his counting house,
Counting out his time;*

*The Moon was in the twilight,
Sleeping in the dawn.*

*The stars were in the galaxy,
Twinkling in the sky;
When up came a blueberry
Baked in a pie.*

I read clearly and confidently. And when I was done. The class began to clap as if I had done something wonderful. As you would figure, I felt more uncomfortable than ever. I was about to stop them all and make a great statement that this was not a real poem at all, it was just something my Uncle remembered; when with a start, Mrs. Chattermore said, “Enough!” Silence fell over the classroom.

It was a few minutes before order was restored. “I can see apples do not fall far from their trees, Mr. Frère,” and Mrs. Chattermore began scribbling furiously into her grade book, muttering about small miracles. I knew at that moment I was doomed.

When the time came for announcing the winner I was all in a sweat. I had done well but I knew Mrs. Chattermore would not be pleased that I changed things all around. I had done a horrible thing; I disassembled art and made it my own. I am sure she would report me for this. Or worse, call father at the carrot farm and I would be spoken to in that strained tone fathers take when they are displeased, all because I listened one time too many to my Uncle Edward. I hung my head and felt that extraordinary feeling of shame.

Well, of course, in the end I won. But it was not for a long time did I know exactly why I won that competition and got to read this silly poem for the School Days festival. The reading went well and after the event, Edward would only say rather contentedly, “Well boy, there are several ways of going about getting things done, and one way to do it right. And that’s the right way, now isn’t it.” He tugged at my father’s arm and said in a hushed tone, “and who’d think that old buzzard would have developed a sense of humor after all these years.”

My father giggled in a way that I seldom saw, he laughed lightly with his shoulders. But my mother was not so polite. “You really know how to spoil something nice, Edward.” My mother said pointedly after she gave me a big hug. I was just as confused as ever, but I felt happy that everyone else was happy. That seemed to be all that was important.

It was several years later when I learned why Mrs. Chattermore chose that poem for me to read. It was at her memorial service when my father told me of their time as her student. When they were younger, Edward and he would go about making up rhymes, poems and stories. She loved their playful nature and how easily they toyed with language. Mrs. Chattermore believed Edward had the makings of a fine poet. It was in her class when Edward wrote the blueberry poem. Mainly, I now understand, to mock her and her love of literature. It was youthful rebellion that spurred on Edward’s writing, and she could see this and encouraged him even if he could not directly appreciate it as he might at a later, more quiet moment in his life. Her choice of this blackbird poem was indeed a harkening back to those days of creativity, hoping she might hear it one more time. And hear it she did, and if she was listening, she also heard the most unusual of noises, a quiet Edward, stunned by the kindness of a teacher’s thoughtfulness. He was never quiet for long, but this day he was more quiet than I had ever known him.



Gatza is the author of seven books of poetry; *Housecat Kung Fu* is now available from Meritage Press (2009). His *Not So Fast Robespierre* (2008) and *Kenmore: Poem Unlimited* (2009) are available from Menendez Publishing. He is also the editor and publisher of BlazeVOX [books]. Gatza lives in Kenmore, New York.

<http://www.geoffreygatza.com/>



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