

Notes on the post-baby Facebook poetry writing project

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“You mean you’re outsourcing your poetry writing?” --Sally Picciotto

I type this on my iPod with my left hand. Baby, asleep in my right arm, would not have me move. The most frequent comment she receives from strangers is that she has a “shikkari shita kao.” What the hell does that mean? That her face will not crumble in an earthquake? That her face bears the mark of good craftsmanship? Whatever. I want to know how to have babies and keep writing. Or so I claim. I was never a write-every-day kind of writer in the first place, so why start now? I always liked writing late at night, and now I’m up late at night several times a night, so why not? I listened to Mahler’s 5th a lot during labor. So, the first smidgen of post-baby poetry, 19 days after Baby’s birth:

Sunday, November 22, 2009
4:46am

Tour

Of the house, of Mahler

And to your right is the kitchen. This is the storm chasing the kitten section. Help yourself to whatever utensil suits your needs, and listen for the brass alarm, which will let you know when the time has come to take the heat out of the kettle –

Then I realized my sleepiness couldn’t keep up with the writing of poetry, so I enlisted Facebook. Here is the first status update/poem prompt:

SN: marina is chugging away and i am writing a poem. please contribute with: a few obscure things from your kitchen, and a few things you love/hate about mahler.

Ben Basan and Nada Gordon “like” it.

Nada likes Mahler’s spectacles, Joshua likes the h in his name.

Then I figured I could at least do that much, once a night – to write a Facebook status update asking for contributions in the form of poetry.

So here is Number 2, on November 23, 2009:

SN: okay so i can’t actually write much. the status update itself is a lot. perhaps you (you!) can write the poem for me (below), sort of renga-style, by adding 1-5 words each. What I would like is: a PROSE POEM in which the pronoun is always YOU and the location is always INSIDE/OUTSIDE THE DOMICILE or INSIDE/OUTSIDE THE BODY. Let’s go:

You
pluck the arcane eggplant of your appendix
womb-maker

from the depths of a duplex brightly you
/ Your body makes a sound everyone but you can hear
hesitate to leave home in the rain
leave a column of butterflies of light
Locked in your mind...
no outside is not also column of light
I love you.
dropping from sugar dusted fingertips
/You draw the orange-tinged Birch leaves toward their final rest on cold limestone
seems so freaky/ to take you out of me...
when two is another
Never gonna give you up / Never gonna let you down / Never gonna run around / and desert you
you walk through the mirror-door
You watch the red brick wall darken with rain, open the window to breathe it.
you and the bad clementine. you and the predator drone. you and the kitchen sink. you and the global
positioning system.
skin part storm

SN: Thanks all - this poem is now "closed" - please stay tuned for tomorrow's poem prompt.

The above is a compilation of all the comments, with contributor's names removed. I admit the "self-writing poem" could use some revision, or perhaps I needed to improve the nature of the prompts. No. 3, on November 24, 2009:

SN: thanks for all your contributions so far! here comes collaborative poem prompt no.3: please write a sentence beginning with "This" and ending with "?"

C.E. Putnam This tear drop of coffee on my wristwatch; will it enrage my handler?

Lars Palm this lamp outside is called the sun?

Stephen Cope This is what?

Nada Gordon //This// this?

Nada Gordon: I know, strictly speaking that wasn't a sentence. I noticed in the last one that almost no one followed the rules you had so explicitly set out. Leave it to humans to both require and resist restraints (and maybe keep that in mind as you raise Marina).

Stephanie Rioux This can be?

Konrad Steiner Thistles rip my flesh?

Andrea Lingenfelter This didn't strike her as an auspicious beginning, but then what would you expect with all of those centipedes crawling across the floor?

Lise Phillips This feels sad, because This is always separated from That, sometimes inches apart, no?

Nada's comment was true, and yes, something to keep in mind as I raise Marina, and also as I continue the project. Some other prompts included:

No. 4: Status, statuses - Marina and I would like to hear about your PERSONAL OR PUBLIC WEATHERS, but without talking about the weather.

No.5: What is outside your window that is neither man-made nor natural?

No 11: last time you cried?

No 14: please take one of your earlier status posts, and replace as many words as you can with its most esoteric synonym.

In any case, it became clear to me that the poems weren't quite writing themselves like I had hoped, so I concluded that I will end up using this material as the ingredients with which I

will write the poems. Not exactly outsourcing. Eugene, though, who works at a company, says that that's what outsourcing is like.

Yesterday I asked everybody who contributed – well, not directly, but via a new status post - if I could quote their contributions now (for this current piece) and later (for the “real” project), uncredited. I plan to give credit in some fashion, if not now, then later, but I said uncredited to be safe, although if I wanted to be safe I'd have to ask efwryone I mean everyone specifically instead of only through a random status post that they may or may not see. But Facebook is like that, and I am like that. Now why didn't the iPod correct my efwryone for me? Now the built-in “intelligent keyboard” thinks that efwryone is a word I like to use, and now I can type efwryone really fast with my left hand. Efwryone efwryone efwryone. I promised I wouldn't baby-talk, but perhaps typos are the baby-talk of the hand. Lynn Xu asked me if I was going to start writing mommy poetry. I don't think that is exactly what I want to do. Or is it too late? Anyway, it's impossible for me to say right now how the credit issue will work until I've figured out how to use the material.

I had decided I would continue this project until Baby slept through the night, which happened on January 2nd, 2010:

SN: Marina just slept from midnight to 6am. Straight!! I woke up with breasts like rocks and a wet shirt, and I don't dare believe this is the end of night feedings, but hooray!! And I think this may be a good place to end this nightly FB project - so everyone please add your line to yesterday's no.41 if you haven't already done so! And thanks!! for writing in - I'll soon start writing the poems using your comments.

So the last official entry was:

SN: No. 41: A sentence beginning with “happy” and rhyming with “Happy new year!” - ? (Happy blue deer?)

happy new cure
Happy if you were here
happy drink beer
(the above is also a possible new year's resolution)
Happy New Fear
Happy bagel shmear
Happy you cheer!
Happy weather's clear
Happy you near/Happy (you) flew here

[interjection by SN] Hey it's cute! I was so deliriously tired last night when I wrote this one...! Still exhausted. Back to sleep!

Happy true tear
happy zoo sear
Happy Brassiere!
happy ewe ear!
Happy zoo rear!
Happy Jew Fear?
Happy glue gear!
nappy ewe's ear!
Happy pule sphere!
happy new career?
Happy true fear!
Happy shoe mirror!

happy choo lear
Happy two beer?
happy; stuck on happy if you will, because I have gotten my drink on, said goodbye to the dog, the old
dear, and am heading down to a wreck of a place, my friend the boat builder's shack, down at the end of
Choo Pier
Happy moose sneer!
happy glue tear; happy Sioux beer; happy blue rear; happy queue here; happy Jew leer
Happy new leer!
happy dew tear
Happy sans sneer
Happy you, dear.
Happy chew sphere, screw beer, flu gear, spewed clear, true tears

My favorite, one of many, might be "nappy ewe's ear!" by Pierre Joris and "Happy moose sneer!" by Celeste Lashley.

What I never told Facebook was that the long night of sleep led to clogged milk ducts led to mastitis which led to fever and extreme pain which led me to a local doctor who was an incredible asshole to both Eugene and I, and, well, I had a rough week and my mom kept showing up with food, thank you mom.

But everything is much better now, and I've now managed to write this whole thing (minus the quotes from Facebook that I have to go find) on my iPod with my left hand, and Baby still sleeps in my right arm. I also need to write an introduction to the Kawata Ayane book, but that I don't think I can do with my left hand on my iPod.

That's all I can say for now, but Baby will be 3 months old next week, and we'll just have to see how the rest of the year of writing with Baby goes. It also occurs to me, as I review all the comments that people posted to my prompts, that keeping and presenting them all as is could be an interesting document in and of itself, so the question of editing or not editing, crediting or not crediting, and how, all remains to be determined.

Also, a shout out to my cousin in Germany, Masanori Akashi, who, of all the bazillions of relatives I saw over my pregnancy and post-partum, was the only one who thought to ask if I had been able to continue writing. He lives in Germany and writes in Japanese about music; one of his recent books is about the use of music in all of Kubrik's films, which is awesome, especially for the movies you've seen. Now that may have sounded like a plug for his book, except that the book is in Japanese so only a handful of you would be able to read it anyway. I guess I was just bragging about my cool cousin, then, but now I'll stop.

January 29, 2010
6:05pm
Silk Road Building
Tokyo, Japan