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Making Literature Conference

2019 Conference

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Mar 1st, 1:30 PM

### My Best Poems

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Cortelletti, Brett, "My Best Poems" (2019). *Making Literature Conference*. 1.  
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## Now When Jesus Came, He Found that Lazarus had Already Been in the Tomb Four Days

and his will had been executed. Lazarus' s  
pound of oil was left to Martha, but Mary  
disputed the will, saying that Lazarus was ill  
and if in proper health would have left  
it to her. Whatever the tax collector couldn't  
take was left for his father who used the  
denarii to wipe away his family's tears.  
Then there was a little hiccup when it turned  
out that Lazarus wasn't so dead after all,  
and he wanted his stuff back. The High Priest,  
who got an almost brand-new lawnmower  
out of the ordeal, thought about having Lazarus  
re-killed for good measure, but decided that one  
death was good enough to validate the will.  
Now Lazarus had nothing but his second life.  
He sat across the room watching as Mary  
anointed Jesus's feet with the oil *he* bought  
as a souvenir on his trip to Cancun. For a while  
Lazarus bummed around, sleeping on couches  
that used to be his until everyone got tired  
of his freeloading. He lived out the rest of his days  
in a trailer park where all the lottery winners  
moved after they'd squandered what they won.  
When Jesus died, nobody mentioned a will,  
and when he heard that Jesus had resurrected,  
Lazarus rolled his eyes.

## Mowing the Lawn on a Thursday Evening

Sometimes I fantasize about being killed  
by something beyond my control--

something final, but quick, like my daughter  
murdering me after I refused to pay

for her semester abroad in Amsterdam.  
Or maybe I could be crushed by a semi

when the driver failed to check his blindspot  
as he merged onto I-71 South because

he was preoccupied with Mindy  
on the sex-line, describing her latex

corset to him. Or maybe a plane could crash  
into my yard as I'm mowing it. I'd never

hear it coming with my headphones basting  
"Detroit Rock City" to drown out the hum

of the mower. There was so much of the yard  
left to mow, there was no way that I would have

been able to finish it all. The next morning  
the homeowners association would be up my ass

about the botched lawn, but now I'm dead  
and the yard is on fire, but honestly, it's a relief.

Thank you, pilot, for ending it all before  
the KISS song got stuck in my head.

## Word of my Death

Started as a rumor in the heart.  
After the final pulse, the last

of my oxygenated blood carried  
the news through my veins. The

town crier left the aorta and tucked  
my capillaries into bed and asked

my brain to not worry and told  
my stomach a white lie, saying,

*finish what you're doing and save  
the rest for tomorrow.* The red blood

cells waited in stagnation and  
the white blood cells raised white

flags, surrendering to the decomposers  
to come. Everything was closed

and I left the place a mess for  
the next owners to clean up.

Ex Pewica

He volunteered to distribute communion  
at church. During the offertory he  
slipped away without giving anything  
and entered the room that probably  
has a Latin name for 'where the sacraments  
are kept.' He fastened the velcro  
on his robe, lashed the rope around his waist,

and stepped onto the altar as the pastor  
broke the bread saying, "Do this in remembrance  
of me." He grabbed the tray of pre-portioned  
wine servings and stood beside the pastor like a dog  
on hind legs. The first member of the  
congregation approached him: "Blood of Christ,  
shed for you." His voice cracked. After twenty

recitations, the words became sounds, "Blud ov Kryst  
shedfur yu." Some said "Amen" and others  
said "Thank-you." He had never thought to say  
thank-you before. Would anyone really  
say thank-you to Jesus after He let His punctured  
hands bleed into their plastic shot glass?  
Or were they thanking *him* because when he gives

out the sacrament, it's not the blood of Christ,  
but only cheap wine, yet they thank him anyways  
for trying to his best to make it sacred.

## Ars Poetica With Egg

Stand in a cold rain long enough to contract a fever of 102°, place the egg in your mouth and leave it there. Once the fever subsides, sanitize the egg with a swig of tequila. Remove the egg from your mouth and reach for your grandma's largest hoop earring and submerge it in fire until it glows red and plunge it through the eggshell and let it cook the egg from the inside out. The egg is done when the yolk is solid and any uncooked egg white has leaked through the cracks. Eat it alone in a room without windows with the lights turned off and repeat that innovation is worth the pains of creation.

## On the Origin of Phrases

I like to imagine  
that on some sunny  
day ten thousand

years ago, a guy was  
skinning a cat, starting  
at the head and working

his way down the spine  
when another guy walked  
up to him and said,

“You’re doing it wrong.”  
Our hero instantly  
responds, without sarcasm,

“There’s more than one  
way to skin a cat, Keith.”  
Keith realized that he was

being an asshole and left.  
A day or two later, our hero  
was crushed by mammoths

while hunting, and Keith  
felt pretty bad about the  
whole thing. He decided

to immortalize his friend  
by sharing his cat skinning  
wisdom. Thousands of years

later, nobody really skins  
cats anymore, but the saying  
lives on. Good thing,

because if it didn’t, then  
our hero’s suffering would  
have meant nothing.

## Classical Conditioning

I have begun asking my closest  
friends to punish me for  
all of the inconsiderate

things that I do. They stapled  
my lips together when I beat  
someone to the the punchline

of the joke about *a fly six inches*  
*above the water* and they poured  
wax down my ears for not paying

attention to my daughter when she  
tried to tell me what she learned about  
the functions of the ear in science class.

They chide, "If you don't listen to to others,  
it'll be be because you can't hear them."  
For years, I couldn't be trusted

to not put myself before others,  
but now I'm trying to remember  
that other people are people too.

I'd be surprised if I made it another  
week without getting a hand cut off  
for grabbing at the biggest drumstick

in the chicken bucket. At least now  
I'm aware of when I'm being selfish.  
I'm sorry, this poem has been all

about me. Tell me about yourself,  
but I'll have to ask you to speak up  
because of all this wax in my ears.



Mansfield, OH

The car wash has grown a lot since I last saw it and now they have a Five Guys Burgers across the parking lot, but the old Indian Buffet closed down after the owners retired and skipped town. Every billboard that's changed coughs to grab my attention, and the ones that have remained the same since before I learned to read give me a wink: *Warrior's Pizza, Love at First Slice*.

The new baristas treat me like I'm not a regular, and the one that remembers me does not ask, but states, "No room for cream in that, right." The man outside the coffee shop who I thought was senile remembers my name and asks if I ever finished *Infinite Jest*. A new generation of punks have elaborated the old graffiti that my friends left behind by spray painting dicks all over it. I mourn for the painted over walls where I wrote Hermann Hesse quotes and the names of local bands whose songs I forget. As I buy plums at Walmart, my 9th grade history teacher asks how life's going and he actually seems curious. I see an old classmate across the parking lot and am relieved that she didn't say hi and force us to pretend that we've thought about each other once since our last encounter. I feel like swinging by the library, but there are overdue fines waiting for me. Now that I'm old enough, I could pick up cigars from City News or have a drink at Martini's; It wouldn't be the same though. Vice has lost its charm, and I never had the guts to sneak in anyways. There's no romance in a man returning to a bar he never went to.

## On Abstract Expressionism

Jackson Pollock was the painter  
we'd be imitating that day in our  
second grade art class when Miss Rose

told us that people used to fight  
over what his paintings meant  
and whether or not they were really

art. She passed around laminates  
of the controversial canvases.  
All we saw were colorful swirls--

how trivial they must have been, killing  
each other over paintings. Fighting  
to the death to destroy or protect acrylic

swirls. We had cups of paint with holes  
punctured at the bottom for the paint  
to drip out, and we Pollocked about

over old bed sheets. I looked down  
at our creation. Who would fight over  
this one? Who would call it disgraceful

and turn our mess of colors into a bigger  
mess of shredded cloth and wet paint?  
Who would attest to its brilliance and

abandon their family to protect this artifact  
of witless expression? Not me, or anyone  
else in the classroom who helped make it.

Though we were pleased to see it displayed  
above the drinking fountain later that week.

## Cleanliness is Next to Godliness

As I shook off the last drop of piss,  
I thought of the panhandler I passed  
by on my way to the bar, whose sign  
read, "Why Lie, I Could Use A Beer."  
I thought of the offertory that passed  
empty through my hands and how  
thankful I was when my friend forgot  
to collect my share of the gas money  
after our trip to Nashville. I thought  
of Jesus saying *Sell What You Posses  
And Give To The Needy*, and I felt dirty.  
I zip up and go to the sink. I balance  
out the hot and cold water, and I fill  
my hands with soap which I rub  
into every crevice and onto my wrists  
and up my arms until two waves  
of frothed soap collide in the middle  
of my chest and flow down my torso.  
I am submerged in an ocean and  
now, with handfuls of water, I rinse  
the soap away, anointing myself.  
I think this is baptism.