

American Works: Efforts by Greg Bem



About *American Works: Efforts* by Greg Bem:

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All words and images in this book are by the author.

Images taken at Seattle's Kubota Garden and Kirkland's Bridle Trails State Park.

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This book is for Scherezade Siobhan, who broke me free despite it all and despite it all I'm sorry, all I have are these ramblings.

This book uses the font Century Gothic.

The companion book to this book is the Twitter poetry compilation *[Untitled in Black]*, also released in December, 2016.

More information about these books and Greg Bem can be found at <http://gregbem.com>.

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I can safely say I face the grimoire
in a house created out of germination.
Owned by a psychotic, who I have to deal with,
this place forces me to march, and cry.
Around the time I come back,
when all the void has been said,
and all actions committed,
I sleep, in exhaustion, in fear.
The scalpels of daylight await me,
through the fingertips of the windows.

Do you know what time it is?
Retrograde is a blank desk,
filled with invisible dust,
and these are the days and nights
where we feel no love.
My therapist told me:
envision your heart as a flower.
I can't open it, I can't.
Most days I can't.
And winter came so long ago.

The only unique thing
is the flavor of popcorn
and the way I remember laughing,
and the way I remember not thinking,
not having to care about yes or no,
because it never came,
it was exorcized.

Or perhaps a lobotomy
in the middle of the rain,
a sense of calm
soaking the gray matter.

Yellow shades cascade
in bellows of effort.
Some things take time to foster.
Some things take more energy than conceivable.
So I will wait as clenched jaws of doubt
echo through me,
echo through me into new voids,
and I will try my best to reinforce memory.
And get a healthy night of sleep
And meditate.
And go for a walk.
And stay warm.
And eat right.
And be social.
And drink less.
I will try to maintain an illumination
while turning the light off when I leave.



Irreparably I watch the images of the dead black men.
A flight through my skull, entering in through the socket.
How do I ask to be relieved of a world of brutality?
My mind does not exist when I am on the verge of tears.
It does not have to, or perhaps I know nothing.
The landscape is filled with the anonymous tears
we all secretly knew would arrive.
The lighting is dim and the streets are empty.
Places and times like this scrape by,
scrape us, gouge into our layers of flesh.
We become visible through our mutual, exposed, blood.

It was never a question of asking you for more.

It was a question of getting used to you.

When the hair is still damp from the morning shower,
and these thoughts enter like an invasive, coastal storm,
what is the protocol for resolution?

How would you get over it?

How would anyone?

It is almost nine in the morning,

and everyone is in transit:

work, school, shopping.

I sit here like a ghoul, or a phantom,

who has victimized, and never for the last time.

I like camping as I like all American past times.

Like it has something to offer.

Like there is something greater.

Imagine sleeping through rain tapping on the tent.

Imagine the wind rustling your skin

Visions of phantoms freezing you.

Imagine a mode of death.

There is camping.

There is the warmth of camping.

A cocoon of slavery.

A salvation.

In the birthplace of the image,
or perhaps something more derogatory.
In the fucking of the imagery,
I last, more than I have lasted before.
Radioactive, the tint of my tongue
carries metal and sheens.
Threaded light, banded blindness.
Is this imaginary or machinic?
The trick is to abhor, or abject.
A chronic walk, thoroughly staggered,
where life is boundless,
where life comes from, and goes to,
primordial bacteria learning to strangle.



In the ink of the finest print,
the proclamation in a foam of blood:
this is the city where the cranes don't sleep,
where the density of balance
is at its greatest moments.

A pocket full of thread
and the shells, cracked, of food.
Management of an inventory
as red as the knuckles
upon smashing through glass.

Where love once existed,
now we have the tallest,
now we have the most refined.
The visions of grandeur
are coated in a chuckling oil.

A mobius strip of fortresses
untouchable
and pristinely dirtied.

Scholars sitting in the rafters,
inhaling an Americana
of gasoline pumps
which get paid in magnetic strips
in the accounts of the beholders
while rain pours down
far up above where the humans live
and all we get
are the grayed out
are the redacted
sentiments hazy and tired.
We have huffed and we are zoned.
The surrealism playfully idiotic.
A man pushing leaves
down the road
with a machine
thinking about
pushing leaves
down the road
with a machine.
The music of this world
is quintessentially fucked.

I have retreated into an abscess of sunset,
and I have lived to write the line
without sensations, without disgust.
Instead there is a chill on the skin,
though I cannot see my breath,
or feel shivers, unholy or holy,
and I am quiet and asexually present,
a strip-mine and a fault line.
Greater images merging into conflict.
What was once stable and clear
is now a convergence of pain.
In the retreat, in the return back,
I can feel the breaking inwards,
pressure on the heart, the lungs,
and my hair looks so good to pull,
and my scalp looks so great to rip.
Bring forward the sacrifice:
a mirror, covered in smears and dust,
with the faint outline of mold.
These civilizations present themselves.
Representation is a fatigue.
A situation, an acquiescence,
the dawn of turning out the light.

What is health?

Health is the coal never held in fingers.

Health is the pill never savored.

And the images funneled through
like smoke song and notation of flame.

Seek out the last glances

beyond closed circuits

and acute monitoring.

The tension before

the villainy.

The barbed wire grazing the forearms.

You lift yourself up and over.

You enter a yard of triumph and distortion.

An agony of harmony

in the cultivation and the corruption.

Hear the order of things.

Remember a brick

through a window

along a colonial street.

It was the first order

and the last breath

when you realized in the cold

yellowing of intelligence.



I write "Subtechsed" and dream in stretches of horror
if not the stitches of a simply distressing egg hatch of regret.
What exists underneath the tools we have built?
What was the original intention, anyway?
These ramblings like the bramble we ached through
are trials toward a sense of retribution: but whose?
The questions are the filler finding its way to a surface.
A bubbling up, an oxygen, and a rising procedure.
Beyond: the hollow sounds spun across distance.
And there is no more meaning when indecipherable.
Words decay and we pass on almost all decisions,
corpses in an American causeway ablaze,
waiting to hear the arsonist's crackle of prayer.

Once upon
another office
poem
she said:
Let's work
With this data
To extrapolate
The Pain
and sure
the phalanx
of integers
brings with it
a distance bright
daggers or scythes
bloodied flesh
and sure
this thrombosis
readied
for the long sit.

My heart races
the sociopath in me
a homunculus
forgot to shut the door
still sticking an arm out
and this fevered dream
is a dream of death
of all nostalgia.
Americana slaughter
the way some say
hellos and goodbyes
echoes on facades
traces carved into sand
the womb of this life
as cancerous
as the little being
who needs to sleep.

Wretched and torn.
The carpet of grass
soaked and soaking
my littlest garments.
I valued the time
as I value them today.
The brightness quivers
into a boat of bone
cascading through life
avoiding the shores.
In avoidance, a breath
is a new glimmering
creeping across,
cleverly along
the sadness of grass
a plot now coated
in a triumph of blood.



I brace to face the scale
of a world I haven't seen yet.
Its jeweled cervices,
spiny, spindly, spiky currents
that flow through its piques
are permutations
or premeditations
of past lives forsaken like gold.
These choices are inches' worth
of great blooms of sunlight
or a skin of natural, cyclical darkness.
I turn up my snout to it.
I unfold my legs and kindle the wood
that exhibits action, tendency,
the tendons calm as tripwire
ready to deface and defame.
The braces are as shackles,
and eventually fall apart,
through exhaustion or rot,
limbs putrefied like goals,
courage consumed fully
by bacterial landscapes.

I have not seen fire in days.
I have not seen the machines.
Or the glances of the workers.
Chastity results from the episodes.
The crawlers go home after night.
Elongating brings new meanings.
There is a sprig of dawn
and then nothing.
These are the days of graying.
These are the days where yawns
are like knives that disembowel
the sparrows of conversation.
Erupture before the calm
or the calm before we get up
our seats turned into beds of snakes
their scales carrying viruses,
their eyes incisions of shadow.
In wake of these insignias
bring back the flame.
Let us know again char
the brightness turning our eyes
into living vents
where we may dip into terms.

Years of attitude
dissolve into aptitude.
Years I've held my lungs
beyond the periphery
above the stars
the churn of air
a nevertheless of sighs.
The growth of giving starts.
The gift released through
a sequence of claws
formed and formatted.
Beyond the ghostly
everything else
there exists a haunting,
Americana a boil
to burst and cauterize
but when and where?
Chirped birds long dead
are pronounced skeletal.
We exist to throb
at these sour visions.
We exist for years
as a verdant calamity.
We pass by on streets.
We piss into gutters.
The hair on our head
a constant fading reminder
these gifts are petty.

If you can imagine
the titration of fear
ripping across the cheeks
and qualitative decrees
hollow out corpses
on steel beds but tomorrow
we are safe and still
before the science begins.
There is an emergence
through the small slices
of a temporality of anxiety.
There is a drunkenness
beyond the squeamish
where limbs evanescent
bully their way into putty.
This concentration
a hormonal exchange
turning off the fake crystal
to embrace cortisol
and to bundle one's legs
like a stack of rotting books.



It was the verge of choking
and the sink spat blood
as I rustled in my bed
my scalp rejuvenating
its decaying skin.

One must wake mostly
to honor the death of dreams.

One must sit upright
and attend the atrocious smells
of the long-bathed towel.

An endurance is a hardship
we keep like seeds in our bellies.
Sprouts to take down humanity
the way tendrils of evil flower.

Flower and become plentiful.

To eat thyself from within.

To break apart structure.

A collapse of our towers of flesh
to keep us warm at night
and frozen through the day.

Blood in the eyes
is the blood of days
that keeps me calm
and keeps me blind.
I wait and wash
then fall to dream
about lakes of oil
of ringlets of bone
of juries of skulls
and choices of mouths.
Through these black sleeps
and mournful waking
I slowly walk across
pale geographies.
The scrape of footsteps
a personal trust
until I move forward
ankle shattering night
bruised hip of day
and hurt falling prey
to a vague city,
a city that never
ever forgives.

The orgy has come and gone
and the waste of human experience
has gone too, exploding windows
and doorways as a means of a mark.
Fetishes are tools for collapse.
There is a breakdown around
the open mouth of each corner.
Jaws are what stops you and what screams.
Tongue is what latches onto horror.
It is a gruesome fixture, this place,
this existence of absence
as rooted as problematic.
And now there is to be
and to be alone, slowly.
The operations of the crowd
a pressure pressed to throat.

It never starts in the same place.
The trees brittle but alive,
their leaves scattered like old clothing,
the sense of rot and an order of refusal.
These are the natures of the starts.
I am nurtured by the middles.
Landlocked in an apartment
forever to be referred to as prison,
for longer referred to as agony.
Where each movement is a crutch.
Where each breath is a menace.
In the layer of the thieves of life
I sit with my back against nothing,
for I sit hunched like a broken crab
the sun not hitting me to bleach
the sun blocked by an exhaustion of sand.



Sipping the water feels like torn paper
my throat like scissors splashing the cut.
This order of magnitude is an attraction
to a glaze of restitution in the Autumn
of a very Seattle-bled city scraping by,
loose change dangling across sweaty palms,
the bruised toes and the gashed toenails,
the wealth of minute maps of suffering,
and the ground will stay wet for seven months,
and the laughter in the dark will not be Russian,
and the dead will rise daily to feed us.
Wait for the messages the dead dangle,
cyphers of the damned, of the damning,
those who can express far better than us
the hypnogogic vortex of consistent agonies.
The throat isn't slashed amidst these dark days.
It is pumping information, gagged, an ascent.
It requires more tearing of paper,
more bloodied skin, and a beautiful question
arising like foam and bile, an acknowledgment.

From viewing a horizon of blood I commit to fan blades,
for they combat the plagues of built relationships.
Through the veil of wandering I wonder of my footsteps.
I learn nothing but that which is on and that which is off.
This air is smooth and this cocoon is stable.
The language a reaping, a trick, a spool.
Oil within the deepest cavities of the ear
masks the decay of our past and future bodies.
My mind is one place and forbidden to break:
the language of the clouds hums through my irises.
Was it the other language of your face across the aisle,
dark marionette boggled by headphones and breath books,
to keep me in touch with the lesser forms of my own undoing?
Pulling apart sequences with a Western horizon
and it never feels smooth when the glances are hard
and the fingers are shaking in thrombolytic tides.

This book of poems was intercepted by a monster.
Pieces of mind are shoveled into the corner,
looking like Styrofoam and breeding like bacteria.
The feeding transforms them into small people.
They scream and die and get shoveled more.
They go to waste and rot for decades.
Not even the rain can drown their faces.
Not even the wind can carry them to destruction.
A licking of the lips is a fight against the nihilism.
For all the forms that could exist and could be removed
I cry again and again, my astonishment a fist
squeezing the stem to wilt the flower to oblivion.
I break down again and again, my mind a violent murder
with those mopping up pools of blood and tokens of gore.
All of this leads back to the roads of the triumphs
and that we may breathe in and out to exist and to fight
while all our other forms waste and rot so slowly.

Underneath the table
layered against the furthest shadow
is a memory of the ocean
its face composed of eyes
blinking against sand
poised for the gaunt rocks
and its crashes are amphetamines
and its dusk is comradery.
I remember the sound
from so many beaches
stopping me in my tracks
and giving an urge to smile.
What bountiful position!
Neither wet nor dry.
Neither warped nor flat.
Like driftwood prepared to burn
through the animals' fires,
I was eased into place
and set to be still.



My feet are the harvest of the season
that creeps into darkness with each new day.
Light should be shaped and urged.
It should be causality and it should be turned.
I watch myself decay over multiple years.
Now, it is finally uprooting with its veins
and riveting knuckle skins like fault lines
erupting against the constant bends.
When light comes through the largest of the panes
and the room is given a ghostly green color,
the rosy warmth of the skin says hello.
I want to bend into my back and stare at ceilings.
I want to admire the sensations I still have
including those of an everyday awareness.
The grass in front of me has been cut.
The sirens just beyond me have died out.
The windows maintain their blinds.
Roman Flugel raises and collapses at the same time
before my seat of leather and oldest news.

It is with great sadness that I watch the marchers
across a nation founded upon divide, violence like scythe
cutting across the field of grass hundreds of years back,
landscape of trauma with tears as dew in the morning,
canvas of pain so filled many of us forgot the canvas.
Imagining a love that starts a bonfire in the desert's middle.
Imagining a love that brings the canvas to the flames.
Imagining a proper dousing of gasoline with fury.
Dark sky suddenly erupted into the power of the light.
Night as focal for origin stories, like cars flipped over,
like the pressure inside the skin, inside muscle, in all tissue.
Desert dust caking my eyes, or is that the ashen remains?
Imagining a love where the ancient and the present gather
to celebrate a liberation extracted from the inside and out.

The stream as a trickling of data and my heart
is like the rush of wind that I remember on my fingers,
is now on the window, pressing up against it,
the sounds of so many, souls of so many,
it is the resonance that keeps my head down,
my legs walking forward into a determined daylight,
with the information as a web, lure, beacon.
It comes in many names with many faces and
the descriptions taste like the bottom of a pit of coffee
and the feelings inspire my feet to dance along thin carpet,
the patterns hallucinatory, making me open,
and I can feel the change of the world in my throat,
like a slashed branch stuck into a decay of fallen log,
like a bird's wing crushed upon impact into a ragged cliff,
like the back that has been recently pressed and popped,
my throat soar and hoarse and moreover plentiful,
there is room for all the joys and sorrows within,
on this Monday morning in the middle of the citadel.

After Cynthia

A citadel is placed upon the backs of those mad with hunger,
those incapacitated with the poverty of the changing city,
and I feel my chest rise and fall before the glow of the screen
and the staples of words across its fabricated whole.

A citadel where the landscape sorts through us like a factory,
where the souls are guided, and are siphoned from halls to rooms.
Where we may bow before the volcanic god four hours south,
and stare at traffic and water and trees and neighborhood decay,
and the international presence is still there and for how long?
And the grit and grime and locomotion of the people is there
and for how long and on what path and through what,
what circumstances will lead to us staying together,
or being stretched thin, and I look to the citadel for answers,
for it is a dark citadel creeping slowly through all of us,
and it offers us the freedom of bastardized knowledge,
and like cocoons or shells or armor there is a sturdy silence here.



After Monika Khot

I wrote the way it looked.
In a din of a den
is it the worship that counts
the counter?
Talons along instruments
scales brushing against metal,
hordes of the consumers
going through their tastes.
From the back I find an alignment
the crowd a journey
of repressions and eruptions.
What is darkness's role
in a collection of unknowns?
or the reddish tint
that spreads like a bruise
as I am urged to move my face
and direct my eyes again
and again and again?
The counter in me
as the counter in her
as the counter in all.
Beats per minute
like the grinding of bones.
Musical bars shadowed
when exposed to noise.
A language of mutilation.
A cloud of lightning
speaking the memories in fire.
The changeling bites the changed

and moves outward into the ocean.
The fish have been killed, they said,
along with the largest reefs.
Great beauty of destruction and
great unknowing of our lives.
She comes to me mostly in messages
evoking desires and fears like headlines
and I think of the many funerals
and the many, many marriages
haunting this epic simulation.
Prongs of an instrument leading
us through the close proximities
and from caves to cliff ledges.
Crashed water all around, or
our ankles are damp and blued.
This fabric, this skin, the hair
covering my head like a parasite.
A list and we are as similar as new
through the warming of the world.

As water scatters across a frozen land
I promised I'd write directly to and about home
and the freedom that never was truly so.
And the truth that never was freely so.
Nothing itches except when I touch it.
I think of subzero conditions and zero conditioning
and the process of revolt beneath a dark sky,
where dark represents the absence of light,
where light represents the oppression of humanity,
and the possession of a lit well of hunger,
and thirst, but not the way it's shot,
not the thirst of violence, though it's present,
and not the thirst of presence, violent as it is.
The water seeps into skins I will never feel
though I hope for their warmth everlasting
the way I cherish a glow within the known self.

Perpendicular to the rot is the sign, covered in plastic,
and it reads like a defacement of mystery and the wild.
“The fungal disease Laminated Root Rot consumes
both the cellulose and the lignin in the wood,
greatly weakening the root system,” it reads again.
Meanwhile there are scampers and immersions.
There is the skull of the furry chipmunk in gray ether.
There is the roll of the moss that wraps like a scroll,
my fingers green for a moment before the flip to rot.
We walk down the paths like ghosts, hollowed ones,
and the smiles are as difficult as the frowns in dim light.
Like the lacquer that covers the bowl darkness comes,
and I wonder about time being a slowing crawl
and then I wonder about time being death and deadly.
The camera slung on my shoulder weighing and warping.
The rain long gone into the mountains to freeze memories.
I wonder where that chipmunk is now, in that park,
and how much of the rot has clung to its tiny claws.

