

don't make the mistakes
we made...
the fast cry
for slow poetry...
hello frame, give us
pause
the request
really a ratification
down, down
"comes back as a roar"
to celebrate 'crip time'
a droop becomes a drip
of sadness savored, savoring
on one side the page
on the other the page
closer when not touching
others try to bridge you
widened space between
an ocean resisting every sideman excuse

so yes the urge
to push the pain away
to say it's not the heart
must I be superficial dilettante
to want to take that smile
that snuck in on a despairing Wednesday
& collage it with last Saturday's several
& last moment's Tuesday evenings to
say I wouldn't trade this 50 for all their 20s.
"If you can laugh at your oppression,
you've obviously not known true oppression."

"I know you're sad that the young don't respect you
As an elder the way you respected yours when young,
But I kind of like it when my students leapfrog past me."
Obviously, I'm a drama king & now
that we got that out of the way: pronouns,
pawns, and a very large left-handed left hand.

Not so much a tenuous grip,
as a firm
but rare one [like you won't know till later
you were in it],
and certainly the vacuum
cleaner muzzles the soft fur of selfies,
each melting meaning in the snow
flunking out of formality or flarf or those who,



after Katrina, wanted to cancel Mardi Gras
and characters with only one foot in the plot
--one says, "all my friends are shut ins"
another says, "I'm disenfranchised & proud:
Have you ever felt punished by the reward?"
in Act 3, scene 4's long post-intermission nap
as if to numb the numbers with pro-active pain!
& I fear I have to get "too prosey"
to show you I love you, as people even!



Healer's Squeal

4.

An aerial view of a curvaceous swathe of the Escalante river
that seems on the verge of forming an oxbow lake... I can feel
its pain screaming for release... any second now... but, no, I'm not

standing longingly by the window while you go on a Mt. Diablo hike
as mind makes a vow to body, "sorry I got to do this to you, it's not me,
it's the man upstairs, I swear" (which, translated to social life, can be

disastrous). I'm sitting in my car, reading a book & not enjoying it as much as
the semester I just finished (though digesting), questioning poetry again as if
such questioning is its essence, when the thought struck me like the sun

or like the fresh air, of which the sun is mere synecdoche—
the reason I'm not enjoying it as much is because it's outdoor poetry!
Sun, it's June & I treat you like December (today's excuse: I'm too sick

to go out into the sun, or is that like "I'm too thirsty to drink water"
when indoor's been disembodied goody goody workaholic thick winter
nut stored savings account bank glut alienated race-running, tail-chasing

fat fetish self-jealous job occupation indoor dialectic mind
like there's a beautifully exciting dead metaphor of rejuvenation
taking the form of self-flagellation I thought I had out groan

& I wonder if there was an ethical wisdom in a "merely witty" line
I wrote 25 years ago that I've since failed to heed: "Seeing a shrink
won't help; *being* a shrink might." Ashbery liked it, and sometimes

it worked, & I think of the many who said I read too much Ashbery
perhaps because, unlike a lot of other writers, he did not edit out
the "rebuke words" of the "internal editor" but indulged the better

to subvert it, to make fun, or light, of the rebuke, and sometimes
we sit too long, we can't lie down unless we take a walk, and this
outdoor poem makes me want to act it out as if I'm the body

no longer speaking through the mind angry about the paltry stick figure way
it's divvying up the sparks of subjectivity, "you're not as crippled as you think!"
& maybe it's just the sun using the poem to lure me out, to heal...

"If you sit in me awhile, I'll give you strength to walk in my "beams."
& I must heed that tomorrow, but today the mellow clouds of room
temperature have come to appease the indoor mind to ease the transition...



Blessed for One More Week in Oakland

One of those stick figure images
I've seen every day for almost a decade now
I see it on 63rd, I see it on Lowell,
then south on Market left on 40th,
right on Telegraph past Pill Hill,
scooter row, my gym
down Broadway, through Grand,
down Webster through 14th.
More condos, more tents!

Sure, can make me question the whole
“pure image before symbol,
perception before judgment” thing
between the systemic and the personal
for those who hadn't yet cast out lines
to live between, trading tangles for twists
“My heart broke like the middle class--
now my mind's a condo,
but my body is a tent.”
“My heart downtown walking city,
then the center became the circumference:
CDS, Malls, iPods, Amazon.” Every
prelapsarian era spuriously deduced
by forward-looking ruins...
compression----ghost—devo—ghost
byzantine ventilation
quickenning with each stubby thumbed
state of the art, clothes made of oil, tweet
at the voting box we poor married the government
only to be cuckolded by the corporate persons!
bodiless positivity----- pain--less--pain—
anger, and the messaging police--
*oh for a middle not a muddle, oh for a bed in that middle
and a recalibrated economy celebrating failure & care
like birthdays more than death...*

“No point investing in some new gadget skill
when you know by the time you figure it out,
they'll change it.” And if we can't convince
the oppressors to see they're actually hurting themselves
we could at least unite like the heart, mind and womb,
inaction and action, in a rational fun worry wonder
sorrowful overthrow without being our worst enemy...”



Meanwhile on firmer spacious warm sea wash
of values less transient than the great 20th century,
this could be a seesaw affair between pathos & intellect,
harmonies and harm, wordlessness and war...
but if violence towards others is always also violence to self
is violence to self also really violence to others?

Should I ask the EMDT therapist if the myth
of getting better doesn't always have to
make it worse?

“One great thing about being
abandoned is it could rid us of abandonment anxiety...

Found us a fallout shelter with real meadows in it!
Anachronistic lovers sexily whispering end of history
though it sometimes felt like a battering ram,
ambitious failures more alive than earlier faith in forms,
and one spoke of the arrogance of the death
of a friend to define our pain, even if he gives
permission to be arrogant back: to try, again,
to rouse & summon a healthy well-adjusted
worldly critique of critique on behalf of kindness
in the form of beauty unembarrassed by
the very words it bears, in homework's abstract
caring, in the eroding community college, a haven
or feel-think tank that could translate
the wealth gap into moods like seasons—

Symone writes, “it is clear the epidemic to numb
the pain is a silent cry in the loud house of agony
and despair” Or, as Eduardo suggests
“You can always create apps that are free
until customers are hooked because the success
of any business—including Me, Inc.—is measured
by their ability to raise prices without the
agony of losing customers!” Symone suggests
music therapy would be a better alternative
to the cultural epidemic of fatalistic fear
in the face of manufactured ethical ideals...
It's not a highfalutin fructose idea, but have
you heard about the one who has to say
goodbye to goodbye just to say “Hi?”
& perhaps our best love was agape...



Ballad of the End of the Semester Trying to Wean Myself Off Argument Holiday Blues

Damn! I cannot play and Eb major triad
on my left hand with pinky-ring bird
and barely even with pinky-pointer-thumb...
But do ideas rescue you from images
more than images rescue you from ideas?
Am I too puritanical or ugly shy
if I say music videos are as absurd
as a soundtrack of a painter painting?
Besides, the painter's listening to music
and the musicians don't read music
but close their eyes, and how reciprocal
is that? And what of the dancers
and fashionistas, do they rescue
the foodies at the movies, and
other corporate sports that call us
anti-social as a need to create divisions
just to connect them when duty calls
& I have to switch from goodbyes & death
to sharks under capitalism: When the pro-shark
folks say they help sea grasses by intimidating turtles
so they don't overgraze, isn't intimidate projection?
Oh, take me to your follower, since we're all
supposed to be leaders now...

Over a trivial issue, I raised my voice in small talk
"I'm sick of you always singling out..."
Immediately regretted was immediately forgiven
So why am I still so shaken up... oh temper, temper
I haven't lost you socially in some time...
And there's this thing the media
has been doing since I was born
where they may take a communal
cry against systemic injustice
and make it fashionable for awhile
so that when they re-relegate it to the fine print,
people might think it's not as big of a problem anymore,
or if they suspect it is, there's always an oldie, or history channel,
to play "War [what is it good for...]" *Not even nothing..*

but that's not going to stop me from celebrating
the native American student who shows that
environmental destruction and colonial settlerism
are one and the same and her beautiful skepticism towards



those at the rallies against climate change marching for
the science that's more the problem than the solution
even as I laugh at my roommates' scoff--
"They use global warming as an excuse
not to fix the potholes." He's got a point too!
Still, nothing like a zydeco song on college radio to get me
in the Holiday Spirit.

*"Treat me mean on Christmas,
Let your warmth be cold as ice,
"Treat me mean on Christmas,
Let your warmth be cold as ice,
Oh you deserve it, baby,
You've paid the price for being nice."*

So at the sauna at the Y Clarence & I got talking
about Clarence Thomas
& at the end I said,
"and speaking of Clarences,
I heard "Backdoor Santa" by Clarence Carter today,
And he laughed in recognition!
Then, at the coffee chop, Jasmine told me
she can't stand most Christmas songs
& I said I like a lot of the garage & punk ones.
She said she likes Bad Religion's album
I said I heard The Damned's "There Ain't No Sanity Clause"

& remembered the old anarchist song book's
"Nuclear winter lasts millions of years" sung to
"round yon virgin, mother and child."
and she laughed and smiled,
and it can help get me
through a rather rough day...



Healer's Squeal

11.

“I am healing” can be taken at least 3 ways, two of which may seem a boast. Healing shouldn't have to imply already sick, better to contrast it with sickening. There's these activities and some can be both. In this society, probably most are

& there are many ways sold, given or simply found to escape or transcend (this society). Is sickness just the new sin, and HMOS the new church? Is part of my sickness that I need to start with a joke? At the end of Love's

Labour's Lost, Berowne's told to jest in a hospital & if his wit can help heal the patients there, she'll marry him and put up with his jests. In Emergency, I would love a jesting doctor—or is my sickness that I have to dream I'm

helping healing others just to before I can heal myself? “That's sick” can be taken two ways, & though my physical disability isn't contagious I fear my emotional (mental) might be. “Must I expose it, just to depose it?”

The dizzying—even maddening—list of underlapping diagnoses stuck on me: ADHD, PTSD, mild bipolar, nature deprivation, seasonal affective disorder, social affective disorder, eating disorder, addictive personality, simple “lack of coordination,” lack of grounding,

carelessness, too “right brained,” overanalytical introversion, musicophilia, “the warm accusation of being poets” mild “savant syndrome,” utopian longings, “the blues,” “the devil” even schizophrenia (though clearly he was just doing it for the kickback

from the psychiatric hospital, & I think he genuinely thought I'd be grateful because it paid \$12,000 for a 6 month study). I let their words screw with my prana, my chi! Misdiagnoses killed my mom! So, “if wellness is the new health, wouldn't hellness

be the new wealth?” I mean, “I'm sick. Wanna go on a date! & don't worry, I don't expect you to heal me with your wit, even though they say you're sick too, so why do I think admitting my sickness can make me a better healer?”





Chris Stroffolino lives in Oakland, and teaches at Laney College. A bold, refreshing and regular voice in the new American poetry scene at the turn of the millennium, Chris had flowed and ebbed through a few transitional zones but has continued to write and publish poetry. He is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *Drinking From What I Once Wore* [Crisis Chronicles, 2018], as well as a memoir *Death Of A Selfish Altruist* [Vendetta Books, 2017]. In 2019, he recorded his first album of songs in 8 years, *Audition For A Practice People Place* [15 songs of goodbye, and a song of hello], which you can listen, and download for free at: <https://soundcloud.com/chrisstroffolino/sets/audition-4-a-practice-people>

