

Dancing with Fickle

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English of The College at Brockport, State

University of New York, in partial fulfillment for the degree of

Master of Creative Writing

November 17th, 2022

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For Mom

For reminding me to write it all down

Acknowledgements

This work would not be possible without my family fostering my creativity my whole life, my fiancé Joanna for loving and supporting my storytelling all these years, my friends for reading and enjoying my work.

I would like to thank all the professors I have worked with at all three colleges I have attended, with specific thanks to Professor Scott Rudd and Professor Jim Whorton. Professor Rudd helped me connect with stories on a deeper level with a love of the fools. Professor Whorton helped me build this work from the ground up, listening to my ideas and helping me finish out my degree path.

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Abstract

A young man struggles with the day to day of his small hometown. He wants to start on his own adventure but has no idea where to start. That changes when he discovers a book of philosophy written a thousand years ago. Adventure is thrust into his lap as the spirit of an old court jester, Fickle the Wise, appears before him. The book is about Fickle's teachings, and he is just getting started with his newest disciple.

In this verse novella, the two travel together to find the young man a purpose: teaching him how to write. The dialogue is crude and witty, and the young man must learn how to hear the world in order to better understand how to write in it.

Personal Critical Essay

I. Introduction

“Just start writing. Whatever comes to mind, write it down.” I used to believe I would remember every creative thought and story I had ever had. As a result, when my mom would give me the advice to write it down, I did not listen to her. I wish I had listened earlier, because it may have made ELA and English classes easier. I always struggled to write things down and express my thoughts on paper. My mind would switch between two modes; either that writing was a waste of time when I could just remember it, or I could never find the right words to match the thoughts and scenes in my head. I struggled in English classes kindergarten through my senior year of high school. Researching and organizing an essay was a constant battle of not knowing what information to put in what order. I could not stand poetry, because it always seemed to be about something else hidden under the words. Finding deeper meanings and connections in the stories we read simply did not make sense to me. There seemed to be a formula to everything, and even though I was very good at math and science, I could never translate the logical thinking in those subjects over to history or ELA to make sense of my own writing and what I was reading. When Professor Scott Rudd at Monroe Community College said the above advice to me in a poetry workshop class my second semester at the school, I had my epiphany moment with writing. I was struggling to write a free verse poem. I decided to go into Creative Writing at MCC after enjoying an elective class my senior year of high school, but I was finding the fundamentals troublesome, because of all the reasons mentioned

before. I had no motivation or inspiration for this free verse poem, so I sat in the front of the room staring at the paper. Professor Rudd came around and reiterated that I just needed to start writing. I had heard the advice before from many people, but that moment it all clicked into place and connected into the massive web of my consciousness. This thesis is a short verse novel, blending the harmony of poetry with the storytelling of fiction to create one solid piece that brings the reader on a journey through venturing out and learning new things simply by reading and listening to the world around us. This thesis is a culmination of all the work I have done since that moment and a challenge to my younger self.

II. Literary Influences

One of the earliest influences was Dr. Seuss's children's books. The characters and words that he created stuck with me to the present day. Each creature and being has a role and when Dr. Seuss needed a different element, he would invent one and place it where the creature needed to be. One of the characters that stuck with me the most was the Cat in the Hat from the book of the same title. The Cat was one of his most whimsical characters, and his carefree attitude toward life and the rules gave me an appreciation for the archetypal jester. Seuss captured the fairy tale aspect of deeper moral lessons to be taken away from reading them. This was compounded when I performed as the Cat in my middle school's production of *Seussical*. The theater and plays gave the Cat the role of the narrator, seemingly floating into all scenes, guiding the story along but not being directly impacted by the events of the story. This blend

of storyteller and carefree narrator inspired me to have a character like that in every world I created.

Studying Latin for six years gave me a love for ancient mythology and storytelling of the ancient world. Many of my studies stem back to Ancient Rome and the myths they created. The natural wonder that comes with explaining how the world came to be and how the gods interacted with each other demonstrated the culture and society as they explored themselves as humans of this world. These studies inspired me to always have fleshed out lore and backstory for the worlds of my stories. Having ancient concepts of times past made the world feel lived in for me as a writer and for readers of my work. It gave them questions, and so I would write more to answer those questions. Over the years, I worked on finding the balance between over-sharing or under-sharing, but the foundation of the ancient world and Latin studies gave me an appreciation for detail beyond the events in the story.

In addition to the many years of Latin and mythology I studied, I read and analyzed both Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. These ancient epics gave me an idea of the scale of war and the journey to return home. They also demonstrated how grandiose and in depth a reader could become with the inner thoughts of a story's protagonist. The scale of these epics inspired with how they interlocked and how a wide cast of characters could exist within the confines of one story. I dissected the *Odyssey* in middle school, high school, and college in many different classes. Doing this allowed me to break down the story from multiple different critical lens and perspectives

which built upon my understanding of the hero's journey and how an epic is constructed.

Shakespeare became a major point of focus over my high school years and beyond. Acting in plays gave me the spacial awareness of the theatre and scenes within a story. Reading the sonnets, comedies, tragedies, and histories gave a clearer picture of the style. One of my favorite archetypal characters is that of the Shakespearean fool. Two of the first fools I really enjoyed were Feste of *Twelfth Night* and Falstaff of *Henry IV Part I* and *II*. Feste mastered wordplay and using his wit to find loopholes and ways out of trouble. Feste was my first example of the fool archetype which plays on the court jesters of the Medieval era. He became a model in my mind of a character who was able to speak their mind where other characters were bound by their royal titles and roles in life. Falstaff became the example of an old fool who acted crude and pleased himself. He was able to part wisdom into the young Prince Hal who would become King Henry V in the later history plays. The charm and witty wordplay that came with Shakespeare's fools amused me with how they could speak the truth and get away with antics no one else could because of their rank and station within the social hierarchy. They were never main characters and were not in every scene, but their words resonated and impacted the protagonists of the play. They always captivated me. Fickle became my take on the Shakespearean fool in his initial inception, and he transformed with time and the continued study of fools and word play and double meaning words.

Following Shakespeare was Dante in my academic focus. He combined my love of the classics with my newfound interest in medieval and Renaissance studies. *The Divine Comedy* captured the poetics I came to appreciate with the storytelling and journey of him being guided through Hell, Heaven, and Purgatory by numerous historical and biblical characters. When I realized how Dante had a fictionalized version of himself being guided by the spirit of Virgil, I was compelled by how the spirit had passed on which allows the still living Dante to peer into a place of existence in which he would be privy to.

The little time I have found for leisure reading led me to Patrick Rothfuss and Brandon Sanderson. Rothfuss's *The Name of Wind* took the hero's journey and placed the narrator's duty of telling the story into the hands of the protagonist. I had never read a book like that where the now older protagonist shared his adventure with another character to teach them about life and which parts of the stories were true. The biased narrator creates this conflict on the page of what stories are true and how much of the protagonist's memory is true and fully formed. Sanderson's *The Way of Kings* took two parallel perspectives and interwove them together into one narrative that covers multiple parts about the world. At the time of writing all of this, I have not had time to finish reading that novel, but the descriptions and the jumping between perspectives is something I strive for in my fiction work. Both Rothfuss's and Sanderson's fantasy novels are so beautifully written and filled with descriptions. They paint a picture with their words so I can imagine their fantasy elements, though I as a reader can never experience them in the world we live in. Their ability to bring

the reader into a world unlike our own with characters that readers can relate to and seeing the world through the imagery led me to writing more fantasy worlds of my own.

III. Literary Intentions

This work acts as both a challenge to myself stylistically and as a greater extension of the universe at play. For much of my collegiate career, my poetry and fiction have remained separate entities and bodies of work. Poetry became my way into express my personal thoughts and experiences. Nonfiction felt too daunting and constrictive, while free verse poetry allowed for a freedom to write with a stream of consciousness kind of flow. After the thoughts were on the page, I would go back and solidify the line breaks with an image or verb and chisel out the work for style. Prose fiction allowed me to flesh out my characters and specific scenes within the fantasy universe I have been crafting. When Fickle was conceived, I imagined a crude poet and wanted to get a whole philosophy collection of Fickle's sayings. At first, I could not find a way to combine the poetry and the worldbuilding from my fiction. My goal with my writing is to share the vast universe I have cultivated over the years. Profit would be a bonus, but I want to share these stories with the world so that my stories can inspire other people just as I have been inspired and a creative mind my entire life. With this project, I want to combine the philosophy in the poetry and the storytelling and worldbuilding in the prose fiction into a verse novella. The important piece in this construction is putting together a coherent story in a concise way. This

story could be written in prose, but the verse format allows for the separation in voice between each of the characters, past and present. Even areas of struggle can be overcome and mastered. The freedom in structure allows for the story to be told in a unique way that shows each of the different characters in their own way.

Fickle as a character and Balry as the writer of his wisdom was adopted from the philosophy and works of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The major difference being that the narrator is picking up these teachers a little over a thousand years later and the spirit of Fickle returns to help guide the narrator's journey more directly. This creates this dichotomy of Fickle as he was written about and Fickle as he appears in death. While this creates potential challenges in understanding, I designed Fickle to be consistent across the book and his spirit. The narrator is the one going through the changes as seen in how he speaks and visually as his sections become more poetic as the story goes on.

My mind is both scientific in its organization and attention to detail and creative with the stories told and words chosen to elaborate that. The wit that comes with dual meaning words creates wisdom and understanding as well as fun and jest. Using the format of a verse novel or novella echoes the style of a Shakespearean play like *Twelfth Night* and Dante's *Inferno*. The verse novel to me is a bending of the novel form and emphasizing the words chosen as is so important in poetry. In the past I have written my stories in prose form fiction and my personal writing in free form poetry. With this thesis, combining free form and structured poetry with fiction and the work with short stories and attempts to construct a novel brought together

everything I have worked on up unto this point in my collegiate career. The narrator speaks in more free form poetry while Fickle speaks in more tradition poetry, and the lines blur as they learn from each other through the journey. Some of Balry's writing is written with a particular syllable count to echo the sound of styles like iambic pentameter. Many of Fickle's sayings as a spirit are different types of shorter forms like haiku or even using poetic tools that I have used throughout my collegiate career with different prompts built into the structure of the words. The Ear of the Poet utilizes onomatopoeia as well as the ear as being a crucial aspect of a poet. To hear the world and hear the sounds of words together to create something beautiful is something I find to be very important in my writing, so she becomes the embodiment of that concept.

IV. Conclusion

When I set out on this path, I would have never imagined where it would take me. Storytelling has always been my passion. I used to play outside with my siblings, and we would make up worlds together. Writing became the conduit and funnel for those ideas in more recent years. I went to school for writing, because I knew it would be a challenge, and I wanted to get out of my own way. Being told to simply start writing finally allowed me to make the connection between brain, arm, pencil or keyboard, and the words on the page. To this day I do not know why that moment was the time it finally got through, but ever since it has been a journey that has made me into the person I am today. The journey the narrator goes on is a mirrored, fantastical version

of how I imagine my own journey in a way. I never imagined I would be a poet, and if you said that to the younger version of me that I would be, he would have laughed at you. I write for the love of storytelling and capturing moments when I would otherwise be unable to find the words verbally.

The Many Dialogues and Philosophy of Fickle the Wise, Written by Balry

I had always loved the smell of leaf thin stained tomes.

I was shocked when the librarian gifted me a thicker philosophy book.

I had never heard of Balry the Scholar, but he insisted the book was right for me.

The first page read:

This is a tale of Fickle the Wise,

Who most berate, belittle, and despise,

But equal there are none

Who stand against this one

In wits beyond his grandiose guise.

Skimming Through

I snuck away to the quiet corner with the rocking chairs my father designed and crafted with his automaton friend.

Once I was settled, I opened the tome to a random page about three-fourths of the way through:

*Fickle danced with every woman. The young ladies
In their red, blue, & green chiffons to the grandmoth-
Ers in their velvet, navy, & olive silks. He
Lapped up the sounds of the heels of each sole & got
Drunk on the wine's rhythm. I sat near one of the
Castle's stained-glass windows watching the snow fall. I
Had only ever read about the chilled powder
Falling in other parts of the world. Fickle whirled
About with the flourish of each snowflake that fell.
He had the ear of a poet who never lied.*

Sonder in the Summer

I had the sudden realization on this hot summer day that not everyone experienced winter the same way we did.

The snow, the lights.

I tried to remember seeing my first snowstorm.

It was so ordinary.

I couldn't remember.

I knew the book was old.

The pages captured the essence of cold tea and musty leather in the closet.

The writing was fancy, and it sounded fantastical.

Typical Day in Twiddle Ville

I put the book away and moved my way back home.

Most of the other boys had already started their journeys.

I wanted to write.

Every day the grass grew another half inch, the leaves on the tree shifted as the sun ran through the sky.

The motto of the town was “twiddle your thumbs in Twiddle Ville.”

At the end of the day, it was home, but I could not help but think, as I sauntered down the cobblestone road, that I would need more than twiddling to inspire me.

He was Always There

The whistle of the gap in the window gave the warm wind a hollowed sound.

I heard the workshop door close, and Dad came into my room.

“How was your day?”

I shrugged, and he smiled.

He gave me a hug, and left my room, turning the lanterns lower so he didn't trip over the rocking chair in the kitchen.

It only takes one bump on the head to not make that error again.

His hug left the smell of wood stain throughout my room.

I never had much to say about my days, with them moving like gears, same over and over again, but it was enough knowing he was just on the other side of the wooden frame of our home.

Dad had purpose.

I needed to find mine.

I read a little more before bed.

Lord Doljar's Mirror's Echo Address

My loyal subjects,

Thank you for another year of prosperity.

As we enter this coming year, take the time to reflect on

The tides of change that are washing onto our shores.

The waters will crash and foam, ice will shatter against the cliffs

And we will stand tall.

No forces of nature or mortal will

Shall conquer our walls.

Be in good health,

Lord Doljar of Abaltsu

Two Days Before Omenry during the Mirror's Echo passover, 2986

Fickle's Translation of the Lord's Address

Dearest farts and hypocrites,

I'm sending you words on browned paper through a messenger,

Who is so short he needs three wooden podiums to be seen over the horde of you lot.

I bring you metaphors of water to explain change.

This could be done with a painter's palette

Or even the ever-present moon phases,

But I chose water to remind you

Of the common drink that equalize us all, or something like that.

Storms and people will cry tears of joy

Years from now looking at the walls

That fell and reassembled.

Live,

Your Generous Fool, Fickle the Wise of All Places

(But Namely of Abaltsu)

A Writer's Purpose

A pull. That is the only way I could describe the gravitation draw of my muddy boots across the stone path laid before me in my mind. It had always been there.

The roads out of Twiddle Ville were laid decades before the homes. I would carry Fickle's wisdom as written by Balry to guide me.

Just as the thought was formed, I felt the spirit's breath whispered down my spine.

He laughed as my vertebrae clicked into a standing position from my bed to retrieve said boots.

A Literal Spirit of Adventure

He was slender and laid back in the air, his arms laced behind his head.

Where I imagined his feet would be the ethereal legs faded into the air.

“I see you started my tome...

Well, Balry’s tome. I would never write that shit.

Writing wastes time where I can be speaking in whimsy!” He said.

“You must be Fickle the Wise,” I said.

“Wise? Is that how he dubbed me?

Flattering. Anyways, when are we going?”

I didn’t know what he meant.

“You are telling me we are staying

In this room forever? No?

Then let us go forth. At the very least

I need to see what has become of this world.

Go on, pack your bag!”

What I Packed in my Backpack for my First Journey

The foldable water canteen

Two pencils

A bound collection of blank paper

My dad's quilted blanket, rolled

Five days' worth of bread, nuts, and dried apple chunks

The Many Dialogues and Philosophy of Fickle the Wise, Written by Balry

The red dagger that glowed in the moonlight

A set of jacks and marbles

A dice set of six, missing one

Little tinder and sticks from the tree

A pouch of ashes from the fire pit

An extra pair of clothes

A staff from the workshop

Roles Reversed

I threw my pack over my shoulder and went to leave home.

I paused with my hand on the door handle.

My dad's snore echoed through the house, comforting me as I stood.

I had to leave now before the sun hit the cobble road.

A sense of urgency, or inspiration, as Dad would put it.

To stop him from worrying like he would do for me when he'd go to the workshop early, I left him a note on the door:

'Inspiration calls. Be back soon. I love you.'

Choosing the Directions of My Journey

“You’re telling me you

Want to be a writer?

Why waste time with that?”

I ran to the library, open at all hours.

I shuffled through the pages and leather until I found the book titled *The Selves of the Poet*. I knew where I wanted to journey to.

“I want to find the Ear.” I turned the book towards the spirit of Fickle.

“I do believe I

Have heard of such ear.

I’ve seen her beyond

The veil of dark death.”

“So you will take me?”

“Good fool, we will take

Each other! ‘Tis not

Every day I get

To leave eternal

Rest. If you insist

On writing, who am

I to stop you now?

Balry ne’er listened.”

The Last Leg on the First Leg

The staff I had grabbed from my father's workshop had many different functions.

It could be a cane, a sword, an extra leg in the awful chance I lost mine on the road.

My mind spiraled with the worst and fell asleep under a tree about two hours from Twiddle Ville.

Apparition's Sunrise

I woke to applause and saw Fickle floating above a boulder cheering on the sun as it rose cresting beyond the horizon.

“Ah! Good sun!

You rise again just as you always did.

Not even death can stop the sun.

Good to see you, my constant friend.”

I watched the sun rise, letting him enjoy the moment, pretending I was still asleep another few minutes.

Our First Dialogue about Writing

He floated beside me as we walked down the path.

“So why are you here if you don’t believe in writing?”

“To be here and hear you pining keeps me fighting.”

A pebble tumbled down as I kicked it along.

“Why did Balry write things that you said?”

“To keep more than bone from lying dead.”

I wondered about if Balry made it all up.

“He wrote because he cared.”

“I danced, and people stared.”

I stopped.

“Are you purposely rhyming with me?”

“Testing how easy you fool you see.”

A List of Statements Fickle Said in the Evenings

Each day, Fickle would appear and disappear.

Each day, I wrote down whatever Fickle would muse about:

“A hen knows her egg.”

“The same flower changes under its environment.”

“A gold coin in my hat is a gold coin to make me fat.”

“Fools make their own fun.”

“Don’t dance with a partner you haven’t smiled at.”

“A king’s ears are better to his people than his arms.”

Perspective

My father said, "Trade in Marcanta if you want to be cheated."

One of his gadget deals went sour.

I imagined dark clouds and orange lights

keeping the bearded cloaked folks out of sight.

Instead, orange leaves and the sweet spice of cider filled the air,

and the people smiled apple pie smiles

inviting me into the nearest inn for respite.

My First Ghost and Cider

I sat at the table,
and the crowd was quite boisterous.
I didn't know if they could see him too.

“Kid if you're going to stare,
At least have an ale in your hand,”
Fickle said, floating above the chair,
His legs kicked up on the table.

I had never ordered ale before,
So, I approached the barkeep with my notebook in hand.
The barkeep requested five copper pieces. I gave him five copper pieces.
I went back to the apparition staring at the stage.

“Bard's no good.
Too many strings up his ass
And not enough in his hand.”

The Ode to Archaic Words

He floated up onto the splintered wood stage,
and though only I could see him,
he spoke as though all eyes were on him.

“Avaunt and be asunder from such burgesses!

Mother did say every doxy carries a bodkin

Ere you be fainted by fandangled melodists.

Prithee, nay, and naught.

Call me Mooncalf and suffer my zounds

Of the quick popinjay thenceforth.”

Not Hitting the Mark

I tried to write a witty letter to my father
but Fickle whispered do not bother.

‘Nothing is still a thing.

It isn’t the things you do but the words you say.

Dawn brings sunshine.

You can’t be wrong if you’re never right.

Stop smelling flowers.

Every day ends with the same letter.’

“Wit cannot be forced with common word,

Better to not than let the brain curd.

You must change how you speak and think

If you want your writing to not stink.”

Fickle Demonstrating Again

“There once was a boy with my book
Who foolishly gave it a look
Through nonsense and shit
He refused to quit
And believed me though he mistook.”

He spoke like he read on the page.

I wished to invoke his words with Balry’s skill,

but I put my notes away for the night.

The Thing about Death

Fickle woke me in musing and staring out the window:

“The thing about death
Is that once your eyes are closed
You do not miss a thing.
Everything has died with you
And you bring all of it to Death.
Death dances and plays.
For Death is the patron of all antics and fools,
The greatest of truths and tricks
Is we carry shovels and dig while we breathe
And we dance between moments.
I have seen Death dance
And gods be damned
Can he dance and play
Witty has the rest of us fools.

The thing about death
Is he wants you to join him.
He is lonely sitting in a dark room
Without even a nice wooden rocking chair.
Mortal souls bring a light

And they dance into his embrace.

The thing about death
Is no thing. Cessation.”

His form danced and lulled me back to sleep.

Things Fickle Yawned on the Path out of Marcanta

“Names carry everything about a person.”

“I’ve never seen a mirror blink.”

“A fool’s tears lead to drought.”

“Stop wasting time, because it has its own affairs to keep in order.”

“I’ve never thought thinking is a good use of thought.”

“Fathoming a fool’s speechless words leads to depths deeper than the oceans.”

The Last Time I Kept Both Eyes Closed

I didn't see them coming in the night,
the overcast blocked out the full moons.

This is why my father always brought his automaton with him,
companionship I had covered, but no light glows from a spirit's eyes
nor the tome that carries his memoried words.

There had to be at least five. Bandits
concealed by the dark clouds and black rose adorned masks.

I've never felt a boot imbed itself into my stomach
as if they were trying to go through me.

All the stories I have ever read spoke of heroes
rising above the crowd and fighting back.

I lay there and waited, hoped, for them to stop.

I had never prayed to any of the gods before,
but as the bruises formed and the second rib broke,

I envisioned myself home. Back in bed,
in the safety of the only place I ever needed to go.

My father would have fought back.

I imagined for a moment as one of their heels rolled
across my face that I stood in front of the door,

defeated and lost. My father stared with two creatures,
one on each shoulder. The first had a quivering lip and held their arms
out inviting me in. The other looked down with furrowed brow
shaking its head no.

“Hey now! Let us do this proper, lads,” Fickle called out.

For a moment, I could see through one swollen eye:

His spirit climbed through one bandit’s torso.

His teeth clenched and he yelped. Then my eyes
caught the overcast, and I blacked out.

I awoke to Fickle saying, “No fool has ever been caught with both eyes open.”

The Day of Humility

Every year, Lord Doljar held a festival

Where perspective is put above all things.

It lasted two days, and I attended every year.

The first day, everyone in the village and kingdom

Berated and hurled rotten food at Fickle.

He was adorned with many a name during those hours:

Big Mouth, Lord Puppet, Play Thing, Picklesucker, Wise as a Bird, Dumb Rock, The

Overspoken

Everyone laughed at his expense.

The second day, everyone in the village and kingdom

Did the same thing to Lord Doljar.

Many names were attributed to him as well:

Dull Lord, Master Fool, Careless Dog, Empty Crown

I detested the behavior of the people, but Fickle loved the festival.

He said, "It is not that any of these people are bad.

It is more simply they are given the opportunity to speak their filthiest minds.

The Lord steps off his familial appointed pedestal

And joins the lowest of the low, myself, to show he is above no one.

No person I have ever met has had such respect

For himself or his people as Lord Doljar."

I asked if he respected the Lord for the festival,

He said, "I do not get paid to respect him.

I get paid to do what the people do to him during the festival

Every moment he takes a breath."

My Day of Humility

When I awoke from unconsciousness
and clambered to my feet, Fickle sat above a small boulder
where I had set up camp.
I'm done I said.

“Done? Good that you stood up,
but you are not done. You got kicked a few times.
So what? I did all the hard work. You ever possessed someone
and then felt them piss themselves as you used their body
to scare off their friends? Yeah. Did not think so!”

I threw my stuff into my now torn bag.

“Listen, you Weeping Willow of the Sourpuss Fields,
No one said you had to do this. You made a choice,
And stepped outside your nook. Guess what? Nothing is safer
Than your mother's tit. But you turn around and run back beat up,
What did you learn? What wisdom did you glean?
Be there no fruits of a journey ill-spent?
A story ripped out and replaced with copies of the first page?”

I stopped packing, and my shoulders were heavy.

“No one is going to give you anything, but a swift kick in the ass
Verbally, physically, whateverly. So you ride life out
On a great stallion mounted in gilded armor
or a donkey covered in indistinguishable mud and shit.
And while choosing not to ride anything is still a choice,
It is the choice of the forgotten.”

I wanted to punch him in the jaw,

but he was right in a cruel way.

I threw the bag over my shoulder and started out
to find the Ear again.

“That’s the spirit!” Fickle said.

I told him not to speak again until we arrived home.

He bowed and threw away an invisible key.

I did not pay him any mind, but I respected his resolve.

The Merchant's Warning

There was a moment where I understood
the journey we had started down. A stone hut
in the shape of a block. A merchant with a fruit cart
stopped in front of me, and said,
“Don't go up there. She's a crazy one.”

Fickle resolved over my shoulder,
“Merchants with apples,
Only trusted by their fruit.
To the mad girl's home.”

We approached.

The Ear of the Poet

And there she sat: Ripley Lagarn, Ear of the Poet.

My dad had told me about her, a strange hermit.

Curly black hair pulled back in a bun.

From the library, I remember seeing her name

on a poetry book and *The Selves of the Poet*.

Sounds echoed off the wooden walls.

“So you live alone?”

“Most days. Sh! Did you hear that?”

She fumbled to grab a quill and paper,

scribbled a quick note, then stuck it to the wall.

“You really could be a disciple of mine,”

Fickle whispered, like the wind.

The Only Conversation I Have Ever Had with An Ear

Eeeeeeeeeeeepssssshhhhhh

Ripley pulled the black kettle off of the silvered countertop - shing, shooooo

Two cups - Pahsti pahsti

Her wrist rotating ninety degrees counterclockwise,

the pour - shooooom, Glish glush glish glos glis, glish glush glish glos glis

She sighed - "Ahhhhhhh"

We never said a word,

but the tea smelled of must,

desire, the essence of dried flowers.

I left hearing more than I ever had before.

A Lesson on Journeys

*There will never be enough food
To stop the gurgle in your stomach
For the wind and new experiences.*

*Of course, be careful of the food.
Some will be seasoned well,
Some will taste like shit,
And some will just be poisoned.*

*All you ever really need is yourself.
Bags carry the extra things
That make you lazy if you actually
Had to survive.*

*Whatever you do,
Don't go alone.
Unless you have to,
In which case bring everything.*

I Listened and Wrote

'Ribs still bruised
and ears keep ringing.

My mind adrift
like Fickle in the breeze.

Consume experiences and digest the ringing
of my father's anvil. I can hear him still,
even in the imaginary field I construct of my home.

To be fickle and free,
unbound tome, pages flipping with the wind.

He speaks the language of death,
because the thing about death
is it floats along with you on your journey,
and hears the musing of his jester.'

My gut told me to crumple the page.
Instead,
I folded it and wedged it
within the pages written on by Balry.

Fickle's Monologue on Undead Languages

Fickle once turned to me and said

After listening to two guards

Talk about talking,

"Language cannot die.

The notion of a dead language insults

The very ink pulled across parchment.

Now there is something dead:

The tree or cloth that has been rolled

Out and flattened to be written upon.

I sing to bread and hay

And mimic text to gold and velvet.

No - Language cannot die,

Because the very nature of language

Is to adapt, evolve - like

Eggs into the winged birds,

Leaves into warm flavored brown water,

Stone into king's living quarters.

Necromancy is banished

From most arcane establishments,

But language is both

The birth giver and the necromancer.

I refuse to fathom

My quill forgetting

The words I speak at it.

Undeath merely returns the body

To a forward moving position.

Husk words, or phrases even

I suppose you could say.

Yes, a list of husk phrases then,

Risen up once more by my wizened tongue:

Keep time and play faster

Remove your helmet

Here's a gold for your troubles

Drink to your health, old fool.

Yet I revive them so:

Blow melodies out your arse

Piss on those who dig shovelry

Trouble will cost you five

And fools do not drink health

We breathe undead language,

Pungent and ripe.

Write that in that damn tome of yours.

Maybe someone will raise them up

Beyond the husk of the pages

You prescribe to.”

Our Dialogue on Revelation

I placed the book down and stared
 Through his ethereal form. He flickered
 And turned to grin at me.

“So, you figured it out did you not?”

“I rose you up when I read Balry’s tome.”

“Loyal student, he could ne’er let me rest,
 and now you pick up the disciple’s pen.”

“Are you dead then and dancing
 or undead revived by ink?”

“S’pose I am both,
 Ever waiting to be heard,
 Ever waiting to be read.
 Balry is the ink,

I am sounds of the characters he squiggled down.”

“You are beyond your words.
 You are a heap of leaves in the Lord’s chambers,
 The tickled toes the first time any baby giggles,
 The first leg of this journey we were on,
 And the last fool I will ever debate with.”

His appearance flickered once again.

“Oh dear boy, you will mutter

Against many a fool.

They just will not be as witty

As me.”

The Final Monologue of the Wise Spirit

I clutched the book tight

as the apparition of Fickle

floated back and forth.

All I could do was listen and cry

as his pale form pulsed and dimmed and laughed.

“And what if there were no gods?

The ones who made our mutable flesh?

Or worse

what if we made them?

Promises of this world

to be passed forward.

Beliefs only captured in muddy minds

manifested to give shape...

Just fathom it!

We are seeds -

Oak seeds -

growing into 400 ringed trees,

and the “supposed” gods

plant us in the ground

but only after we are dead.

I have far more rambling rings

now than even in life.

I wear them on my fingers

when I mock the kings of old:

Crowns of clouds

Scepters of petrified earth worms.

Alas yet I fade back to that hallowed plane!

Come now, boy, do not cry for me.

No such tears were wasted when

my brain collapsed,

and nothing more came of my babble.

This is all Balry's fault anyhow.

Had he not written between those leather panels

you would never have had to hear me,

but if you must weep so wearily:

May you stand tall knowing

your company was welcome, and the mead was..."

And then nothing but the wind remained.

A Written Success

I began to write

on the parchment I carried,

Fool and Ear inspired.

Klank klank – my father in the workshop

Creeeeeeek – I entered the room, a warm gust hit my face

My dad turned and smiled.

“You find what you were looking for?”

I smiled and said,

“All of it and more.”

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