

A Note from the Author

The following poems are from *The Story of Chi-Ko & the Gut + 154 Gut Sonnets & The Gut's Grand Goodbye*, a comedic hybrid of prose and verse that's been in progress since 2001. The speaker of these poems is Chi-Ko's detached paunch, which has grown huge. See NOTES for additional information.

I AM BIG AND ROUND AND PSYCHEDLIC

What's the soul look like? A rubber duck
That quacks when squeezed, that pees
Lines of bath-water out its squeeze hole?
Is it a happy little thing, molded for joy?
Is the soul a fish? Catchable, yankable
Out of its element and into ours?
Does it wriggle on a dock and then,
If not thrown back, gaze with one flat eye
Upwards from a clean white plate?
Are poems such fish, beheaded, cleaned,
And chopped into rectangular filets
By poets whose minds are like knives?
Do poems chopped square have soul?
Do poets who chop souls into poems
Have souls at all? If so, healthy souls?

AT A VENDING MACHINE

Why does it have to stay like that, that empty coil,
Spiraling towards me in a fixed gesture of offering,
Showing off what all the others chose?
Perhaps what's gone wasn't even all that great.
Even if it were, it's not like I'd have *stayed* satisfied.
At best, it would have been like a shout
That fills a cathedral for a quivering instant
Then leaves the place quieter, emptier....

Did you just compare your insides to a cathedral?
Gut, you've been here much too long.
Just choose something and be ok with it.
No matter what, you'll feel relief when it falls,
And the bright crackle as the wrapper opens
Is always louder than you'd expect.

PERSONAL PHYSIOLOGY

When I say my heart, I mean a private Rome
I funnel all feeling towards, I mean a pin-cushion,
A bomb, an unemptiable trash-can icon; I mean
An apple I wear like a hat, for blind-folded fools
To fire arrows at, I mean the crux of the matter,
The seat of my joy or ache, I mean a flower
Pinned to the chest of a clown. When I say
My heart I mean what's the matter when something
Is the matter. I mean a false-bottomed drawer,
Because I will not tell you what's the matter,
Because I do not know, and if I did, wouldn't say.
When I say my heart, I mean a kite I am flying
Without a string, I mean all that flies off, away,
I mean all I can't control, I mean all.

ON THE CONDITION OF PACING
("A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN")

It's intriguing, pacing, how you come upon yourself
Always in the midst of it, six turns or so after the turn
That begets it. It's a lot like living. "Whoa now,"
You think, "I am and have been *pacing*." But then,
You transform into this image of yourself *pacing*,
Which is super, kind of like reading, in 3 am quiet,
Your own name on the label of a bottle of pills.

Suddenly you're something. And it sucks. It sucks
To be anything, to be anyone, but particularly someone
Who paces. Life lies. If this white room were
Actually freedom, I'd peel and flick, like a sticker
Off an orange, this tea-leaf of thought.
I'd then go on and on like a tape measure,
Bending back and forth inside these borrowed walls....

UPON HAVING JUST CUT THE DRIVER'S SIDE
SEAT-BELT OUT OF CHI-KO'S CHEVY BLAZER

Do not listen to the heart. The heart wants always
To go too far, to boil over the pot; it likes to dance
Itself dry in scary sizzles. Therefore, don't listen.
The heart wants to be sealed in a rubber-clamped
Trashcan filled with bilge; that's why it advises pipe-
Bombing five hospitals as recompense for a stomped
Toe. Do not listen to the heart. Yes I do hate
Chi-Ko. Yes he did stick a sticker on my unseen side,
Which I wore unknowing for two days whole. Do
Not listen to the heart. The heart longs to be locked
In a tall conical tower and cry its cries. It dreams
Its cries to run as blood down the tower's side,
And to have girls touch the droplets with their fingers,
Then look up. Do not listen to the heart. Do not.

ANOTHER SONNET TO MYSELF TO BE TUCKED
INTO A FOLD AND READ WHEN I AM ROARING
DRUNK

So you've dug a hole. So you've said
Something dumb to a girl, and she's pissed,
And now she's told juicy-bro, and he's pissed,
And he's like, "What the fuck did you say?
What even are you? Is this thing a hut?
Whose fucked up idea of a prank is this?"
And he's puffing out his chest, tough-facing,
Balling up his hands: what do you do?

You listen here, Gut: Skyscraping spires require
Commensurate holes, and to get deep fast
Takes blast-work. Fucking fight that fuck
The best way you know how! Suck his foot
Whole into your folds, shoe and all,
And grind, and spin him down to the floor!

SUPPOSE I MET ANOTHER REAL POET

Suppose I should happen to meet one like me,
And learned (through him) that I was one of many:
“All along,” I’d say, “I thought I was the only,
Though I never searched for fear of finding.”
To which he’d wave his hands and reply
Perhaps something about the sun, and how
We make it out more than a common star
Because it’s closer, and ours, and all that warms,
And I’d ask, “Is that off the cuff?” and he’d laugh,
“It is.” And I’d stare into his plain face
As a doubled-stranded urge twisted within
To kill him (naturally), but also be killed
By him, to take his best lines into mine, to read
My truest sonnets with his name atop them.

A KIND OF MASTURBATION

Self like a found leaf rising in outlined veins
Through crayoned paper // Because all things
Rubbed, give up their shapes // Rubbing,
A kind of recorded interrogation in which.... No. //
Say, Gut, something much, much simpler:
Cars have shapes. Houses have driveways.
Now and again you see a mailbox shaped
Like a barn, then fifty in a row, shaped just
Like mailboxes. // A barn-mailbox's dream:
To contain tiny horses, pigs, cows, chickens,
To hold mice the size of sea monkeys. Few
Things are purely dream. Few people are poets.
And even poets, to each other, are mostly
Like the mailboxes that look like mailboxes....

ANOTHER SONNET TO MYSELF TO BE TUCKED
INTO A FOLD AND READ WHEN I AM ROARING
DRUNK

Hey there Mister Woeful, Mister Wobbly, Mister
Mutters-To-Itself-Oh-No-Buddy-Wuvs-Me,
I have for you a bit of advice: towers of love
Are built from bricks of like, and no-one likes
A moody moping ornery lump. So go and mold
A brick of like. Of what, you want to know?
A question. A joke on no one. A compliment
That isn't creepy or sexual. "I like your style.
You know, you have great...style." And though
They bloom alike as a yard of dandelions, save
In different Abercrombie tees, there's something
Each does that makes her different. See it, Gut,
And a brick of like is made when you see it.
Now mold another; now watch it start a pile.

FINAL CAGE

The truth of the bird that's flown its cage
Is that it carries that cage; it carries
That birdcage in its bird-brain
All the remainder of its birdy days,
And if it perceives the world,
Through its hard, glittering eyes,
As a series of cages, as a sequence
Of cages of increasing size,
Then let the world prove different.
Each cage is roomier than the last.
Each appears to be the end of cages,
But appearance, each time, lies.
The bird proves each cage
A cage as it flies, flies, and flies....

NOTES

The excerpted sonnets are examples from a work in progress that was begun in 2001. It is a hybrid of a Gogol-ish short story (narrated by a bumbling collegiate lacrosse player named Matt Yeager), a “Marathonett” (a group of 154 sonnets), and a long-lined Whitmanian death song. In the story, a small paunch detaches from the mid-section of a dieting collegiate lacrosse player named Chi-Ko, alternately “Crisco” (Chris Kozoloski), the narrator’s housemate. Hailing itself as the Gut, this half-plant, half-animal fat ball, which can talk, grows and grows in personality, unsightliness, and literal size. The Gut’s snake-like “plan” is to turn the tables on Chi-Ko by swallowing him whole, thus rendering Chi-Ko a small, sublated part of itself. Paralyzed into inaction, however, by an equally powerful urge to shrink and get back together with Chi-Ko (as well as a melancholic temperament, generally) the Gut ultimately orchestrates its own grandiose and grizzly murder.

In the meantime, the Gut, whose only exposure to poetry is a *Norton Anthology of British Literature Vol. II*, which it has successfully swallowed, and a few conversations with 21 year old Matt (a dilettante in verse), “secretly” pens a series of sonnets in unabashed hopes of living forever....

A Ben Jonson epigram serves as useful introduction to the Gut’s personality:

On Gut

Gut eats all day and lechers all the nights,
So all his meat he tasteth over, twice;
And striving so to double his delight,
He makes himself a thoroughfare of vice.
Thus, in his belly can he change a sin,
Lust it comes out that gluttony went in.

A quote from C.S. Lewis, taken from his introduction to the *Screwtape Letters, Revised Edition* offers a clue to the Gut’s being, and modus operandi in regard to Chi-Ko:

“[It is an] absurd fancy that devils are engaged in the disinterested pursuit of something called Evil (the capital is essential). Mine have no use for any such turnip ghost. Bad angels, like bad men, are entirely practical. They have two motives. The first is fear of punishment....The second is a kind of hunger. I feign that devils can, in a spiritual sense, eat one another; and us.

“On Earth this desire is often called “love.” In Hell I feign that they recognize it as hunger. But there the hunger is more ravenous, and a fuller satisfaction is possible. There, I suggest, the stronger spirit – there are no bodies to impede the operation – can really and irrevocably suck the weaker into itself and permanently gorge its own being on the weaker’s out-raged individuality.”

MATTHEW YEAGER

Matthew Yeager's poems have appeared in *Sixthfinch*, *Gulf Coast*, *Minnesota Review*, *Bat City Review*, and elsewhere, as well as *Best American Poetry 2005* and *Best American Poetry 2010*. His short film "A Big Ball of Foil in a Small NY Apartment" was an official selection at thirteen film festivals, picking up three awards. Other distinctions include the Barthelme Prize in short prose and two MacDowell fellowships. His first book, *Like That* (Forklift Books, 2016) received a starred review from *Publisher's Weekly*. The co-curator of the long running KGB Monday Night Poetry Series, he has worked in the NY catering industry for thirteen years in various capacities: truck driver, waiter, sanitation assistant, sanitation captain, bartender, bar captain, lead captain.