Fusion

Cheryl and Janet Snell

art and poems
Janet Snell
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About the Authors

Sisters Janet and Cheryl Snell have collaborated on many projects. One of them, poems and art inspired by game theory, won the Lopside Press Chapbook Competition and was published as the book PRISONER'S DILEMMA. The sisters' other books include Janet's FLYTRAP (Cleveland State University Poetry Center) and Cheryl's two novels and seven collections of poetry.
Praise

Freud could never stop being fascinated by the notion that it is life that is the interruption. Not death. The immortal is the natural state. But somehow we find ourselves shunted and routed out of the immortal and into the detour of the mortal for a brief go round before flowing back into the immortal, back into death, and the beyond of death. Cheryl Snell’s poetry, and Janet’s art, together illuminate this insight: that the detour into life is a circular whirlpool. --Matthew Biberman

It could be the case that those human heads are floating in a paradoxical space: yes, obviously human (and all that that signals to us) but also pure moments of form. Cephalic shapes to circumscribe color-vacuums, lending force to the other “objects.” Another impression jumps into my own head, beyond what I said above about...well, whatever it was I said. For me, I feel like I'm looking at a negative-image of consciousness. The subconscious? Maybe. And what's weird and cool is that those heads, drained of color and feature detail, seem to express more human soulfulness and depth than even a portrait by Rembrandt!...Tim Buck

The imagery is often stark and reminiscent of Sylvia Plath, the emotion bottled which, unstoppered, pervades an air of vaguely fragrant stoicism. Where the subtext is menacing, it frets away at a blithe surface like a sliver of glass stuck in the weave. But, often, it's uncompromising, violent, in-your-face, leaving the reader with no more than the merest scintilla of hope... This is not poetry merely to beguile the imagination; it is experience by vital proxy, full of pulse and texture and radiance. Memento Mori is
a tour de force …Rosy Cole

...This is a collection of poems to be lingered over, like reminders of first views or experiences we usually keep to ourselves for fear that speaking of them will make them lost to us. Snell has captured these moments and we can only hope she will continue to write such tender thoughts as well as in MULTIVERSE. --- Grady Harp

"... Both Snells' (author and painter) works soar in this lovely book. It was interesting to watch the movement of fear between the poems...A nervous and wonderful collection of art fused with poetry."--Andrew Demcak, on Multiverse
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In the drawing

I am not the charcoal,
not the chalk. I am everything else
the drawing is not. I am not
the line nor the space, the light
nor the shadow.

I look into my moving mind and see
the charcoal and the chalk,
the line and the space,
the light and the shadow.

They lope along the blue landscape
where my thought's just been.

Every day I turn inside out for you.
Object of Desire

Start with a canvas
stretched loose as a lover’s limbs.
Primer going on and the room silent as snow.

Thought animates the dark
and pulls back
on a paring of light
climbing through the window.

It lingers on the model, her slip
white as gesso.

A long drought, the sudden touch, a veil
pulled away. What’s between the layers
lets the image live.
The pause in the dialogue.
Promises made of paste.
How did you come to me?
I lied to your face,
which broke open anyway,
slats of neon falling across
features I no longer recall.

It’s the Vacancy sign
that stays with me, its molten
landscape with the current
shorted out. On a map of dark
topographies, that word
burrowed into my loneliness
with its prophecy.
Complexities of Sex
Migraine

like a restless husband
looking toward the door
the body begins to betray you

it sends up warning flares
along darkening roads
and hidden railroad crossings

one brow lifts
over squeezed-shut eyes
as if it has another place to be

and, as if intending to deceive,
tears leak from only one side
of your face.

a body tries to tell its truth
but the sun is shining hotly now,
never mind the pain light brings
How to Generate Heat

A woman rises up under her man and the world disappears. Shadows sweep across his face and swallow the room like Atlantis or Pompeii. Disasters like that should stay packed away in a history book, hidden in the back of the stacks someplace where people who don’t want to know don’t have to look.

The man lights a candle and brings it to bed. A bright spot blooms behind the silhouette of the woman, fully dressed now, leaning out the window. Someone in the street below is smoking a cigar, but the woman can’t see what it cost him: his hands are full of ashes, his fingers licked with flame.
Tongue

It moves in him, strong as seizure
but soft, the glottal convulsions.

Out of the mind’s muscle,
words rise to be spat
at the story inside him
struggling to eat its way out.

That’s not what I meant
Words are full of holes, glaring, glaring.

In the cool cave of thought
his twisted root leads
backwards and forwards
along the slippery streets
between lips and teeth.
we measure the meaning of *forever*

you move
through me,
and light
bounces
from one
skin
to the other.
dark hides
from light as light
pursues it
but it’s dangerous
to stand this
close
to that
truth
while the clouds are
erasing the sun.
She Lives in a Hospitable Place
After Kafka
Wings

Pink blossoms from the cherry tree
swirl around the garden birdbath,
plush the lounge chairs, drape the table
in fragrant cover. The evergreen, too,
has thickened with flowers, leaning low
over azaleas not yet in bud.

Arriving on paths of wind-tossed petals,
a flutter of moths settles in the deserted cherry.
Its stark limbs shiver with wings
filling the indigo emptiness
like the empty places I turn from now,
before the night backs into what it was --
failing light and fading voices
reaching out toward what is lost, as if to say,
I didn't mean it, as if to say, please come home.
Because She Could Not Wait for Spring

Brush by dripping brush
the woman laved color
over the winter weary kitchen.
White-winged counters drifted
amid the blush of seashells.
Cupboards rocked off their hinges
with the idea of orange
and the chairs knocked knees
under a bee-bright table.
The floorboards clamored
for reinvention, to be swiped
with intimations of moss,
until at effort’s end,
the tongue-drag of green
held the painter fast
with the knowledge that
she’d never leave the kitchen now.
This Dish Has No Feet
The Body is a Throwaway Thing

Curved spine
snaking
through her jungles.
Shoulders, a pair
of birds. One
soars, the other
plunges to where
feet drop and drag
at the end
of twisting tributaries
Every night
the seam-stitched sails
of her arms
fill with wind
billowing
over the bridge in her mind
toward the sea
leaping with miracle.
Bad Mouth
Optimism

She rises
from burst bubbles
all surface
mere slippery edge.

The air she split
closes around her
again
but it’s her luck
that changes
the minute she begins
to calculate
her faith
in second chances
Separation Anxiety

You are farther now,
a flicker of light upon a spine,
floating away from me
over carousels of luggage,
through time zones
pocked with stoplights
and the bulge of alternate lives.
I wait with nerves vibrating
like colors on a map,
one stumble away
from cold fluorescence
and worst case scenarios
while you look up at the train
moving along its unmoving track
waiting to fulfill its destiny.
Over

My before followed your after,

your down and out,
your without within.

Despite or because,
I became around and about,

but you wanted behind and possibly under.

Considering for and against, how to get beyond?

Our inside among was neither here nor there,

so

if became when and then, right now,

and the present was where I moved past you.
Snarl

It rained for days
when you left,
the city’s wheels
mired in mud,
waterlogged trees
falling across the road
in splintering grids.
It made me think
of the kind of traffic
where you followed
close behind me,
bumper to bumper,
trusting we would get off
at the same exit --
until the sudden slowdown
the stop and go
the changing of lanes
that led you away from me
and would prevent you
from ever returning
Line of Thought

horizontal and vertical
cross paths where
the distance
between two points is not
that short. there is more
to consider
than distance & direction --
break the line
hold the line
stay inside the lines
but
between the lines
is where
an idea hatches
latching onto the grid
of its tangled pros & cons
Leap of Faith

Whoever holds up the universe
is blowing bubbles again.

Rough waters, one silver body trying
to rise above another.

Wet with the wash of morning,
I hear you singing. Your voice

is breathless and blue. Surge forward
you say. Lean in blind, I reply.

If I could touch my desire, I’d drown it.
When you cry out
in a language I don’t know
I want to follow where you are,
stowaway in the boat of your ribs
under the oar of your arm.

You crash on the shoals
of your other country, your sisters still
waiting, your brothers scanning the horizon
for their own escapes.

How can they fathom the depths we drown in
every dappled night? Where the day
has crisped black, we cast our net
toward the shadows and fill it with fishes.
Dripping light, we throw each one back.
Bedtime story

Tea-green rain
slants through the sky
and night crawls across our bed.
You climb in
with your warm hands
and in the falling light,
we listen
to the wind move
through the day’s memory.

What needs forgetting?
We know night by its absences
and there is no sound
but the rain and the wind
and the small click of your fingers
as you pull in the green
all around us.
Poem Made Of Sleep

Lower your limbs into it
like a bath, your spine repeating
the blue wave of your lashes.
A tear made of the day
escapes onto your cheek
like the slow start of rain
and your fingers curl slightly.

What was it like
before you were born,
treading your mother’s depths
in the float of uncountable time?
You think you thought you heard a song
enter then, but when you woke,
you remembered nothing.
Nightlight

A woman lifts a blouse from a drawer. Wilted lace. Buttons hanging by a thread. She groans, though the fabric weighs only ounces. Tugging each sleeve from its shoulder as if her arms were still in them and the evening young, she rises on her toes. She trips. The man who whirled her off the floor has come back to let her go again, still insisting that he’ll decide when the dance is over.
Man with Hot Air
Undercover
Sister Age

With the album spread across her knees,
she turns the pages of her life
where sons become brothers, nieces are cousins.
A husband died,
but peacefully, of natural causes.

Is this you? she asks, pointing to a photo.
I’m ten, my Brownie uniform weighted with badges.

You were so sweet with your band-aid knees
and blonde braids. You liked to sketch the horses
we kept on the farm.

Her farm. Her childhood. The brain unravels backward.

Did I know you then?
I tell her that I am her daughter.
You are? How lovely!

She closes the book and holds me
as close as if one of us had been lost.
Dry Spell

For months she crossed
a hot dry path
until her lips split
and she called out for comfort.

The rains came
and she opened her mouth
greedy for each drop that filled her.

She was a river
and fish leapt from her
until her hook was baited
and she became the worm.
Undertow

On the way down, she sees everything blue swells and whitecaps are not: not fists of diamonds, nor rocking hips, not rippling limbs tossing up fish nor are they sorry for the depths to which they have plunged her drowning ship.
Spin

We are attracted to *round*--
hot sun and cold moon
wavy light from lamps
the red coals of cigarettes.
The O is a point of fixation:
pairs of breasts, Frisbees,
football. A waxed head.

The spin of this mad blue globe
supports a cycle of chase.
We use wheels to go out
on our tangents. Sometimes
a ring brings us back into place.
Circle Theory

You’re better now, 
your wounds have closed, 
there is sapling strength.  
Your sister is still 
at the other end of the phone, 
singing her hosannas.  
Your ex thinks it’s his turn now, 
though tit for tat was never established.  
Demands are made. Some are met.  
The ones who hurt you most want forgiveness 
at all hours of the night. You can’t sleep anyway, 
and when a friend offers a back rub 
when what you really want is sex, 
you slide down the door 
of your own locked-out life, 
and count yourself among the lucky.
Silence

The silence
the moment before
the child cries.
The stillness in the words
that come out of the silence
that is not still, moving
with the child
when she turns to run away.
Silence speaks
standing at the door
between parent and child
long past the hour
that quiet should have been broken,
shot through with syllables
like a prayer
before it sings itself extinct.
How to Hear

The ear, taken by surprise
encloses the dark, its singular humming.

Your own song could confuse it
so keep it sotto voce.

To separate nuance from noise
takes practice: let whorls that circle

the smooth-muscled tunnel
swell like summer. Against the drums

a percussion of bones moves
intricate things in their fringed peripheries,

and a spiral shell, like the one you once held
in your six year old hands, twitches

with a truth you had to learn to hear.
Illumination

When I sit alone
in the light
it is clear
I am blind

How else is darkness known
but by its absences
Scales Fall from His Eyes

From an eclipsing sky
he tumbles down a well
thinking about the bereaved,
how they line up at ticket counters
looking for their own way out.
What would they do for the chance
to walk away from their skins? Smoke
alarms fail, insurance expires. You can lose
yourself in love and wake as a stranger’s revelation.
And because epiphany loves a well, because
it storms the half-glimpsed memory, it rises
to meet the sliver of light that burns eyes awake
while the body keeps on drowning.
Sunk

No key
No door
No room
No bed

Just this carpet pad.
Carpet already stolen.

No valuables
in the blanket

I found the painting in the trash
Picket fence Spiky sun Stick figures

Nothing worth having

No people
No house
No

Please do not steal anything.
This is my home.
Hocus Pocus

A magician pulls an angel out of his hat by its ears.
It rises to the roof of his life, cursing:
I come to you
limbs tucked in
with misdirected prayers.
I messenger them anyway,
while you perform
with your chameleon silks
and bottomless bottles,
that trick with smoke and mirrors.

When you feint death,
your assistant sawed in half with worry,
that’s the time you feel me near.
And when I vanish like an old gold coin,
(your dirty angel)
I can see you almost believe in me.
Put that Face Back On
Bad

The taste of iron,  
the eroticism of  
someone else’s pain.  
None of it is our fault.  
We are true  
to our natures.  
We wrap sins  
previously paid for  
in butcher paper  
and pray  
to the figurine  
in the attic.

We need something  
to lean on  
and the groaning in the eaves  
makes us believe  
someone still lives here.  
Someone still grieves