
THE O:JA&L 2024 CHAPBOOK SERIES
A Writer's Portfolio



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Publishing since 2017 as OPEN: *Journal of Arts & Letters* (O:JA&L) and its imprints Buttonhook Press, HOT BUTTON PRESS
Contemporary Issues, and HIGH BUTTON PRESS *Contemporary Art*,
OAI supports writers and artists worldwide.



Buttonhook Press

An imprint of OPEN: *Journal of Arts & Letters* (O:JA&L)

Set in Garamond and GARAMOND ALLCAPS and formatted in CreateSpace.

Made available online and/or printed by license in the USA and elsewhere as a novelty and commemorative document celebrating the publication of Bruce McCrae's chapbook.

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WOLF
Poems



BRUCE M^cCRAE

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ONE DAY THE WOLF

One day the wolf threw off its fur and began to walk
on its hind legs, replacing its claws with ten little fingers.
Its growl became a smile; then it became another language.
Soon the wolf was wearing clothes and going to work.
It had a name and house in the suburbs.
It married for love, but eventually that love faded.
The wolf's children, always a burden, finally left home.
Aging, it became despondent and dangerously bored.
Endlessly restless, it would pace, or just stand at the window.
It watched the seasons changing and snow falling.
One cold morning the wolf threw off its clothes,
tearing away in a rage into the nearby forest.
And this is all we know of the wolf for certain.
That some stories never end.

BLUE WOLF

There's a blue wolf in the house.
An alpha male without a pack
to lead across the hinterlands.
A wolf that's eaten all the children,
their toys and photographs and names.
Balanced between impetus and inertia.
Whose heart is no larger than a minute.
Whose eyes are rubies down a drain.
Whose voice is caught on a wire,
suspended in unforgettable amber.
A blue wolf pacing the carpet bare.
Angry, and in love with anger.
Hungry, because hunger is a sacred vow.
Silent, sorrow having no words to spare.
There are no stories on this side of death.
No poems to burn. No song of the dog.
In this house there are no legends.

INTERVIEW WITH A WOLF

Man: Who is it that you are?

Wolf: I am you, in the cloth of multitudes.

Man: Where is thy pack?

Wolf: We sleep in the crook of your mind.

Man: And do you howl in the night?

Wolf: I sing moonsong and starry operas.

Man: In what way do you consider Man?

Wolf: Man, the ridiculous animal.

Man: Does any god come into play?

Wolf: Praise be the blood of the lamb.

Man: Where is your actual home?

Wolf: I've made a hole in the primitive earth.

Man: Define your hunger.

Wolf: It is as sacred as it is profane.

Man: What is the purpose of your existence?

Wolf: By learning to live we learn to die.

Man: And after we die?

Wolf: A winter vista.

WOLF SAYS

I'm not the animal
you believe me to be.
There are no forests left,
no million-headed herds
bellowing across the tundra.
I love the blizzards
but loathe December.
That's not my moon
and unbecoming yelp.
One does not howl
for the sake of howling.

Fables and folk tales,
they're best for bedtime.
Not every riding hood is red.
Not every wolf is a dog
tied to a chain link fence
and to be watered and fed.
It is my nature to be wild,
the doe surrendering willingly.
You cannot tame me.
I refuse all love's advances.

LONE WOLF

Voice like an empty tomb.
Mouth that's a sack of old breaths.
Eyes, which are blood drops on snow.
An image of outlandish imagery.
A one among the many.

Quite singular, Wolf was a stranger
you'd once encountered in a storm.
Teeth like headstones, tongue like a path,
his every breath was an illegible script.
Wolf stood guard by his pillar of words,
a little star wandering odd cosmologies,
an orphan in a time of war,
an outcast from love's dominion.

Whistling on a riverbank, wolf watched and listened.
A simple word describing complex matters,
wolf patrolled the lowlands of Terra Prime.
He went between two midnights, a god among dogs,
an alphabet in a land of numerals, a notch
on a cross in a woodland cabin.

Some suggested wolf was a clout of smoke
or box of year-old regrets.
Some said he was a ghost of the heart's interior,
a spectre in a speculum, a cry in the dark,
loose talk like mouse scratchings or shavings underfoot,
opinion a cathedral gone to ruin.

Regardless, wolf walked the walk.

With a length of sinew he sewed divisions.
With a broken stick he beat out time.
His every song was about death and dying.

WOLF AMONG THE DARKNESSES

It's a dark road, where Wolf travels.
It's a dark night in a dark land.
The forests darken, as do the stars.
The planets go dark. The heart darkens.

Wolf takes the darkest path,
lightly brushed with brazen moonlight.
He follows the darkest scents
of creation's darkest animals.

Wolf crosses the void and comes to a town.
The houses are dark and empty.
The streets are the colour of darkness.
The world is made of darkness.

In Wolf's heart is a splinter of light,
and this illuminates his sorrow.
Headed towards an eastern rumour,
the morning goes from dark to grey.

Soon everything is the vaguest blue.
Wolf's fine eyesight gathers it in.
He sees a little farther along the way.
He sees more darkness.

WOLF IN SITU

Wolf bristled among the mast pines,
the trail an ouroboros of prey and predation,
the stars faraway tongues of flame,
each planet blessed with a distinctive scent.

The long winter threw down its challenges.
Darkness, according to Wolf, was a bloodied paradise,
the forest towering over his sleep,
a palsied sleep of clefts and narrows.

Carnivore Rex, Wolf dreamed badly.
Once he was a creature being tamed.
Once he was a husband to the moon.
Mind of a claw, an incisor-heart, once he was
a mewling pup whining for its mother's teat.
He awoke to a hellish hunger.

WOLF'S DREAM

When Wolf dreams it's always winter.
He dreams snowfall into being.
He dreams blue light and stumbling pines.
Wolf dreams of a bone between his jaws.
The scents of blood and frozen rivers.

One night he dreamt a thousand dreams
and in each the doe surrendered willingly,
a martyr in a gown of crimson crystals,
a saint relinquishing her soul,
awaking only at the moment of her end,
Wolf a witness to a state of grace
an ordinary death would deem unlikely.

He wakes, his fur matted with gore,
the aftertaste of life under his tongue,
a visceral trail rising along the path
before suddenly ending in a squall of red air.

WOLF'S GOD

Unlike the eater of souls,
with a taste for children.
Unlike the doctor of oblivion,
asleep under the Rapture.
Unlike the god you serve,
the one who presses love from flesh,
whose kisses are a cancer,
Wolf's god was a throat exposed
to the crass insults of winter.
When it spoke it spoke of blizzards,
a gospel of teeth and viscera.
For a cathedral, the constellations,
Wolf's dogma an understated growl,
Wolf's god burrowing beneath the earth,
Wolf's soul bathed in a cleansing fire,
the forests alive with burning witches,
with saints heart-deep in snowfall,
each martyr placing their feet to the flames
illuminating the taigas in heaven.

A WOLF MAY LOOK AT A MOON

Stars huddled against polar night.
Planets wandering drunkenly.
And the moon, scratching at a dark rubble,
eking out trust by bearing messages,
stark truths and harsh realities
delivered with a cold hand, another language
frosting a windowpane, scrawling the lawn,
causing the dog to stop and wonder —
where is the blood death wrought?
Where is thy bone?

The moon, between indifferent suns.
Her star-bitten kiss and lunatic ruse.
The courier and her blanked page,
its secret passages and silent covenant.
Codex of phonics and gubbins.

She who falls without falling . . .
While tides reach for a hilltop.
While men go mad and turn to stone.
While Wolf questions the keening of existence.

WEREWOLF

Unlike the popcorn-munchers
and crunchers of peanuts,
Wolf disdained the cinema,
fantasy breeding apprehension.
He knows how blood tastes.
He knows a howl cannot contain the man
stood at his window after midnight.
Cut jumps in no way resemble the hunt.
Moonlight is not a petty poison.
Theatrics are no match for passion.

A rainy Tuesday matinee, real humans
growing fangs and fur in rapt pretension,
Wolf chewing on a stick of licorice
and wishing it were tendon or flesh,
cartoon bloodshed unamusing, genuine
fear a precondition to actual terror.

This silver bullet business is half a fact,
though he often wakes up naked and alone.
Wolf also rises with the arterial morning
and wishes himself into the shape of a man.

WOLF

Once upon a time, the wolf.

Be greedy, as the wolf is greedy.

He who sleeps with the wolf
must run with the pack.

Sheep care little for the wolf's opinion.

The wolf is not the legend.

The love of the wolf lies unrequited.

The wolf dreams of the colour red
and the number seven.

The Day of the Wolf,
when we defer to our wilding nature.

Dark and deep, the forest awaits
the wolf's return, a messenger
with a bloodied message.

The wolf's body performs the rituals
its mind invents, the wolf's soul
adrift over the forest's canopy.

The hunter needs the wolf as much
as the wolf desires being hunted.

Wolf Town, which is a river in winter.

The moon knows of the wolf's house
but doesn't go there uninvited.

Never trust a wolf if you're a lamb.

The wolf is singular and plural.

WOLF INCOGNITO

To evade the hunt and huntsmen
Wolf stood up and barked like a man.
He leant against the wind and learned how to grin.
Wolf practiced people-power and the arts,
causing the hounds no end to their confusion.

The hunter now being hunted,
he washed himself in the blood of the lamb.
He whistled in church. He dabbled with emotion.
Unable to growl, he coughed.
No longer intent on howling,
wolf maintained a studied calm.
Wolf wore wool, embittered with self-loathing.

And still the hunter salted the path.
And still Wolf raced the light of the moon.
Crowds parted. The Earth fell away.
Beside himself, and naked as sin,
Wolf swallowed his primeval cravings.
He returned to the forests of his dreaming.
He lay in the snow and wept like a man.

THE WOLF AT THE WEDDING

The world's most dangerous animal
is building a bomb of bone and steel.
He overturns the earth
in search of a shining pebble.
His soul is tainted
with love and avarice.

Unswayed by loss or death,
the world's most dangerous animal
is engrossed in wine and frippery.
In love with his voice, he talks.
Enamoured of strength, he flexes.
Citizens, a beast is not without its burdens.

No cage can compromise
this animal's powers of reduction.
He bares his fangs and calls it *smiling*.
Travelling from death to death,
you're either with him or against him.
We rise and fall together.

"Trust me," he says, a mouth full of glass,
a mouth filled with lies and poetry,
the world's most dangerous animal
an artist cataloguing mayhem,
vicious on so many levels.
Gladly, his favoured weapon is invention.

WOLF MOON

Not the beetle moon, the larvae moon,
the moon made of drinking songs and pyramids.
Not the moon that ate its children
or the moon that's eleven fingers long.
Not to be confused with a webbing of breaths
on the seventh of January or satcom satellite.
Not your moon, and certainly no moon of mine.
No, this was Wolf's moon, and Wolf's alone.

The moon that's pushing wind across Planet Fiction,
flattering the sun to deceive the abyss.
A mirror, where Wolf admired his reflection.
A silver coin on Christmas morning.
God's chromosome. A dog's abstraction.

Wolf boasted of his lunar appeal,
of the strength it takes to ignite whole winters,
that the moon was the source of his ferociousness.
He paraded up and down the promenade,
dressed to kill, God's gift to lunaphilia.
As if Wolf had reinvented the wheel
or first introduced fire to darkness.
As if the majesty of celestial goings-on
were put in place with the best intentions.

WOLF, BEING AT LOOSE ENDS

Wolf worried a thread
and the timberline unravelled.
He coughed up a bone.
He spoke to the thunder.
When he wept principalities tumbled.
When he sang he sang
the lowest notes in winter's registers.
“You have to laugh,” he said to himself,
grinning like a butchered hog,
combing the beaches of a Dantean hell,
stalking his belly's underworld.

The faithful bowed, Wolf hesitant.
Science kowtowed to doctored medicine,
Wolf swooning, Wolf feint and fainting,
Wolf agitated beyond repair.

It's a quiet night tonight, a dark rain falling.
Call it luck or chance or circumstance,
but life is more than axioms and maxims.
There's blood on the schoolmarm's dress.
Blood in the hair of the inheritors.
Blood on the fire lanes outside of town.
Within us all is a deep well of dissatisfaction.

Breathless, Wolf returned to his forest lair.

WOLF'S NAME

If you say his name
mountains stop being mountains.
Oceans swell, returning
to their salty point of origin.
Time takes a tumble
down a flight of wooden stairs.
Mothers give up their children.
The planets grumble.

If you dare say his name
reality flickers.
Falsehoods are brokered.
A poorly kept covenant,
his name has never been written.
His name is the final shibboleth.
A promise broken,
it must never be said.

WOLF WHISTLES

A tongue silvered with salt
and eyes like porcelain.
A thousand feet of wheels,
amnesia and nausea his cousins,
coat a gleam from radiation.
With a voice to charm the birds
from their forbidden corners,
to sing the serpents senseless.

Dressed for murder,
when Wolf whistles
he purses his lips and pouts.
He mesmerizes kittens
and puts angels in doubt.
He whistles and winks
and a blue miasma descends
from the underbellies of heaven,
his song tempered by a blue fire.
By the black and the red.

Hearts turn to ice-cream.
Pyramids crumble.
The oceans give up their dead.
When Wolf whistles
a second sun appears in the sky,
a sun bruised with emotion.
It resembles the face
of a woman quietly weeping.
It reminds the animals
of a mother's despair.

WOLF, PRIME CARNIVORE

Wolf was hungry. Again.
He ate snow and followed
moonlight across the scablands.

Wolf was hungry
and everything tasted like
blood and winter,
like sinew and bone.

Wolf apprised the wind
of its delicious scents.
His god was Promise.

Wolf said to wolf,
“A drop of blood
is like a summer rose.”
The pack howled
in their merriment.
And all were hungry.

They hunted for the last
red star in the polar night,
predators in love with prey,
pursuit their pleasure.

Wolf ate and ate,
to his delight,
and still was hungry.

WOLF TRAPPED

A series of coincidences
led Wolf down a secret path.
Making things happen,
he built a house of yarrow sticks.
Brought into existence,
he suffered motion and emotion.
For every action
Wolf invented a reaction.
He danced to another music.
He slept in another bed,
always looking, looking . . .
Damned with feint praise,
Wolf declared himself
a prince among the paupers.
In the dark of winter
a light distracted his gaze.
Snowfall bemused his inner child.
Death confused him,
its oblique tactics, its cold hand.
And this is the box he made.
It's lined with memories and letters,
which provide some comfort.
This is Wolf's stone wall.
It keeps the monsters in and out.
This ocean is his. This forest,
and all its attending huntsmen.
This mountain belongs to Wolf.
He runs and runs
along the hidden path.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

BRUCE M^CRAE, a Canadian musician, is a multiple Pushcart nominee with poems published in hundreds of magazines such as *Poetry*, *Rattle* and *North American Review*. The winner of the 2020 Libretto prize and author of four poetry collections and seven chapbooks, his poems have been broadcast and performed globally.

His end is certain.



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Haiku by Jianqing Zheng

Scaring Crow

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2024

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FLASH FICTION: Alive in the Flicker
A Portable Workshop

PAMELYN CASTO

"Pamelyn Casto's *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker* is insightful, comprehensive, and brimming with inventive prompts and exercises to make your flash truly leap off the page."

~ Dinty W. Moore

co-editor of the *Best of Brevity: Twenty Groundbreaking Years of Flash Nonfiction*

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~ Robert Shapard

co-editor of many Flash and Sudden Fiction anthologies, the latest are *Sudden Fiction Latina: Short Stories from the United States and Latin America* (2010) and *Flash Fiction International: Very Short Stories from Around the World* (2015)

"Pamelyn Casto's valuable book *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker* is an astonishing illumination—a total history of the form with essays, strategies and exercises; lessons, examples, how-to's, markets, marketing, contests, anthologies, prompts, advice from pros, new directions (flash film!), reader psychology even—it is all here, with hundreds of internet links. There will never be a fuller single resource, with a good teacher's encouraging tone about it, to boot. You can say flash fiction begins with Aesop; with Casto you can begin anew.

~Kent H. Dixon

translator of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (2018) and co-editor of *Stone Wall Book of Short Fictions* (1976)

"Pamelyn Casto is a deep font of flash knowledge, and this portable workshop is a thorough, indispensable resource for writers and instructors who want to know more about what this thing called "flash" is, how to write it, and more important, how to read and understand it."

~ Tara Lynn Masih

editor of *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Fiction* (2009) and founder of *The Best Small Fictions* (founded 2015)

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"Like a flash of lightning between the clouds, we live in the flicker."
—Joseph Conrad

FLASH FICTION ALIVE IN THE FLICKER

A PORTABLE WORKSHOP

PAMELYN CASTO

AMAZON REVIEWS

for Pamelyn Castos's *FLASH FICTION: Alive in the Flicker*

Daniel J. Nicholas

Reviewed in the United States on August 26, 2024

Verified Purchase

If I were to teach a class, this book would be required reading or a course outline for discussion. Bravo, Pamelyn! In addition, I look forward to your monthly blog to start up again.

David Lignell

Reviewed in the United States on November 23, 2022

Verified Purchase

Pamela Casto's new text, *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker*, is a must have "portable workshop" workbook for anyone who desires to learn and practice the many forms of flash fiction.

W.R. Rodriguez

Reviewed in the United States on October 5, 2022

Verified Purchase

An authoritative overview of the genre, combined with practical advice on the writing process and an abundance of writing prompts.

Norman Jensen

Reviewed in the United States on April 2, 2024

Reading is great but hands-on prompts are even better.



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\$17 (USA)

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