

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Chanel Brenner: What We Poets Do

Chanel Brenner · Thursday, April 18th, 2013

Winner of the national "Words For Riley Poetry Contest," Chanel Brenner is the author of "The Christmas Boy Will Not Disappear," a collection of poems about the death of her six-year-old son. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and their four-year-old son.

July 28TH, 2012

It's Riley's second birthday,
without us.
He would have been
eight.
Instead of dead.
Instead of chalk dust.
Instead of oysterless chips of pearls.
Instead of a giant,
insatiable pit.
Instead of a collage of photos
and cutout red crayoned hearts.
Instead of our tears.
Instead of a vanilla birthday cake
bejeweled with his name.
Instead of a ghost,
haunted by us.
Instead of frozen
at six and a half.
Instead of this fucking poem.



What Would Wislawa Szymborska Do?

Un-burn his flesh, chips of bone
and teeth, powdery ashes
like seeds in soil birth anew.
Reclaim his heart,
his kidneys, his liver.

Kindly return the recipients their own.
 Cross a line through the words,
 He died.
 Re-classify an Arteriovenous Malformation,
 a work of fiction.
 Place him back in his bed, safely tucked,
 to awaken after a dream-filled slumber.
 Create something out of nothing.
 Life out of loss.
 Isn't that what we poets do?



God as a Waiter

A friend tells me
 I need to ask God
 for a baby.
 “He will give you
 one, if you ask.”
 She tells me this
 like we are in a café,
 talking about
 a bowl of soup.
 Place the order.
 Thou shall receive.
 I picture God
 up there,
 the waiter of all waiters,
 taking our orders,
 ringing the bell,
 serving up the soup du jour.
 The last thing I ordered
 from Him,
 I never received.
 He stood at my table
 in His white button down shirt,
 black pants,
 little white apron,
 pulled out his order pad
 and while clicking
 His pen, said,
 “sorry, but what you ordered
 has been 86’d... we’re all out of
The Saving a Dying Child today.”
 I nod yes.
 Tell my friend
 I will ask God
 for a baby.

Then she says,
 “Oh, by the way, you have to believe.”



Mothering a Dead Child

I can't stop writing poems
 about my dead son.
 I am worried
 I won't be able to stop.
 I am afraid
 I am trapping his spirit.
 I like to think
 I am keeping him alive.
 It is unknowable.
 It is my first time
 and there are no
 classes to take
 or books to read
 about how to mother
 a dead child.
 What if I am
 an overprotective parent,
 boarding up the windows
 of his bedroom,
 locking the door,
 hiding the key,
 keeping him all for myself,
 torturing him
 with my poems?
 How will I know?
 Who will tell me?
 How will I stop?



Knowing

My husband asks me during dinner, would I do it all again?
 Would I say “yes” and marry him? Knowing what I know now.
 Knowing Riley would die. Knowing it would lead to this pain.
 Knowing, would I still choose this life?
Knowing. What a strange word.
 I give the question the time it deserves, an honest pause,
 look down at my Loup de Mer,
 take a sip of Prosecco,
 before telling the man facing me,
 this time seated instead of on bended knee,
 “Yes, I choose you, this life... even the pain.”

“You must be a masochist,” he says.

We are proud to premiere ‘What Would Wislawa Szymborska Do?,’ ‘God as a Waiter,’ ‘Mothering a Dead Child,’ and “Knowing’ in Cultural Weekly. ‘July 28TH, 2012’ was first published in The Write Place at the Write Time.

Interstitial images are details from “Mending,” new work by fiber artist [Lori Zimmerman](#).

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