

^°

“disaster poetry”

8 poems

by

joanie st-kaminsky

To share is an act of love.

To be named for your work is an act of love.

Thank you for reading.

Share at your will.

Revised, 3rd ed.

5783/2022 • Joanie St-Kaminsky

An early version of “The Birds” originally appeared in

Tiny Spoon #5: Ecology (Tiny Spoon, 2020).

disaster poetry was originally published

5779/2018.

joanie.tripodi.kaminsky@gmail.com

www.joaniestkaminsky.com



אלי אֵלִי, לְמָה עֲזַבְתָּנִי
אלהי אלהי למא שבקתני

table of contents

evering:	1
“symptoms of space”	2
“the turkey vulture looks at you the way fishhooks...”	4
“here is a brook that knows the taste of menthols”	5
The Smell of My Son is the Good Smell of the Field	6
March	7
Coquina Imagines Herself at the Mercy of Camus	8
From an Olive Tree in Gethsemane	9
The Birds	10
The House of Flickering Love	13
Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade and Whatever...	14

evering

evering: “symptoms of space”

*Love surrounds you, darling,
spoke the woodpecker to his son:
Greys are humans too, smooth and
wretched and mouthless and
indistinguishable.*

You will feel yourself at times a triangle
caught in left space where there's only words
and soft feelings that emanate from bodies in space.
Bodies touching words. Bodies touching words
with their mouths. Mouths touching bodies.
Three mouths, two are speaking, one is touching
words with their bodies. Two mouths are speaking
but one mouth is silent. Three mouths are moving,
one mouth is speaking, one mouth is breathing,
one mouth is fucking.

A tripod on two legs.
That's one consequence
of walking on this earth.

Another is to love things that fly.
You love what doesn't feel gravity.

Spoke the woodpecker: *in artifice
comes creation, and from creation*

*structure, and artifice from structure.
And you worry which came first.
Things really aren't so different as you think.
These are all things in left space.*

*In right space, there is a hole thousands
of times the size of our Sun:
that hole is what becomes of humans
who introduce themselves to each other.
Who see each other synonyms.*

You love things that fly. You love what doesn't
feel gravity. You do not understand yourself.
Tell me, darling, how you feel about fate?

I feel like love
is a weightless thing I don't want
to feel this way about love

evering: “the turkey vulture looks at you
the way fishhooks look to the eyes of fishes”

for aimee

Delicatessen is a loanword, paraphrased from
the baleful lips of delicate chickens.

Look there, cried Jeff, *A man who knows
his own worth*. And pulls the head from a dove.

I didn't read *Animal Farm*. It wasn't assigned.
A robin landed on the porch with a broken wing

this summer. I was afraid to touch it, anything
delicate injured or dead.

The possum from my throat drew the voice of a friend:
spoke on the sweetness of rot, then never spoke again.

evering: “here is a brook that knows the taste
of menthols”

As it's written in Deuteronomy:
Any viscous or snowcapped place
rips itself apart with footprints.
The Lord's or whatever. My footprints

beside yours in the snow of your life
become mine in two handprints
when I bring you to your knees. A trail
snakes into the woods I drag and leave

your body. This is the path of serpents:
on your belly you shall feel no hunger
, only the pain of hunger.

The Smell of My Son is the Good Smell of the Field

Before the world there was water
and G-d knew that, and G-d was ashamed.
And when any time had passed, the land
was before the water, and that was how G-d
intended. NEVER AGAIN THE COVENANT
it was said, ALL LIFE WILL BE DESTROYED
BY WATERS OF A FLOOD. But G-d's a
heartbreaker. Today I woke in a sparrow's nest
and ate the eggs I mashed in slumber.

March

Nothing stays the same, but it's not so bad.
I get to watch the sunrise. I get to feel it set.
When I was young and so inspired, I could
have brought life into the world. I still do,
but it feels different. I water the plants
when I remember. I set food out for the cats.
They don't let me forget. But the moon, the trees ...
I wring my silence into this world,
and it responds in kind.

Coquina Imagines Herself at the Mercy of Camus

I've got my tongue in the sand again,
like Sisyphus, digging myself a hole,
just to be unburied over and over.
I'd rather be split open and
have my insides licked clean.

From an Olive Tree in Gethsemane

The last of the unspoken worlds
have been called to silence.
The undulating muzzled phrases
tightly wound around the moon
move from room to room
whispering, "Do you want to stay here?"
In the bedrock — *Eloi* — the morning sun
— *sabacthani* — nestles on my pillow
like a dying cat finds a place to hide
and blameless shapes herself twitching
in the mousetrap dreams of
her slow, patient life. Sunshine
the color of piss on bedsheets
piss-colored, in a bluesky room,
trapped beneath the filmic skysurface.
Why does it smell like catalogues in here?
The wafer-weight of Body,
the seasick weight of Blood:
forget about this world
and it comes undone.

The Birds

I.

The last light of morning locks the door
on its way out. Several half-shadows move
through the house. The thermostat coughs
like a sputtering pianist
practices her scales. Life moves
lifelessly about the space. Life is
packing up the rest of its possessions.
Life is getting ready to move out;
afternoon will move into its room.
The cardinals are brown. The bluejays are brown.

II.

The dinner bell rings. Dad mows the lawn.
Dad edges. Foxgloves spit dip into
the grass clippings. They are weeds,
like soccer players. The rabbits and
ghost-hens trellis the sidewalk.
The sidewalk turns to brick, then gravel.
The asphalt cracks itself smooth.
Are the chickadees gray? Are the flamingos gray?

III.

You paint the house green. It falls face-first
into a lemon grove. The house paints itself
orange, and you call this home. You live
in someone else's home. You don't own
your own life. The birds only sing
in the colors they're told.

IV.

You have to wake up now. This is silly.
How are you not yet tired of sleeping?
Haven't you noticed the insects
that crawl inside your open mouth?
Your shadow does the dishes.
The warbler crones. Its mouth is closed.
The raven is black. The crow is black.

V.

Night descends like an elbow on this place.
Can you feel your foundation settling?
The self is fragmented, so the self
colonizes. The seagull sobs.
Some birds live underground.
Some birds die there.

VI.

For the birds. Whatever I said,
I really did intend to love you.
Life needs help moving into the new place.
Afternoon breaks the bay window
and changes the locks, but you
sleep through because you're used
to shattering. You don't hear the birds.

VII.

The cardinal is red. The bluejay is blue.

The House of Flickering Love

Go, and I will enter there,
the leek-black hollows worn by the
years,
wormed into wormwood,
buried in the backyard,
yearned for and misunderstood.

Go, and I'll catch up with you,
on the neurotic shores of
unconcern,
where always a candle burns
in the window forgotten,
fallow and flickering.

Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and Whatever's On After That

We kissed in the kitchen but never the TV room,
wrote stories when we were kids and took
pictures when we grew up, that is: the world was huge
and we wanted to make it bigger—then it was
too big so we framed it. White-winged in our
white sheets, I make up dreams to share
should you wake up, ghost-white as you are.

I have never seen the turkey pardoned.
This year the spread is white meat, dry.
I wonder *where is my family?* Out loud:
“Today I am thankful for my family.”
Today I am starving myself.
The red knights' crest on the play-castle
I play-pretend's our family crest, a serpent-lion
dancing around itself, pawing at butterflies.

This morning always comes open.
I want to say like a window but coming down
on you, the sound of glass shattering
just before the sound of shattering glass.
The future is the poem you're working,
the past is a photograph, and the present is
picking your nose. I'm dreaming of you,

my world, your family crest, it's just me now,
watching the parade and not speaking.

As of this publication:

Joanie St-Kaminsky is a faggot, transsexual, nonbinary trans girl, high futch, queer, Jew, poet, artist, anarchic, disabled, neurodivergent, autistic, crazy, and whatever else you are going to call her.

She uses she/her pronouns if you are cis and uncomfortable with that; it uses it/its pronouns if you are cis, consider yourself a trans ally, and are too comfortable using she/her pronouns for it, or trans and uncomfortable using it/its pronouns; and she uses she/it pronouns if you're a faggot who loves gender fuckery.

At the time *disaster poetry* was written, she lived in so-called Asheville, North Carolina, occupied Tsalagi land. She currently lives in so-called Crown Heights, Brooklyn, occupied Canarsie land.

