



Splice Poems

Dan Godston

Argotist Ebooks

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For Edeline

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Mask to Skin to Blood to Heart to Bone and Back

*It was like growing up chair legs scrape
across hardwood floor and hitting
the roof. I kept growing turn the crank
on a cast iron winch and kept holding
onto the roof vocal chords vibrate
like a rooster's because you have this image

that other people crow. Charcoal stub
snaps have of you, based on what
you've put out but the shadow bleeds well.
Hay bale there so far and how
they define you pitched onto a flatbed truck.
Arabesque and what they want patterned

through a dome from you. It's difficult
when window light. Yodel oh crooner
behind you try to take some kind of a turn
the bathtub curtain. Carnival or a change
in the weather barker, gnarled cane
tapper, for yourself. You also

have to bring marbles roll
in a plugged oak with you the perceptions
of your audience barrel. Record spatter I got to the point
where I became sputter interjects
cracked more eccentric—my songs
and expletives. Gently turned brittle*

pages *my worldview*. And I started
using *experimental* with a trembling finger,
a woodcut *instruments and ethnic*
instruments of a cottage, ogre, queen and
child. The horses *and trying to create*
some on the carousel need a new

coat of paint. For a moment we could see *new forms*
for myself. Using the Ferris wheel in the
square mirrors glued to *found sounds*
and so forth. Everybody's the column
in the center of the carousel *on their own road*,
and I don't know where it's going.

Sharpened a Pencil

with an exacto blade *there will be increased pressure,*
no matter the pencil descended to the page *what they promise*
us, to turn a diver knifing into a river from the first recollection

over quantities to sell books. It's almost of earfuls
of a Puerto Rican salsa band to a wooden ladle *a Darwinian*
battle for survival. So it's going slowly stirring goulash,

a pinto bean on the floor, *to be harder to survive. Meanwhile*
graduate creative tomato slices on the cutting board, *writing*
programs continue to proliferate. We're going to be turning

out I'm glad you picked this restaurant, just smoothed
the tablecloth and walked over to dim the lights
a tad, *all these people, and they'll be teachers,*

and they'll soft shoe slide diagonal across hardwood
planks, *be turning out young creative writers,*
where how could I forget anything you taught

me, they'll publish then I don't know. But it's going questions
of integrity, discipline and passion, *to be a very cruel process*
of elimination I believe. Rip up the page and do it again.

The most important aspect memory is a pop-up book *a writer*
can have is energy. When you open one, a book whose pages
are steps *because the world grinds us down* to sit on or climb,

descend a spiral staircase. *The world wears us away. The world*
that would be impossible to forget so why even try to, *does not*
need another book from us. We want what could matter

if memory didn't mean a thing *to convince the world to spend*
money discipline, yes, but abandon the spring's source
to faith *on a book we decided to write. What an absurd idea.*

Red Hills

Ears ears what you listen to breath burns
down the pipe *we all have our licks* doubt out
low simmer *and we all do our licking* in a pressure
cooker *I had to be licked* the bottom boils
and then the bottom falls

out mind makes *out of the licks*. *Don't*
play the same its own connections but
rooted *thing twice*. *When in doubt* in the earth
and body felt-covered mallet heads strike
a cherry wood shell making that

deep timbre listen to the hills *lay out*.
We're in the red hills how the notes meet each
other in a *mansion don't play* space before
in the basement. *There ears musicality ain't*
never *no second audience* banana *people*

to technique *done sticks booted* roll across
us off hammered *the stage*
long time ago. *We metal and the metal sings* listen
as the soul glistens *heavy when we out there*.
We be smokin. *When we play, it be meltdown*.

The Brain Is a Helmet

There's a good greasy spoon joint around here *the brain is a helmet*—how hungry are you? *shaped mass of gray* curved,

angular sponges *and white tissue about the* box of Kleenex on the dresser the *size of a grapefruit*, a stainless steel egg cup

one to two quarts in volume, thumbnail sketch drawn and quartered *and on average weighing three pounds* tap two times

for no (*Einstein's brain, for example*, three times for yes *was 2.75 pounds*). *Its surface* brought bags *is wrinkled like that of a cleaning*

sponge, with when they walk their dogs *and its consistency is custardlike*, in the park here it is—crap—it's closed *firm enough*

to keep from puddling oh well the Walnut Street Diner's not *on the floor of the brain case*, too far from here but it's probably

too *soft enough to be scooped* far for us to walk it they have out *with a spoon*.really good raisin rice pudding

Take

We'd start out *and we'd do*
a take fingers walk up fret-
board belting out a vamp *and usually*
we'd take *the first take* chunks of
bari sax squeals float through the mix
like ice floes on Planet Q. *Sometimes we'd*
take the second but *never the third* snare
cracks open and a arm of honey bees
rushes out *because* *once you play it*
the first time, that's *the way the feeling*
and everything is notes hang from the ceiling
like hibernating bats then fall off
in flakes *and after that* *it starts going*
downhill. The ride cymbal shimmers as
sheets of treble swell and die. *So it's more*
like a challenge when *you do that.* A cluster
chord bites the guitar neck *you know that you*
got to play it *correctly the first or*
second take or that's it whammy bar and fuzztones
conspire *he would take* *it anyhow.* A gorgeous
glissando opens up *if you* *mess up, well,*
that's it, you know. *That's your problem* into
a sweet sustain. *You would*
have to bear that all the rest of your life.

Acknowledgements

The following poems have been published previously—“Red Hills” (*horse less review*), “Take” (*Edgez*), and “Mask to Skin to Heart to Bone and Back” (*580 Split*). The editors of *580 Split* nominated “Mask to Skin to Heart to Bone and Back” for a Pushcart Prize.

Notes about Borrowed Texts

“The Brain is a Helmet”—italicized words were taken from Edward O. Wilson’s *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*.

“Mask to Skin to Heart to Bone and Back”—italicized words were taken from an interview with Tom Waits.

“Red Hills” is the title of a Douglas Ewart composition, and italicized words in that poem are quotes by Douglas Ewart.

“Sharpened a Pencil”—italicized words were taken from an interview with Frederick Busch.

“Take”—italicized words are from an interview with the saxophonist Charlie Rouse, in *Thelonious Monk: Straight, No Chaser* (dir. Charlotte Zwerin, 1988).

The Splice Poem Process

My splice poems are comprised of words that are my own, and words borrowed from sources; the words from other sources are italicized. Here are three ways by which these splice poems can be read: 1) You can read the italicized words straight through—to read the borrowed source in its entirety; 2) You can read the unitalicized words straight through; 3) You can read the poem straight through, the words in their sequential order. There are also other ways to read splice poems...

About the Author

Dan Godston teaches and lives in Chicago. His chapbooks include *Sonic Textures Triptych* and *Opening the Inner Eye*, and his writings have appeared in *Chase Park*, *After Hours*, *BlazeVOX*, *Versal*, *Beard of Bees*, *Drunken Boat*, *580 Split*, *Kyoto Journal*, *Eratica*, *The Smoking Poet*, *Horse Less Review*, *Moria*, *Apparatus Magazine*, *EOAGH*, *Requited Journal*, *Sentinel Poetry*, and other publications. His poem “Mask to Skin to Blood to Heart to Bone and Back” was nominated by the editors of *580 Split* for the Pushcart Prize. He also composes and performs music, and he directs the Borderbend Arts Collective.

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