

I nearly died at birth and was saved by a new, experimental surgery. Consequently I was a frail child who grew up without a mother in a house filled with women. My grandmothers cared for me while my Father worked though for a while we had a succession of live-in maids who were as poor as we were. My grandmothers read to me almost from birth and I still remember lying in bed listening to Aesop's Fables or the stories of Hans Christian Anderson and thinking what a beautiful thing to give life to the mysterious landscape inside. I learned from my grandmothers at an early age a reverence for books and the spoken word which as I grew older and encountered numerous wonderful and gifted teachers turned into a lifelong devotion to poetry.

I've been very lucky. For me it seems looking back—the right teachers have appeared when I most needed them. I've studied under and with poets whose works and whose patience helped set me back on the path just when I faltered. I am grateful for all of them. Most especially to Norman Dubie at the Iowa Writers Workshop and my first yoga teacher and now life partner Nöle Giulini.

I'm working my way through the *Snake Quartet*. The third book—*Hunger Sutras* is scheduled for publication in the Fall of this year—2018. The first two books in the *Snake Quartet*—*Snake* and *Second Wind* are available at Red Hen Press. My website garylemons.com offers detailed information on the origin and evolution of these books—which are essentially one long poem—as well as samples from unpublished and published manuscripts. The last book in the Quartet is called *Original Grace* and will publish in 2020.

I have published 6 books of poetry. The last two are (2016) *Dia de los Muertos*, which is also a coloring book of poems and (2017) *The Weight of Light*. Both are with Red Hen Press.

Interviews

<http://www.garylemons.com/interviews.html>

this link includes a two-part written interview with the Huffington Post, a lengthy in-depth article with Tim Green at Rattle Magazine and 3 radio interviews (sound recordings) on KSER fm in Seattle. It will also soon include an interview with Swamp Magazine in their Spring 2018 issue.

Work in the Notre Dame Review/Commentary of the body of my work

I typically don't explain my work believing that once I do I will have placed it in a room with a ceiling and walls that—no matter how large—must confine it. However the Snake Quartet is admittedly difficult work—both contextually as well as structurally. It has for instance a 40 page title poem in the center of the book that is written in pentameter with some freedom taken with the iambs—the poem is rigorously syllabic and metrically less so.

The original poem—Snake—first appeared in my second book—Bristol Bay & Other Poems (Red Hen Press)—it was a stand-alone poem introducing a strange voice/character named Snake who is the last thing remaining on Earth after the planet in a fit of retributive anger destroys all life upon it.

In this poem all the ingredients of the quartet were already present—the infinite within the finite--the collective hidden in the individual—the highway traveled by dreams between all living things—the nobility of resisting injustice at great personal cost—the reality and importance of non-material objects including whispers, lies, fables, imaginings shadow, untaken actions and fictions of every ilk to the visceral understanding of what is actually real. Everything--Snake says--is real. There's no zero on the probability curve of what is possible and therefore real within infinity.

The *Hunger Sutras* is well described on my website garylemons.com but a small window into it might show all living things—from the microscopic to the immense—consuming one another to live. We eat and something dies to feed us. There is a moral poverty implicit in this. A hierarchy that assigns value to one thing over another. The human is more important than the cow or deer or chicken. Consequently it's acceptable to end their lives to sustain our own. The cancer cell that eats tissue shares the same imperative as picnickers—it wants to live and needs food to do so. On and on. Snake wanders the empty planet finding the shadow of appetite still clinging to the rocks—dripping from the sky—particulate in the atmosphere and as she wanders she explores the alternatives and on occasion send me poems—mostly when I least expect them meaning I spend many nights in the wee hours as her amanuensis.

One very important aspect of *the Snake Quartet*—Snake is both male and female as well as any genders we've yet discovered. I refer to her or him often in the same poem. The idea is she is the collective embodied and the collective has no gender but is—rather—all genders---God—if you will—is neither a he nor a she—not an old patrician figure with a beard and a shepherd's crook nor a multi-limbed goddess with a necklace of stars—those are only aspects of infinity but not the summary of its characteristics. Snake is the summary.

The way this plays out in the poems is sort of cool and new to me. Voice becomes as fleeting as a draft of wind against a candle flame—causing some guttering and flickering shadows on the wall but no definitive shape. The truth according to Snake is that we are the all—whatever name you attribute to it—in specific expression and consequently we share every imaginable characteristic equally. It's custom and religion along with fear and misinformed ideas of justice or revenge that harden us into discrete categories more easily managed either by elevating the acceptable or imprisoning those who aren't.

Sound Recording—links provided above

Website garylemons.com

Additional Poems

From Dark Sky Reserve (unpublished 2018)

Definitions

Most don't know what others
Means by love—only what they
Believe learned from time spent riding
The hour hand around the clock—

One will feel it in the kiss

Of the one chosen for the perfect
Secret longing in their eyes—
One in the smell of wet fur
Curled up and dreaming by a fire—
One beside a grave listening
To the boom of rifles before throwing
Dirt on a child—one will
See it in a glass of wine—one
In a bowl of good smoke—one alone
In wilderness when owls land
On her boot to lick the salt—

I see it in the footprints
Drying on the wood floor where
She walked barefoot from the bath
Directly out to the moon through
A window that can't be closed.

Left Behind

It was during a heat wave
Somewhere near the equator
With blue and orange birds almost
Speaking Spanish on the strangely
Gray branches of the limp foliage
When the map lost its borders
And became as simple as a frozen pond
Spotted by a wedge of geese--

In the course of opening the window
A shiver ran up my spine—turned
Into a cramp that became a spasm
That ended as a seizure that threw
Me across the space/time continuum
Out to the far flung reaches of the stars
While my body—that old saddle—
Lay beneath the window impervious
To the smell of rain in the summer air.

I don't mind rubbing oil on the saddle
Knowing when I go into the night
It won't creak under my weight so
Even my enemies won't know
I'm coming to get them.

From Snake #4—Original Grace (2020 Red Hen Press)

Fork in the Road

Snake imagines a skull—not a head
With a face expressin interest
Or disgust—imagines a cleanly boiled,
White skull on the path in front of him—
Crawls into it—in through one eye—
Out through the other—faster—

Faster—faster—in and out—seein eye
To eye to eye—until snake is a blur—
So fast she churns the ego from a dream--

At which point the skull starts to think
A body to carry it around—grows flesh—hair—smiles—
Walks into the temple of unfinished days
To worship the unimaginable.

Scardy Cat

Snake crawlin crawlin crawlin--
Not noticing rocks turned to sand
Until she's on the beach with her
Back to the sea—one with

The night—one with the day—
At odds with everything in between--

Formulatin emptiness--pressin
Into the ocean—be a rain drop afraid
Of fallin--one thing for certain—snake don't
Run from nothin--she runs
At it--right now somethin pushin
Her at the sea—like a force field of tears
Pressin an eyeball into air--
Invisible--not real in the sense
The sea is real—somethin unseen
Don't even know she's there but
Will roll her up into the going.

Be a border everywhere you look—
Boundaries on all sides—take one step
You touchin someone else's hand—
Stay where you are though—never
Take that step --you don't wake up--

Time to push back thinks snake.
Time for buttin heads with the nastiness
Locked inside every possible intersection
Of fetish and faith like a blank fortune
Inside a stale old cookie—she rears up

Infinitely high—infinitely wide—
Waits—and waits—

Until right now when you and I

Come into view and the world shifts and no
One need fear their potential again.
Once the secretions from the
Broken clock turn into fire
And snake gets burned in the glow
Of what won't come again.

From Book of Spells (unpublished 2018)

Spell

To do something simple--
Make bread from grain planted
In early Spring seed by seed—thinned
Row by row while stooping
Under the weight of a wet headscarf
With a sandwich against your chest
To keep it warm—the wheat
Blessed by weather and ripened
By distant fire—something simple--like
Mixing water and clay to turn on a wheel—
Hoping the face in the bowl will speak

Words clarifying what it is to love something
Enough to let it go—perhaps a wobbling
Bird with new feathers at the edge of
A great fall with only the blood thump

Of its fearless heart moving it upward
Toward the beckoning sky.

Something simple—like this moment--
Or the ordinary movement of lips
Near an anthill—whispering down
Into the tunnel—I love you—Fire—
Air—Water—Earth—Ant.

Spell

Once there was a theme park—let's
Call it wilderness—woven by rivers and roots
And rain into a perfect tapestry filled
With life forms uninterested in public office--it
Growled at encroaching strangers like feral
Shadows circling an unmarked grave—

Indications are everywhere—where
Apples once hung shiny weapons droop—
The summary of all grief packaged
In nonsense then weighed down and sank
In the subnivean trenches of the heart
Can be found in the powder streak on
The chin of a dowager queen forced
To choose between the musical song
Of a caged finch or wild crickets to brighten
Her mood while changing underwear.

Our job--make sure there are still
Moments to inhabit out there in the forest
Where an ancient wisdom—with a
Solar powered voice--waits
For sunrise to sing.

Spell

Isis comes home to a place
That's gone—an aluminum
Wind blows across the empty desert
Where her trailer stood—
She sees ghosts rolling in dust
Like cutlets in flour—sees vultures
Accepting the gift from the gods—

Beneath the dunes—a lost
Continent rises—heather begins to
Bloom white as a Malevich
Dab while warrior clans awaken
Inside imperatives of the sword--

She's tired of carrying gas cans
On her back to re-fuel a moment
In the future stalled at a crossroads—

She soldiers on—toward the wedding

Shimmering like an oasis where lovers
Hold mirrors up to a ghost —

Above her a storm is coming—
Red with every animal churned to paste
Then spread in turbulent waves
On igloos lit up from within—or perhaps
It's simply pimientos on saltines--

Isis sings to the world—a Noah's Ark
Of voices wanting two of everything
Paired with restraint—the songs
Dribbling like saliva from the lips
Of a dotard sucking his thumb—

This is the ventriloquist
Inside the Tower of Babel--

But the words are bombs that
Conceal a glow-in-the-dark god inside--

Falling on a people undeserving of
The coming benediction.

Spell

In a little village along the Rhine
A wild boar runs through victory

Gardens of cabbage with the glee of tanks
That earlier--through the snow of unwritten
Pages-- crushed a stone hut inside
Which partisans wearing garlic laced with cornflowers
Took turns releasing tourniquets.

Later—when that war ended--
The swine died a natural death
In the dark litter of fallen apples--
No longer able to postpone
The mentorship of a long sleep.

How I love the chafing dish filled
With fictions in glistening tallow that
Memory serves up with poached light
On a plate upended by a scream--

Last winter I came back here—
Back to the broken stones the survivors
Turned into garden walls--
I entered the lodge packed with tourists
From places where hotels aren't built on stilts
In case blood floods the wine cellar--

In the restaurant the hips of the waiter
With gravy dried in his cuticles cast
Half-moon shadows on the unbroken
Field of the white tablecloth where

I swear I felt the desperation of red
Cherries trying to escape the shimmering
Aspic hiding the bald pheasants like a hut
Around soldiers holding hands.

I didn't tell you I found
The crushed rifles under the snow--
The blood encrusted shoelaces
Used to tie off veins--the remaining pool
Of shadows where the shrill call
Of owls and the finger in the cheek plop of tanks
Stuck in cemetery mud turned everything
Into a long icicle on a sun warmed roof—

I didn't tell you that now—in
These interim days—forever
Froze over and we are walking out
On the thin ice of a dream.