

## In the Ministry of Writers under the Glare of Spotlight

Butler Book Awards 2017, with stolen lines from finalists during their VFA panel

Why are you writing this?

An image came to me. A dream. Sleepless, I walked the old streets or sat smoking with Dorothy Parker. The poet's wit, cutting. I couldn't get out of the café, the war, a man with a gun in his hand, doubt, the mistress of the French, the abandoned books at my death.

Is it personal?

What? Yes. Everything. I mean, no, as in it's not about me, not this time. I had this experience. I read a line by Jung or Plath or was it Anonymous? Everyday life so –

What is the reason you write?

the excavator on my street kept digging down and eventually it hit a pipe. Was it sewage or was it water? I have no idea. Hey, bub, how's the old dog? Hey, Mary, how's Christ?

What about morality?

I give voice to the silent (or I silence those who'd have their own voice?)  
There is a lot to worry about, don't you think?  
I can't really see your face, who are you?  
I take the voices and let them sing.  
I worry about the voices. I worry about whose voice I've taken on and if I should.  
Hello? I worry I'm talking into the banana phone again.

What about mortality?

Oh, him again.  
Aging. Anthropocene. Immortals wanting, wanting.  
Did you hear the joke about the man who was in a flood? It's a long one but in the end, he stands on his roof while the waters rise and turns away a boat, a helicopter, a hot air balloon and finally drowns. In heaven he whines to God that he waited for Him to save him and God says – I sent you a boat, a helicopter and a hot air balloon. What more did you want? There is mortality for you:  
determination to make it to the end.

Who is your muse?

My abuse. My short fuse. What's the use?

What about your children?

They are small. They stand over me in the dark of night grinning and giggling.  
They are grown, they visit. They are my agent. I am their editor.

Do you read Alice Munro? P.K. Page?

I read to sleep and take my reading slow  
I read the fates in what I cannot feel  
I lead by going where my reading goes

Do you read Ondaatje? Mistry?

Lions and their skin.  
A fine balance.  
I read short takes in pride, at the edge of the stepping stones, I walk through dark streets  
lit by gaslight, follow the yellow mountains for the days of my life until there is news.  
The red desert night. Apocalypse.

Do you have a dog or cats?

I do, what's it to you?

Are they named after literary characters?

I have a fish, Elvis. I've had cats. So many Bashos. I have a dog. I grow vegetables.

I say to my partner, do you want to read the poem or walk the dog more? He leaves at  
midnight, walks until the morning clouds part, fragrant.

Who is your first reader?

I talk to my dog, I talk  
I talk to my computer, I talk  
I talk to the sun, I sweat in it  
condemn its heat. Talk to the flies  
all their eyes.

Are you going deep?

When all is lost, there is nothing to lose.

I brush my teeth. I stare at my iPhone. I open and close the fridge door, I tear out the pages. I papier maché birdhouses out of them. I worry about the paste and if it will mold or poison. I throw a ball for my dog. I make a pile of papers on my floor. I reread Virginia Woolf, I reread Young, Price, Jones, Farrant, Stevenson, Than, Rurr...

I run out of ink. I run out. I run out of paper. I run.