

LAWYER:

“We are disappointed
 but not surprised
 that once again
 members of law enforcement
 will not be held accountable
 for killing an unarmed Black man”

Phone Calls**Cast:**

You

Setting:

Your home

*YOU pick up a phone.
 Call your reps.
 Ask them to support ending qualified immunity.*

Pass it on.

For Elijah (Again)

A MOTHER (<i>whispers</i>):	Because you were born there is a light
CHORUS (<i>sings</i>):	Let us inherit a double portion of your spirit

Speaking for Myself:

the safety to
crumble
cracked open at the
impossible
of it all

of Touch
healing
harmful
healing
harmful
healing
harmful
()
Touch

This Play Was Once a Lunchtime Violin Concert for Cats and Dogs at an Animal Shelter but Now This Play Just Wonders What to Say

Wind

SHENEEN: “The wind will blow and I’ll think about him.”

THE WIND blows:

WIND: -
-
-
-
-
-

-
-
-
-



1. Playing Violin for Cats

*Three cats in a caged row. A young man playing violin.
Someone turns off the lights.*

A cat: Who turned off the song, hello...hello?

2. The Work Over

A woman types at the computer.

Phone vibrates loudly on the table.

Cat meows for food. A child calls from the bathroom.

A Smoke alarm.

3. The Transmissions of Capcom Trevor Scott & Commander Genevieve Scott-Wagner: Part I

Trevor talks into a camera on his space station mega-computer.

TREVOR: The cannibals have devoured the children first. My only hope is that your mission is a success and there can be hope for the rest of us.

4. The Transmissions of Capcom Trevor Scott & Commander Genevieve Scott-Wagner: Part II

Genevieve films her response from within her spaceship pod.

GENVIEVE: What kind of civilization are we that cannibalizes the young?

5. The Transmissions of Capcom Trevor Scott & Commander Genevieve Scott-Wagner: Part III

Trevor replies from a dark closet.

TREVOR: No kind of civilization at all, I fear. You have not sent in your mission reports. Are you okay? When are you returning?

6. The Transmissions of Capcom Trevor Scott & Commander Genevieve Scott-Wagner: Part IV

Genevieve replies at breakfast on her 'pad'.

GENEVIEVE: The mission is a success so far. My breeding program has yet to yield results. Why do you look so old?

7. The Transmissions of Capcom Trevor Scott & Commander Genevieve Scott-Wagner: Part V

Trevor replies from an underground bunker.

TREVOR: It has been ten years, Genevieve. When are you coming home?

8. The Transmissions of Capcom Trevor Scott & Commander Genevieve Scott-Wagner: Part VI

Genevieve has a small child on her hip.

GENEVIEVE: Up here, all life is precious. This is my home now.

9. Mountains on the Horizon

Trevor steps outside. He is very old and blinks in the harsh sunlight.

TREVOR: I can finally see the mountains on the horizon.

He sinks down on his knees.

10. Mountains on the Horizon II

Genevieve teaches to a large circle of children in a meadow of wildflowers.

GENEVIEVE: What is missing here?

BOY: I'd like to see some mountains out there.

He points to the horizon.

GENEVIEVE: Yes. Let's program some mountains.

FOUR PLAYS

A white man in blackface enters. He plays a violin: Swanee River.

A black man in whiteface enters. He plays a violin: Swanee River.

A policeman enters. He removes his body-camera and drops it on the ground. He smiles.

A small child enters. He picks up the camera and aims it at the audience. On a large screen we see... us.

DRAWINGS:

This is Elijah.

This is a face mask.

This is a carotid artery.

This is ketamine.

The End.

THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED

A violin enters, it tunes up. A blue steamroller crosses the stage and crushes the violin.

THE GAME

Eric Garner and Elijah McClain are playing cards. A knock. George Floyd enters and joins. Another knock. Breonna Taylor enters and joins. Another knock.

—

[Animals and humans gather in a socially-distanced circle to celebrate the life of Elijah McClain!]

Joey the Dolphin: I am swift in thought and a burst of joy. I offer these words to celebrate Elijah on his 25th birthday.

Everyone:

*Purposefully guided
Inspired, grateful
Caring, giving, loving
A light in darkness
Constellation*

Mildred the Fly: Everyone hates me, thinks I'm gross and expendable. But I'm not. I am important. I eat the things you throw away and recycle their nutrients... One of Elijah's last words was that he wouldn't hurt even a fly like me... We will always remember him, and our buzzing in your ear will be the sound of his violin forever.

Everyone:

*Violin wizard
Magical, talented
heartwarming, animal-loving, crowd-pleasing
Sensitive unique caring special
soul*

Wolfy the Wolf: hiding in seclusion, I am hunted down and misunderstood.

Everyone:

*Elijah
Taken before his time, he was a gifted soul*

*Sighing, crying, dying
Fate and destiny was sad
Let his voice live on*

Diamond the Pitbull: I am the underdog who fights for those who can't speak. Your name and work will carry on. We miss you Elijah.

Everyone:
*Elijah
Ray of light
Artistic
Healing learning inspiring
Peaceful Human*

Midnight, a curious Beetle: I was caught by my own wingshine, but taken to flight by Elijah's violin.

Everyone:
*Elijah
Joyful eccentric
Laughing, dancing, inspiring
Beat of his own drum
Healer*

The unnamed scraggly Dog: Elijah's music would lull me to sleep as I would wait for someone to come and give me a name and home:

Everyone:
*Elijah
A life taken too soon
He marched to the beat of his own drum
A ray of light that shined in a dark world
A man of many talents
A brother and son loved by many
A unique human peacefully inspiring others
He will not be forgotten.*

NOTES FOR ELIJAH

Notes for Elijah (1)

So, what brings you in today Mr. McClain?
I tear at my feet until I see blood.
Let me take a look.

Notes for Elijah (2)

I tear at my feet
Why do I tear/rip/ the skin from my feet?
I harm myself to control the healing.

Notes for Elijah (3)

Forever is a promise no man keeps
Unless he keeps looking back forever,
Forever escapes us till we look back,
Look back

Notes for Elijah (4)

A sun who keeps on rising
A tide in the rising sea
Earth beneath my bloody feet,
And a rare deep breath

Notes for Elijah (5)

First thing in the morning/before the sun:
I pray for the dead to keep on living
Like the elements before us

Notes for Elijah (6)

Stevie told us we will know and we do But
knowing doesn't make it easier Lift the
yoke of a knowing heart

Notes for Elijah (7)

MOTHER NATURE: Turn down the lights
on the great white way. For I am taking a
day off to mourn my son.

Notes for Elijah (8)

MOTHER NATURE: (laughing)
Yes, 1 day is like 100 days but who's
counting? I am taking a respite to mourn
my sons.

Notes for Elijah (9)

MOTHER NATURE:
Judges,
It is not my job to make him a Saint,
Or to write his name in books with
Angels.

Notes for Elijah (10)

CHORUS:
We are pulling back the covers
We are letting in the Sun
The shutters are open
The alarm has rung
(Sun)

Luv Offerings for Elijah...

Elijah:

I bow to you.

Always with gratitude.

Purposely guided.

Inspired by everything.

Head stands and toe shoes.
I love you.

Luv Offerings for Elijah...

Elijah:
I bow to you.
Always with gratitude.
Purposely guided.
Inspired by everything.
Violin Vigils for Stray Cats.
I love you.

Luv Offerings for Elijah...

Elijah:
I bow to you.
Always with gratitude.
Purposely guided.
Inspired by everything.
Healing hands, stories and song.
I love you.

Luv Offerings for Elijah...

Elijah:
I bow to you.
Always with gratitude.
Purposely guided.
Inspired by everything.
You were light. So light.
I love you.

I bow to you.
I bow to you.
I bow to you.
I bow to you.
I bow to you.
I bow to you.
Elijah.

Luv Offerings for Elijah...

Elijah:

I bow to you.

Always with gratitude.

Purposely guided.

Inspired by everything.

The earth is not smooth.

I love you.

Luv Offerings for Elijah...

Elijah:

I bow to you.

Always with gratitude.

Purposely guided.

Inspired by everything.

I am different, you said.

I love you.

Luv Offerings for Elijah...

Elijah:

I bow to you.

Always with gratitude.

Purposely guided.

Inspired by everything.

Light.

Fly.

Breathe.

Free.

I love you.

Elijah.

Luv Offerings for Elijah...

Elijah:

I bow to you.

Always with gratitude.

Purposely guided.

Inspired by everything.

I love you.
 I love you.
 Love.
 Elijah.

I love you.
 I love you.
 I love you.
 I love you.
 I love you.
 I love you.
 I love you.
 I love you.
 Elijah.

Piece by piece, collage, which makes one person.
 From so far away, the pieces in harmony. Music.
 From up close, they break. Unfinished.

-

“Transfiguration”

Elijah
 Jesus
 Moses

A mountain.

At this moment

JESUS

We appear.

MOSES

ELIJAH

As if to signify the unthinkable has happened.

JESUS

Because once more.

ELIJAH

It has.

-

*All of the homeless cats and dogs look up.
A light shines from somewhere.
Down front a violin drops
to the ground.
It is shattered.*

-

COLLEAGUE

He wore a mask to protect himself.
He protected them too.
There was redemption in the sounds
It still echoes.
If you listen, you'll hear.

-

*A stage. A music stand.
Spotlight.
A person places sheet music there. Exits.
A distant dog.
Food bowls are filled.
Lapping water. Unquenchable thirst.
Lights.*

-

“All of the dead ancestors raise up out of their graves. They dance, rejoice.

They do not cry, or focus on what was lost.

Think of what was made:

remember the foundations you build now are bricks upon bricks. It is upon someone else’s body
you lay yourself.

-

A large pane of foggy glass. A figure pounding on it from behind.

DOCTOR

(muttering, unintelligible)

Wehavenowaytotellorknowandwewillnevertellorknowandwehavetodomoreresearchwecan’ttellor
knowwithoutresearchwewillnevertellorknow.

The pounding gets louder. The DOCTOR mumbles louder.

DOCTOR

Nowaytoknowit’suknowablewewilltellyouwhenwefindoutbutwedonotknowit’spossiblewe’llneve
rknowandifiknowtheniwilltellyoubutwedon’tknow.

The lights fade. The pounding stops.

-

A young black man wakes up in his bed.

Light streams through the window. It is a new day.

His mother enters carrying a small pet carrier.

The earth trembles beneath them.

-

A PLAY WHICH TRIES TO CONTAIN IT ALL

Act 1

In which everything is made.

Act 2

In which the slow destruction is witnessed.

End.

-

Instructions for a play for Elijah inspired by Sol Lewitt

1. What would you want someone to say about you? Can you begin to imagine?

—

CONVENIENCE STORE CLERK

Walks downstage, his eyes fixed on one spot ahead of him.

In my mind he was afraid but hopeful to the end.

//

VETERINARIAN

It's been a nightmare watching them watch the door so hopefully, and their lives have never seemed so short. I can't think about him.

//

Read your last words on instagram.
So nice to those officers,
Can't imagine how sweet you must have been
To those who weren't killing you

//

Desperation

Fate:
Every now and then I
Look back and
Imagine
Justice for the victims of police brutality.
A
Higher image we ought to dream.

//

Empty Space:

Motivational. Inspirational. All these words accumulate here. A lifetime is described within the empty space. The cracks writhe with frustration of what could have been.

//

ELIJAH
 (A reader goes high in a tree and says just
 “Jah” and “Ah”
 And awe
 Living lived
 Elements emblems embedded
 Likenesses
 Ambling in just hope

//

bow pulled across strings
 Sweet, sweet melody
 kittens lulled to sleep
 Sweet, sweet melody
 tea sold at store
 Sweet, sweet melody

silence.
 no more melody

// (this next one is 2...totalling 50 words...)

Those Who Lost a Friend, Therapist, and Person

Phone: (Left on the pavement, still ringing. Could be a patient, could be a cousin, nobody is there to pick it up and check. People walk past. Flashes of light. It rings. Then it's silent until the voicemail alert pops up.)

//

The words that keep repeating in my head is he was getting his brother an iced tea.
He was getting his brother an iced tea.

//

Minneapolis summer the brightest green grass and cleanest white plastic signs
An art installation of rows and columns of markers sunk in the soft turf

//

25th Birthday February 25th the Christmas of February a child is born who will be king but who
will not be king but who is

//

25 the perfect square
the fingers each with a hand of fingers griefreach
front of face orifices with five senses each sensing where is home

//

CALVINO
(stepping into the light and holding his hand high palm down knuckles up)
Quality of lightness, not as a feather, but as a bird.

//

Resting arresting wresting re sting
Resting arresting wresting re sting
Resting arresting wresting re sting
Resting arresting wresting re sting
How does never again start?

//

Elijah, in the Old Testament, with Elisha, approaches the river Jordan.
 He rolls up his robe and strikes the water.
 The water immediately divides.

//

Elijah and Elisha cross now dry riverbed.
 Out of nowhere a chariot and horses of fire appear and Elijah is” lifted up in a whirlwind.”

//

Elisha I am flying. ELIJAH

I see you Elijah. ELISHA

Everything is fire. Chariot, Horses. Sky. ELIJAH

Anything that falls I’ll catch. ELISHA

Yes ELIJAH

//

MOM
 Can we talk, son?

SON
 About what?

MOM
 (Looking back in time, looking forward, seeing her son’s full height)

How the world is, Son.

//

Belonging to Arabic, Indian (Sanskrit), Hebrew, English languages, Elijah could be heart blessing, a paradise, a precious prophet, a great angel, brave, kind and bright.

//

25 characters:

<~~~~~remembrance~~~~>

//

Your

Hands

So gentle

Meant to comfort

Their

Hands

So rough

And bent to kill

We raise ours high

But

All should have

Your

//

Thick white line separates stage left from right. Violin: right. Spotlight follows a cat across the stage. She sits to the left of the line.

//

ELIJAH approaches a 5-year-old boy and hands him a violin.

BOY: I can't make music. My hands: small, my mind: wandering.

ELIJAH: Your heart: melody.

//

SPEAKER: Introvert. A reserved or shy person who enjoys spending time alone. In a sentence: as an introvert, solitude breathed joy into Elijah. I-N-T-R-O-V-E-R-T. Introvert.

//

GIRL: What lingers now?

A smile.

I heard the story,

saw one photograph.

And that

smile

infiltrated my world.

That smile...

his

smile

breaths on.

//

Will you ever see the sunshine again?

Or another droplet of rain?

For all of those who you loved

Weather certainly won't feel the same

//

Twenty five

Plenty five

Twenty live

Plenty live

Plenty of

Life

Of plenty

Two-five

Too five

Two alive

Too alive

Twenty five

Should be

Alive

//

TEEN: if you could be anything, what would you be?

CHILD: I guess I'd just be me.

TEEN: and if they didn't let you?

CHILD:

//

PHOTOGRAPH: How can I capture something that will burst the hearts of strangers? One look in your eyes says humanity. Thank you for the warmth.

//

A young boy sprints onstage, stopping center to catch his breath. He looks around, trying to identify a sound. His glance rests on one spot.

—

1

*Full plate empty chair
a child is
not there, he*

*we
wait
with the empty
the longer we wait
the more is filled with
empty*

2

*Resist – ing
is debated. For example:*

a

To “resist contact” is
a form of resistance –

b
Clearly, it is an act of
yes, and a fist is

a
a test?

b
at best, it

a
...yes.

...

3: Gentle.

C
I don't think he'd set a mouse trap
if there were a rodent problem.

D
No!

C
Gentle soul
called home –

D
Sent, so, with no -

4

F
He who brings such life into the world
leaves that world with more

B
or less

F
Less him, yes

B

so: less

F

so more
and less, yes.

5

Please respect the
introversion of, the
intention of my
pleas

Please, I'm sorry
I can't please
if you'd just leave –

6

Purchases tea
bows, deeply
gratitude, see?
Boy-man knows who he
is what he sows and
we owe
gratitude an in kind
bend, low for the glow that was
Elijah McClain.

7

“Purposefully guided”

Soft tough
never enough but
now more than ever, never

what, just

“Known for dying”

8

If we're not undone
we're done –

You see? *child hums*
My son
child
continues to hum

undone, missing
and missing nothing.

9

1
“Soft”

2
Meaning

1
Meaning *soft*, meaning

2
what

1
meaning not

2
You mean a *lot*

1
I mean what. the fuck.

2
You mean soft.

10

Empty chair
the innocent

isn't there

anointed

once risen
will herald in

we wait
he will return, will liberate –

we wait.

—

(An empty stage)

I.

PERSON

I'm sorry that we never met. And that we never will meet.

ELIJAH

No one can meet everyone.

PERSON

I wish.

II.

(A bustling stage. Elijah stands center.)

ELIJAH

You don't know me.

(No one reacts.)

ELIJAH

No one knows me!

(More people surround Elijah. He disappears.)

III.

(Elijah stands center stage, alone. He moves his lips. No words come out. He falls to his knees, bangs his fists on the ground. Silence.)

IV.

(Elijah sits at a kitchen table. He reads the newspaper and drinks from a mug. He carefully folds the newspaper.)

ELIJAH

I am a character.

V.

(Elijah stands across from Elijah. Elijah moves his hands in pantomime, Elijah copies him. Elijah gently lays on the ground while Elijah walks briskly off-stage.)

VI.

(Nothing on stage. Slowly, the rustle of leaves can be heard, then the quiet chirping of birds. A soft stream gurgles. All sounds reach crescendo. Heaven.)

VII.

(A museum. Visitors enter, take their time with each artwork. Many congregate around an empty podium in the center where a statue should be.)

VIII.

(Elijah crouches on the floor. His hands grasp at his throat and chest.)

ELIJAH

These aren't my words!

(Lights flicker off and on. Elijah disappears.)

IX.

(A classroom. TEACHER stands at the board.)

TEACHER

Who can tell me the significance of this passage?

(Only Elijah raises his hand.)

TEACHER

No one?

X.

(The audience is directed to sit on folding chairs on stage. Elijah sits alone in the audience. The audience watches Elijah. Elijah watches the audience.)

—

Winter Lookout

Night. Wind steps on bark.

Owl

In coat of white feathers

lands on branch

in snow.

She hoots.

Owl: I'm watching. Youooo.

*

BodyCams

Landing in grass.

BodyCam 1: Fuck!

BodyCam 2: I'm cracked.

Scuffling.

BodyCam 1: What's that?

Scuffling.

BodyCam 2: Can't see a goddamn thing.

*

Why Are You...?

A voice whispers into an ear:

I don't...even
 Even...I
 I don't
 I don't even...
 I don't even kill
 I don't...kill
 I don't...

*

Fireflies

Darkness. Yellow and green lights flicker the rhythm of a Rocky mountain song. The buffalo roam. And the deer and the antelope play.

*

Iced Tea

Whispers into an iPhone:

cold water. **tea** bag in a cup. boil. steep. remove **tea** bag. refrigerate til **iced**. walk home. enjoy.

*

MothersI

Mother pulls weeds. More Mothers enter and sing rounds echoing through bullhorns:

The ancestors tell us
 sing our story.
 Remember, remember it.
 Yes, we will.

*

Aurora

*A howling violin National Anthem.
 Skier in all Black glides off a cliff: flips, spirals through the night sky. Eyes dance against a blue wall of northern lights.*

*

MothersII

A boy with a hoodie listens.

Mother1: Pull it down.

Mother2: No. Keep it up.

Boy: Just.

Mother2: Keep. It. Up.

Mother1: Pull. It. down.

*

Graveyard

Car drives Grandmothers with white gloves.

G1: He had tiny bones. Nimble.

G2: To dial?

G1: To place on strings.

G2: My word.

Gravel.

*


Lookout Chorus

All-white figures in kitchens. A flash of light in windows. The figures walk to windows to look. Many phones dialing loud.

—



Imagine a circle.



A circle.

*A park.
Green grass.
Nearly Spring.*

People gather.

*Five violinists take turns serenading
cats from a local shelter.*

(safely)

Simple rituals take place.



*for now
this*

Today is Elijah Jovan McClain's

Birthday.

We gather.

Virtually.

Please say his name.


Elijah Jovan McClain.

(25 times)



Purring Cat Sounds.

(click on the underlined word)



*Let's observe twenty five
minutes of silence and
contemplation.*

Will you list 25 things you're grateful for?

Could we share this somehow?

A deep bow of gratitude.

25 times

Close your eyes.

Think of a time someone showed you kindness.

What do you feel? Where?

Extend that feeling to the world.

Will you commit to performing 25 acts of kindness?

(before next February 25, 2020)

Each word holds a song. (click)

Meowing

Beatitudes
Air
Forgiveness
Sound
Photograph

Kittens
Kittens
Kittens
Cats

Healing
Emotions
Heart
Beyond
Blessing

Golden
Love
Sun

Joy



1

I kneel at a memorial to Elijah, lighting candles:
I can't speak for you
And you can't speak
I want to tell you a story

2

I read a story once (Diaspora) about two-dimensional
alien carpets --simple, but they were actually
the living language of extra dimensional beings.
Stay with me.

3

The teller of stories, immortal and undying
strokes the loving ears of her kitten
who is a universe of green fur
housing hungry unfearful cows

4

The teller of stories despises himself for being the one alive to tell this story.
He cannot tell it well. It is the only story.

5

The teller of stories reads stories of bodies through his fingers. Muscles, fat, flesh:
nouns, adjectives, verbs. His body speaks back: peace. pain. peace.

6

The teller of stories howls over a raging wall of sound, obliterating the street like a
storm, washing it away to black
stay with me.

7

The teller of stories knows that sometimes the ground is the sky. Miraculous seeing.
You laugh - look! Aurora's jagged shapes threaten the gentle clouds!

8

The teller of stories breaks! They shatter, ebullient and frail, gliding back to coalesce!
The briney blood dance of the earth is their story!

9

The storytellers make eye contact, draw their bows, lift their chins, begin. The stories weave, expressing an ineffable truth. They live on paper they *live*

10

A boy full of love without resentment is murdered
horribly stolen
and becomes a story that makes many strings sing--
stay. I love you.

SUSPECT DESCRIPTION

who am I
what you cannot see
I die because you cannot imagine me
as I am.
I'm sorry you killed me
love,
E M

but you can call me Elijah.
my own fear of your fear of me kills me to feed your fear
I laugh and you find

it erratic
why should a black kid in a ski mask laugh
I'm sorry
your chokehold friends sent me a text to cheer me up

did you get it?
they were laughing
just like I do when I listen to music in my zone
when I need to get out

of the house and be fatally misunderstood
I know you never see me on TV,
only yourselves arresting me with my blurred face
I'm sorry

I'm sorry you needed to kill me today
I'm really sorry
I didn't mean to do that.
strings singing for a homeless cat

healing hands

I have them and I can place them on myself
for the rest of time without you misunderstanding that.
do you feel bad about murdering

me?
I didn't mean to make you
I'm so sorry
I wear my mask
so I don't have to deal with that
energy you give

off, you know?
it's really hard
to live and feel okay
and you don't feel okay
if I'm alive, huh?
and I'm so sorry about

that
I don't know what to say to you
if only I had my violin
I could have played a
few strings
a few notes

for you and you and you and you
to calm you before you acted suspiciously and arrested yourself
for as long as you live.

—

Mother: He's late. He's late again. He doesn't pick up his phone.

Sister: He never picks up his phone.

Mother: He's in his own world.

Elijah: You'll like this one. I like this one. Stay still and listen while I play this. "Four Seasons."
I'll play summer, because it's almost over.

Clerk: That ice tea isn't cold. Reach to the back. You can reach. Don't make me get up to help
you... Walk and drink like the rest of us.

Neighbor: There he goes.

Neighbor: He's strange.

Neighbor: He's growing into himself. Nothing wrong with strange. He's gentle.

Neighbor: He dreams when he's awake.

Police: Stop!

He runs faster.

Police: I said, stop! (into radio) We're pursuing.

He runs faster. It's like a children's game. His legs won't stop.

The rest of us / me: I can't bear to talk about this part.

I'm not qualified to talk about this part.

Trying not to look away.

My name's Elijah McClain. I didn't do anything wrong. My name's Elijah McClain. I didn't do anything wrong. My name's Elijah McClain.

Neighbor: The ice tea spilled right there. Not even a stain. They packed him up in an ambulance.

Neighbor: He wasn't moving. They did something to him.

Neighbor: Shit.

Clerk: He got that same ice tea. I chased him out. He wanted a stool.

Neighbor: They'll blame you. Won't blame themselves.

Shelter: He came at lunchtime.

(They play the "Four Seasons" on a phone.)

Shelter: He sounded better than this. Listen... Breaks your heart.



INTRO-GREEN

*My name is Elijah
McClain. That's my
house. I'm an intro-
vert. I'm just diff-
erent, that's all.*

Whatever you do
don't kill him
again.

COMING UP ELI

Boy as Cheetah
Stalks his prey

There, living-
 room adventure
 Momma, runs
 Boy as Cheetah
 leaps, praying
 falls into Momma,
 falling,
 laughing.

ELIJAH SHOUT

Sunlight spills into a bedroom.
 Elijah cries out, Rock!
 Elijah: Rock, you hear me?
 Elijah: Rock, O Rock?
 Elijah: Where are you Rock?

INDEPENDENT INQUIRY

Woman, rose-colored house-
 coat, silver hair-bonnet, ties
 trailing behind, gilded butter-
 flies attend. Table, 5-inch-ream
 shiny paper, Mother peels
 reads, highlights, marks, circles
 strikes, questions.

ROSE OF SHENEEN

Sheneen enters
 the room called Vast,
 Adorned with, clothes-
 pins, Rose-hued, bearing
 5-inch-ream, photos. Casts
 a line across the vastness, attaches
 every photo.

PARADE

Elijah, age two, stands in the doorway.
Come inside, you are safe and beloved.
 Every creature enters.
 Mammal, Reptile, Avian, and Insect.
Welcome, friends.

THAT ELIJAH WAVE

Hype-man tears through
 crowd, stands inside circles
 of *Who wit me?*
 Echoes. *Wit me!*
That Elijah wave!
 It go like this. *This.*

ROSE OF SHENEEN (Reprise)

That vast room
 photo-filled
 Hall of Elijah,

rose

this exhibition,
 private, Smile
 after Smile the edge
 of vast,

another
 mother enters.

ELIJAH

Elijah enters
 Elijah bows.
 Elijah strums his guitar
 Elijah bows.
 Exit.
 One minute of stillness.
 Elijah enters.
 Elijah bows.
 Elijah plucks his violin.
 Exit.

ELIJAH ROCK

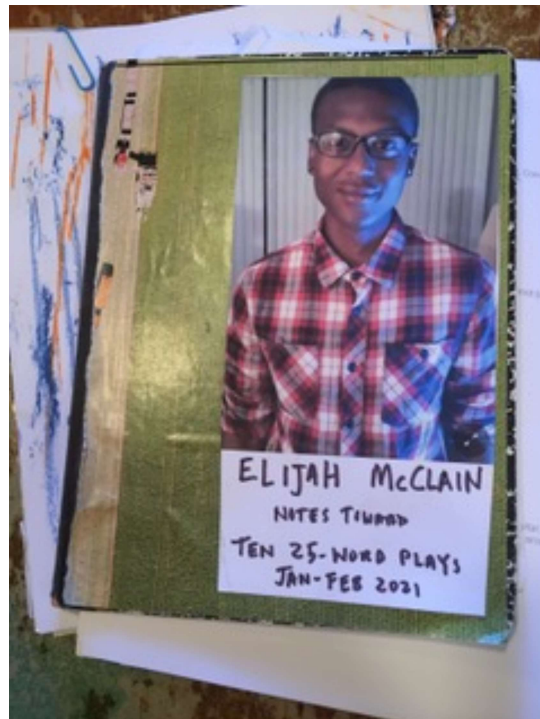
slit the drum-
skin, slide in-
side, *two* his
favorite stones

stich the drum-
skin, sidle the
strap over you
strike that snare
again.

for Elijah

**BENEDICTION**

ELIJAH: I don't judge people for anything. I respect all life. Become better. You are phenomenal, you are beautiful. I forgive you. (*He blesses.*)



[and]

Breathe

(Twenty Ponderings on Hope)

John Paul Lederach

January 31, 2021

Four Corners Festival

Perambulating

Hello everyone.

I am honored to be a part of the launching of the Four Corners Festival 2021.

I am asked to speak to the verb BREATHE, at once simple and profoundly complex.

Each of us is breathing right now. We do it every day, every hour, every second.

Breathe is the single most shared human experience.

We may not share common ground, but not one of us escapes sharing common air.

Breathe contains the most profound paradoxes of life – weaving what appears opposite and even contradictory into a hidden expansive whole.

inhale and exhale

always present, nearly always invisible

invaluable yet rarely esteemed

living both within and between us

Paradoxes do not lend themselves to logical and rational explanation. They do not seek to be solved. They invite a wander and a ponder, the search for wholeness unfolding at the speed of spirit.

Breathe. Inhale. Exhale. Opposites. Try doing just one.

*every doorway
a threshold between worlds
openness the key*

I set out on a wander in search of the four corners. I followed the not always visible pathways into the imagescapes and the soundscapes of the verb *BREATHE*. Twenty ponderings and an epilogue emerged.

~ one ~

it's only air
weighs nothing
comes and goes
in and out
seen when frozen
only noted when disappeared
it's only air

~ two ~

from the dust

from the earth

from mud

a shape was formed

then nothingness left its source
and entered the dust

writers of old say it was the moment

when the mud came alive

when the dirt billowed and walked

dust-being

- three -

This corona virus has infected my writing.

It has become mud and muddling.

I cannot sense an audience.

I do not know who I am writing to.

Maybe I am just writing to myself, after all
we seem to muck about in quarantine
these days, mumbling to ourselves between
four walls, forgetting our mute button is off.

I have lost sight of form.

My writing wheezes along like an anarchist
landing somewhere between poetry and prose

whilst refusing them both.

Somedays I start a good essay.
Thoughts roll like clouds across a vast sky.

By evening the pages have become a haiku.

A random drop of rain in a desert.

I can never tell if that one drop is
clear and dear or lost even before it lands.

A gem? Or nothingness?

- four -

I have pondered on nothingness over this past year.

It started when Yeats paid me a visit. Yes, I refer
to William Butler. He was not permitted to visit of
course, what with the quarantine and all, but!

*he made his way
or I should say
I made way
to notice
his presence*

- five -

**how nothingness becomes somethingness
step one**

*take note of what has
always been present within
and all around you*

- six -

The few words I remember from my conversation with William Butler are these:

*I shall arise and go now
and
for peace comes dropping slow*

We were sitting under a Palo Verde tree in Tucson, Arizona. April 25, 2020. Just at dawn. Full lock down, but I was lucky to have a tree in full bloom on the front patio. The craic was good when he held up his hand and stopped talking. Complete stillness. Then our silence opened into a wondrous droning buzz from above. The flowers seemed to be talking. Seconds ticked into minutes until he turned and asked, “now do you hear what I mean?”

His voice was grainy, like an old BBC audio. But there it was - *the bee loud glade* arched like a music shell overhead. I madly wrote these words in my sketchpad and when I went to show him, he was gone.

*when the sun crests
the bees come
they drink til drunk
and can't stop singing*

*they drop me flowers
their wings on my face
breath of god*

*even small fragile nearly nothings
move air and push ripples*

*maybe when we say
thinking of you
prayers beat like wings
pushing a bit of air*

it's worth a thought

~ seven ~

I never had the chance to be present with you, in person and in place for one of these Four Corners Festivals. I wondered where the four corners were located. That was my first image, the four corners as a place.

*we always take
whatever arrives
and place it in
what is already known
so that we can name
what it means*

~ eight ~

**how nothingness becomes somethingness
step two**

*place the unknown
in a place with a face
and name the known place
then name that face and
you will know your place*

(we call this seeing what I mean)

~ nine ~

Close to where I live now, we call the place where the states of Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico meet the four corners region. It holds the voice-trace and presence of the Anasazi, the ancient ones, the Ancestral Puebloans. Today the Diné, the Ute, and the Hopi inhabit and make home in these lands.

It only takes a breath to say their names, the nothingness
of air moving up from the lungs past the vocal cords
rippling a vibration that forms a word, a name, audible
even across oceans.

Say their names.

Breathe and nothingness ripples.

~ ten ~

My image of the four corners festival took me to a place.

But where?

I decided I would ask. I wrote to Belfast friends, a couple
of professors, a politician, a few mediators, a city
government leader, *~ what do you consider the most famous
four corners in Belfast, by which I mean a place where two streets
cross and create four corners?*

It seemed simple logic. I was looking for a map, a
compass, even the magic of a child's riddle and rhyme.

*to arrive where the
four corners meet of course you
must follow a street*

~ eleven ~

I have wandered many cities, quite a few where the local
puebloans have suffered and traversed layers of storied
harm.

Walk the streets and both dust and stories will rise.

Over the years, I learned that in contested cities with storied streets people carry three maps.

One map tells you where you are and where to put your feet to *stay alive*. Those maps always have *where there be dragons* spitting fire at the frayed edges of unnamed streets.

One map you carry in the cells of your body. It holds all the streets that came before you. It tells you which streets tell which stories and gives you THE story that sorts out all other stories. This map *keeps alive* as long as you follow THE story everyone tells you that YOU were born to breathe.

The third map doesn't speak much. At most it whispers. It's the one with hidden hints that maybe other not-yet-seen streets exist, and that the ones that speak and spit have names that can change. If spoken, these yet-to-be named streets permit you to *come alive*. It is the dust-being dream. The mystery you might choose to borne.

Stay alive. Keep alive. Come alive.

Ah, but which map to choose and when?

~ twelve ~

In one of my early visits to Bogotá at the height of another wave of violence in Colombia, I stayed at the home of a close friend. A human rights lawyer and peacebuilder, he had lived for years with threats to his life.

Every morning and evening we walked to and from a gathering we had convened and each day we went out and came back by way of a different set of streets. By the fourth day I realized our wandering was not for tourism's sake.

I notice we are taking a different route every time we walk, I observed. It's great but I have no idea how to get home on my own.

We kept walking.

Yes, he agreed. You are trying to find your way by looking at street names. I am listening for the streets to breathe and talk - stories about what is here but not seen - as a way to assure that we both get home alive.

- thirteen -

Paul Brady's song titled *The Island* holds the phrase, *and we're still at it in our own place.*

Maybe in your head you heard the melody and sang the next line.

From another of your great poets, this one comes to mind:

Whatever you say, say

Well, we've been having troubles over here in the land of the free with our maps and compasses spinning wild, with the stories we're told and choose to tell, with who gets to call what place home, with streets without names and names that can't breathe, layers on layers of dust and dirt, the nothingness of silence, the weight of silently waiting, for hurt and shame to find their proper name.

You can find those street talking stories on almost any city map in America, if you are listening.

Last week, a playwright friend sent out a call to celebrate Elijah McClain's birthday. He's seeking 100 playwrights

to write ten plays each with a maximum of 25 words, to be performed on February 25, 2021 when Elijah would have been 25. 1000 plays to celebrate the moment when the breathing began in this wondrous embodied gift given to this earth.

I thought I might try. Since Elijah's spirit flew on August 30, 2019 and investigations hotted up a year later when George Floyd equally lost his somethingness in a wisp of nothingness, information became more publicly available.

I found the audio of the last 151 words spoken by Elijah. His voice present but invisibilized below the police jawing over top his body on their discarded camcorders. Weightless air pushed up from his lungs past his vocal cords and out into the deaf, numbed world, until his last nothing was no more.

The verb BREATHE appears in the first and final sentence of those last 151 words.

Streets hold stories.

Say his name.

Elijah McClain.

The prophet spoke.

~ fourteen ~

The hardest three words to hear in America: *I can't breathe.*

The hardest three words to say in America: *I am racist.*

~ fifteen ~

A friend recently told me a different story about Belfast. It was as if she had the three maps. In a conversation with her children who had all become adults during the Troubles, one of her boys said *it's odd but when I walk home from downtown Belfast, even if it's the long way around, after all these years my feet still follow the old streets.*

~ sixteen ~

While I waited for my Belfast friends to email me with their choice of where the four corners are located, I searched for what the founders said about this Festival.

I discovered I had the image wrong, inverted. It is not where the four corners meet but searching for how the deep corners can shed their grip.

In their original words, “we’re hoping to entice people out of their corners and into new parts of the city.”

My Belfast puebloan friends’ email responses started to arrive. Only one place was shared in common: Several chose Belfast City Hall. While that may not strike us as representing a place where two streets cross and create four corners, they suggested it is here where the four corners of the city gather just as the building’s wings look out onto the four quadrants.

More emails returned. Longer than expected emails showed up. People could not just choose one set of corners, or if they did, they felt a need to describe in some detail each of the streets and the stories of the corners. They were not answering what’s most famous, they shared what corners most inspired them.

One image cohered: Corners as beacons. But they described the oddest of beacons, one that holds both light and sound. These corners inspired because they held the echoes of past pain while offering light toward something new, a place where remembering met dreaming, and where each was needed to untether the other.

~ seventeen ~

In the past months I started writing a book. Alas, my crazy corona-infected writing has not found its way forward quite yet.

This book speaks to the many in my country who seek to speak quick and neat about the dire need to ease our speak into healing with the recipes for how to uni-file and reconcile ~ sometime between now and the start-up of our next election in 2022, which began last week.

For peace comes dropping slow is not always well understood on this side of the ocean.

I titled the book: *On Social Healing*.

Chapter 1 opens with the heading: *departure points: learning to live between*.

The poet's quote to start the chapter draws from Emily Dickinson: *forever ~ is composed of Nows*.

The first sentence of Chapter 1: *social healing unfolds between memory and imagination*.

If the book is ever written, it will conclude with the same line.

Breathe. Memory. Imagination. Opposites. Try doing just one.

~ *eighteen* ~

How does one untether the past and the future to each be their full robust and nurturing selves and find their invisible whole?

This past year I did write one book, sort of. It is titled: *Rebuilding the Lost Lexicon of the Undictionary*.

The undictionary has twenty or so entries. It is like BREATHE: It just finished. It just started. It is always incomplete. I have invited people to submit entries.

Here a few that seem relevant to our Festival ponderings.

Untether: The freedom inherent in accepting that you do not control things.

Unknow: To suspend attachment to what is held most dear. Also, unknow, as in to wonder and wander. The Desert Fathers' referred to the home of unknowing as a cloud.

Unsee: The ability to let the eye of your inner soul sit at the edge of your skin in order to feel the humanness of another. Ophthalmologists refer to this as blind faith. e.g. Jacob said to Esau, *to unsee your face is to see the face of God*. Note: Some theologians contest this translation.

~ *nineteen* ~

To be enticed out of our corners, to walk into that which is unknown and to unknow and unsee what has been assumed true, that walking will require some serious wandering and pondering.

We will need to choose our streets. We will need to arise and go. Along the wear and tear of feet hitting streets, in

the clouds of dust and dirt that will kick and bellow,
 beacons and voices on the corners will also rise – if we
 watch and listen.

Can this cloud of dust carry dreams?

Only when nothingness breathes from the bowels to
 the breast and into the beyond.

Is not hope, to breathe? Is not hope, always found in the
 billow of dust that has been breathed alive?

~ twenty ~

Freud once remarked that wherever he had been the poets
 had been there before him.

My last ponder comes from a poet in my land who went
 before me, in harder times, on rougher streets.

James Mercer Langston Hughes.

Gather out of star-dust

Earth-dust

Cloud-dust

And splinters of hail,

One handful of dream-dust

Not for sale.

Epilogue

How nothingness becomes somethingness

Step three

As cited from the recipe card of Howard Thurman.

Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive. And go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

Some of the poetry drawn from: *listen for the lone cricket's song (use a slow watch)*, John Paul Lederach.

<https://online.fliphtml5.com/htuoc/ioic/?1610118202376#p=1>

Dream Dust by Lanston Hughes from **The Dreamkeeper**. Alfred Knopf: 1994 (first published 1932).