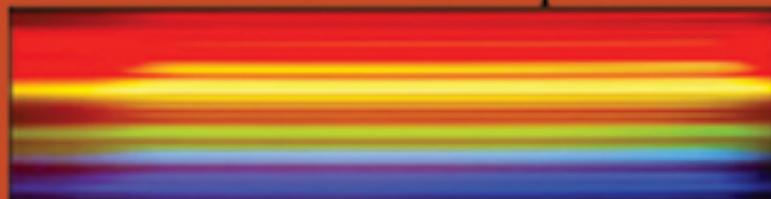


Becoming

X

Selected Poems

Jéanpaul Ferro

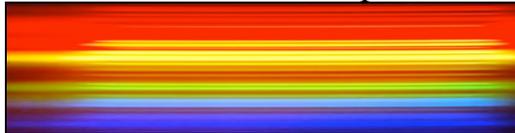


Becoming

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Selected Poems

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Becoming X By Jeanpaul Ferro

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Credits

Tikrit
Identity Theory

Floor Plan 17*
The Rose & Thorn Literary Ezine
* Pushcart Prize Nominee

The Hours Happened (9/11)
The Externalist

Newsweek
The Cortland Review

How to be Dead
Cause & Effect Magazine

Sonics
Haunts

Red Diamonds
Review Americana

Charlestown Beach
Barrelhouse Magazine

Gun, With Occasional Music
Contemporary American Voices
The Providence Journal

Providence Renaissance
Sidereality

I'll Be Your Slave
11th Transmission

United Kingdom
Dogmatika

I know Norman Mailer
Dogmatika

The Elementary Particles
BlazeVOX
Big Bridge Anthology

Dreams of Men
Dark Sky Magazine

Canticle
The Rose & Thorn Literary
Ezine

79 Degree Probability of Loss
The Newport Review

Election Day (Between Midnight and Dawn)
BlazeVOX

Brand Icon
Red River Review

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Gun, With Occasional Music

Across the river nobody was dying,
but back here in the red, white, and blue of America
you were all getting shot.

In the stress of our own disregard we began
to say: *let's get rid of all of the guns*;

but it's hard to say this to a man with a gun.

So we all went out to our little Italian restaurants,

and you wore your beautiful silver dress,
and I wore my darkest black shirt;

drinking Mojito cocktails, we listened to the haunting music
playing in WaterPlace Park,

watched them shoot the fireworks on up over Providence—

yellow weeping willow, orange spider web,

all of America dying while these dark jewels were lighting up
the nighttime sky.

The Twelve Kinds Of Ads

1. Demonstration
2. Show the need or problem
3. Exaggerated graphic to represent the problem
4. Comparison
5. Exemplary story
6. Benefit causes story
7. Testimonial
8. Ongoing characters and celebrities
9. Symbol, analogy, or exaggerated graphic
10. Associated user imagery
11. Unique personality property
12. Parody or borrowed format

It's okay that you're late,
It's okay that you didn't call,
It's okay that you forgot my birthday,
It's okay that you cheated on me again,
It's okay that you threw out all my stuff,
It's okay that you didn't mention the funeral,
It's okay that you won't love me no matter what I do,

*because everywhere I go
there is always something to remind me
of everything I never needed to know.*

Dreams of Men

The sky in North Korea always leads to China,
dark during the day, bright plutonium yellow at night,

dogs sell human body parts along the country roads here,
humans cut off other human's legs in the camps,

there is neither a half full nor a half empty glass,
there is neither a half full nor a half empty soul,

everyone knows the day they are going to die in North Korea,

there is torture and a life sentence in the political prisons
for when you are caught (it does not matter for what),

you have a 5-foot-by-5-foot underground cell,
you are hit, you are raped, you are tortured,
you creep, you crawl, and you cower,
you are crashed, you are experimented on,
you are rushed off your feet by freezing water,
you are poisoned, starved, gassed, you are cut up,

you are told your dead children's names over and over;

I smashed my fingertips so they would kill me,
but they laughed at me for over 3 ½ years instead,

I huddled in the corner all night and tried to dream—

dream of my fingertips touching the wet sands of the ocean,
dream of the bright garden stars rising out in the backyard,
dream of your hips with cinnamon and parsley,
dream of your body rising sunward like a blue sunflower,

dream of flying south over the distant mountain tops,
so we can die together in a beautiful peace.

The Sin Of Knowledge

Down in the subway we said goodbye to our concubines,
Bobby and I trying to outrun the Aquarians who were being
chased by the Évangélicals anyway,

when I got caught I said:

please don't ask me any questions: I don't know anything;

For the next month I hid in my apartment in Minneapolis,
they have great blue lakes in Minnesota, Lake Vermilion
being the most beautiful place for a sunset;

pretty soon my white fingers were waving in retreat,
I had run out of all the best flavors of my ice cream,

I began to run around the country trying to avoid my own
voodoo doll,

At night I would get a room with Leonard Cohen, a bottle
of whiskey, and my fondest memories of you—

the three inseparable deities, tied to the table that was tied
to my back;

after awhile I didn't know what I was running from, because
the danger didn't seem all that dangerous,

don't you remember this? someone said; *never forget*, said
someone else;

when I saw my own reflection in the mirror across from me
right at the bar I knew I had to clean up my head,

but when I tried to go vote they were already packing up the
polls, because I wasn't on either side,

you might not come back alive, someone else finally said to me,

but I didn't care; and I went out and found Bobby, and we called up our girls and met them back down in the subway.

Safe and Sound

I walk these New York City streets,
the rain chasing everyone in but the ghosts,
Dylan gone, Warhol dead, the twin towers
all the way under ground;

in some other moment I'm with you again,
in the witchcraft of the night you are all around me,

I am splitting you open to taste all of you,
I hear your voice reciting all poems by Galway Kinnell,
our needs the exact temperature of the human soul,

oh, how you loved that I was in Communist Party,
but you never knew how the Communists shot my
grand father in the back while in North Africa;

I can't say why you left; you never explained anything
that you did;

it was like our lust for one another was murdering
our very souls, like love itself could kill you if you weren't
careful enough;

I know all sixty-eight positions of your mind,
I know where you hide and what is in your porcelain eyes;

you always knew how to unfold me, unbutton me down
to what you wanted and needed like a Siamese twin,
complex as you took all of it—everything that you wanted,
wingspread, all of our dreams politely hard, our souls
tattooed on each other's sadness: all that goes away;

Sometimes I was your father and you were my mother,
other days we led each other through the garden cemeteries,
headlines of war, horror, despair, but we never broke down;

now there is beauty in the darkness of this city,
headlights driving fast right by me; you—somewhere
out there where I cannot save you; the only war within myself:

amnesia and the odd, beautiful colors of death that awaits me
down in the alley while I stand there staring so admiringly:

like I was looking at your hands on the first day we meet,
our souls screaming; our words ... not making a sound.

Election Day (Between Midnight and Dawn)

The frozen forest floor,
you and I midnight to dawn,
wave-particles in the duality of light and matter:

☐ - ☐■▶▶◀◀■▶▶^ - - // ☐ - ☐■▶▶◀◀■▶▶ - - -

Electron in hydrogen atom,
two central figures,
two sides, and I'm not on either one:

$$|B\rangle = b_1|A_1\rangle + b_2|A_2\rangle$$

The United Kingdom

I dreamed of you last night,
both of us in a hotel in Switzerland,
a blue sunset outside in the 1994 sky,

You had taken all your clothes off,
and you had taken all my clothes off too,
you had shaved all of your blond hair off,

And so we lie down naked on the bed together,
trying to talk to make up for all the lost years,
so many of the words falling down into the darkness,
where a larger darkness lives in a quiet room,

And this finally let us climax—first you and then me,
and then you said: “*I’m so sorry;*” and I said:
“*I’m so sorry too.*”

Tikrit

I love the shabbiness of the
boulevards of the Arab world,

That strange sadness that hangs
over the slums in the late evening,

You can sense the urban decay
that is anything but Western,

A hatred of a “them” that is stronger
than a love of “themselves,”

Humiliated little boys caught
between tradition and modernity,

Boys who seek out great towers
that are as tall as they are small,

Like governments that use modernity
to keep their races in place.

Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!
Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!

Amen.

I Know Norman Mailer

Chuck Palahniuk tosses plastic severed hands
into the crowd at his book readings,
twenty-something males bouncing up and down
in their pews (like an offspring of fascists),
Palahniuk shouting over the din-frenzy:

*"Does Norman Mailer throw out severed body parts?
Does Norman Mailer do that for you?"*

Charlestown Beach

On the last day we ever went to Charlestown Beach,
A million dragonflies came floating by in the air,
Green little explosions in jewels seemingly everywhere
from out of nowhere,

A girl sitting there in an orange bikini said to you:
"This is the last day you'll ever be alive!"

We both laughed; and we drank to yesterday and to tomorrow.
And then you said to me: *"I love this day! I love this day!
I love this day!"*

How To Be Dead

Jump from a tall building,
use a big gun,
blow yourself up,
drown in deep blue waters,

hang yourself in the bedroom above the beautiful bed,
use carbon monoxide,
use pesticide,
suffocation is good,
sleeping pills work well,
cutting your wrists is somewhat gross and messy,
cutting your throat is twice as bad,

maybe you can light yourself on fire,
electrocute yourself,
starvation takes a long time,

stay alive as long as you can,
and wait.

Please Prepay **After Dark**

A little boy riding his blue bicycle
by my house doesn't say *hi*,
afraid I might murder him
like on CNN (24 hours a day),

We send an unmanned space probe to Mars
to monitor the fine red sands,
I e-mail you the pictures later on,
so we can do it in each other's minds.

Marmalade bottle (*That's the way life goes*)

ESTD.
1797

JAMES KEILLER & SON LTD.

DUNDEE
ORANGE MARMALADE

Made From:
The Human Soul (flesh and blood)

NET WEIGHT 16oz. 1 lb. 454g

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN BY JAMES KEILLER & SON LTD
DUNDEE AND CROYDON

That's the way life goes.

Canticle

Poets overuse the word “burlap.”

I especially like the words:

libido

voyeur

paradiso

These are not liberal words.

These are not conservative words either.

“Let this haunt you,” I’d like to write, and then:

“I split her in two;” and also: “We drift off to sleep.”

Manhattan

New York City is like
Shakespeare on a bad night,

A million spinning mules, spinning
red threads, blue threads, green,

Cosmopolitan, atmospheric,
and momentous in equal proportions,

Gothic, Beaux-Arts exemplar,
Italian Renaissance, Art Deco, Modern,

All 102 floors and 1252 feet
of the Empire State,

In Chinatown the smell of vegetables,
fish, and meat cooking,

In Little Italy garlic in tomato sauce
with basil and oregano,

North and south, east and west,
stoplights turn red to green on a dime,

3rd Avenue is a wonder of the world,
a glass and metal Grand Canyon,

New York Harbor penciled in blue
down along Lower Manhattan,

There is a black man pointing a white man
over toward the Avenue of the Americas,

On 7th and 8th Avenue there are eyes
looking ahead for a thousand years,

Thousands of flesh and blood inhabitants
walking to work each morning,

Some with this stunning, indifferent look
of beauty on their face—

Jews, Arabs, Asians, Indians,
Pakistanis, Dominicans, Italians, Irish,

Hundreds huddled together in Battery Park
like the '58 Giants at Yankee Stadium,

Energy and optimism everywhere,
hopelessness and despair everywhere,

On the subway you can smell crayons,
urine, perspiration, and oranges,

The sweet smell of perfume, of hairspray,
an Italian grinder with vinegar and oil on it,

Yes, the pink spark of gunfire
shot off all night long,

Rapists, murderers, and pedophiles
down at the 26th Street Station,

Every day and night
a life at war within itself,

Ellis Island and the Statute of Liberty
shimmering off in the distance,

The bridges of New York encircling the city—
the George Washington, the Bayonne, the Whitestone,

the Throg's Neck, the Verrazano Narrows,
Othmar Ammann built all these bridges,

If you're not walking or driving on one
then you might be jumping off one soon,

That's just the way it is when there are
fabulous fools around every corner,

On Beaver Street, Gold Street, Park Row,
Rector, Liberty, pick a name for a street,

This is the capital of the world; a terrorist's target;
ground zero; a bull's eye; fool's gold;

the Big Apple; *"If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere."*
Yeah, sure, why not?

Listen to the music, boys/girls; buy a ticket to the show;
die at dinner at Times Square,

Make sure you bet on the Yankees,
hope on the Mets, and don't think about the Jets;

You can picture yourself on the cover of a Playbill, or
you can place yourself in the middle of the bible,

But go to Half King's for a BLT after that;
and then pull up your pants, and be a player;

Stand on the wide shoulders of the mountain—
All these things are just fine in Manhattan.

It is truly going to be okay.

11 Settembre. Ora zero.

Ce ne siamo andati dal Vendiano via nell'Ordoviciano,
L'aria umida e calda ci soffiava tra i capelli,
New York saliva in volte grigie fino all'orizzonte,
Abbandonati i sogni dietro nel retrovisore,
Siamo passati tra la cenere rovente dopo aver raggiunto il punto
d'inizio,
Lasciando solo le nostre impronte per dimostrare che eravamo lì,
Una parte di me non riusciva a capire cosa fosse successo,
Mi hai guardato e hai detto: "Riesci a spiegare tutto questo?"
Ti ho guardata appena e ho detto: "Penso che non riuscirò mai".

The Hours Happened (9/11)

We drove out of Vendian and out into Ordovician,
The air moist and warm blowing through our hair,
New York City rising in gray vaults off on the horizon,
Abandoned dreams behind us in our rear view mirror,
We stepped all through the hot ash after reaching ground zero,
Leaving only our footprints to prove that we were there,
A part of me couldn't grasp what had just happened,
You looked at me and said: "Can you describe all of this?"
I looked over at you and I said: "I don't think I ever can."

Translated by Daniela Olivero

I'll Be Your Slave

When you're weak I'll be the weaker,
Plough through your fields all night long,
Your merchantable and movable "property,"
 b_3 to your a_3 ,
Worth my weight in tobacco and gold,
The glutinous dish along the Bight of Biafra,
Body over body in the sweat-house,
Sharing recipes and herbs,

So brand me with your number on my cheek,
Take me through the reeds and the legends,
Tell me when to dip, when to swallow,
Don't let no whipper oblige me to part from you,
I am no Ashanti; I will be your Senegambian,
Let the complex blending of our experience begin,
Until ultimately we are lovers,

And I will be enormously profitable for you.

Sonics

You used to sneak into the funeral home
and lie in the green colored casket.

It matches her blond hair,
I thought (until I saw you in it for real).

I hyperventilated as I stood in front of your hollow,
dead body.

As I leaned forward to touch your mouth
there was a quiver, and you said:

“Do I look beautiful?”

Floor Plan 17

I wanted XXX XX XXX
but I didn't think;
what I meant to say was: —orbits—
 with
someone else,
who knew everything
while the rest of me had somehow
forgotten everything else I had ever known,

 I forgot—
my place in the story,
 my place in the Kingdom,
my way with your fingers;

In your mouth,
I could untie words,
words only you knew how to say,
so I said so little,
to get a rise out of you,
to cheat on you, to tease you,
to enthrall you, to inflict pain.

But I failed. And you failed too. We both failed.

In all our days: "I told you." "You told me."
This was something silent.

We ended up in the glass elevator,
going up to the 17th floor.
I pinned you against the wall,
You slipped your fingers into my mouth,
trying to untangle all those years,
all those years of so many words—

absent *astray*
 adrift *at sea* *cast away*
disappeared
disoriented *forfeit* *forfeited,*

*gone gone astray hidden invisible irrecoverable
irretrievable irrevocable kiss goodbye
lacking minus mislaid misplaced missed
obscured off-course
off-track strayed unredeemed vanished wandering
wayward without*

Brand Icon

Inside our house we heard the gunshot go off,
The blood on the wall like the Steinhövel window—
Adam and Eve made up of a hundred little pieces,

We dragged her nude body out into the snow,
Placed her carefully where she'd look most beautiful,
Waited until high noon until the sunlight splintered,
Put it all down on the best copper colored film,

By the next week it was in heavy rotation on every television,
Everyone was talking about it (you can buy water-cooler talk now),
It didn't even matter what it was all about.

Red Diamonds

You are beautifully concise,
like a rower on the Charles,
liquid when I try to hold you,
accidental music when I try to leave,

all through the New England evenings
fire shivers orange/gold amid the campsites
down below the mountains,

we make up stories to keep each other
amused, men who turn into elephant cinders,
women who fight like moonlight in the sky,

“Don’t kiss her,” you always write
in your suicide notes.

“Don’t marry him,” I always scribble over
your wedding invitations.

No wonder no one else wants me,
no wonder everyone wants to know me,
someone tells me you are the art of fiction,
I think you are the sound of wind in the palms,
a million little prayers to God from all his misled children,

I want to share you, but only a little,
a naked piece here, a naked piece there, naked on the rooftops,
I want all the good Brazilian pieces for myself,
the ancient, smooth parts like the inside of cake,
some parts that are as old as Jerusalem,
some parts that are pierced and narrow and need a vow,
maybe I will take all of you, you’d like that,
you’d like turquoise waves over your bronze body, too,
you’d like it if we rode turtles across the Indian Ocean,
you’d like it if I wrote poems, like this one,
with your curved and brown body turning on every word.

Donahue Society

Blue eyes in the dark: motion picture in flight,

catapults X X X X X X X X
 X X X X
 X X X X X X X X

over hills and valleys,

show me the:

Bling bling,

porthole for the devil,

ten times MORE:

Bling bling,

prophet and chronicler

—cathode ray in streams of high-speed electrons,
emissions from heated cathodes (vacuum tubes) \ rare earth—

we sit here and watch EVERY NIGHT

you're no Jesus or Madonna, you're not James Dean either;

desperate ploy to keep your name on top?

“you got two breasts? I got two breasts too!”

never looking back at the Red Sea behind you,
all that destruction in your wake,

down the hall of the archives of the BBC:

a hundred years of television gone to waste.

Nichts Du Und Ich Tut Nicht

It's the door bell ringing again:

ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong,

yes o better
y u GET IT!

it's the Jehovah's Witnesses—

you didn't bother to tell them about
your birthday again; now did you?

A sad look comes to your face, and
I say: maybe there isn't enough cake;

No, you say, I'm dead; they can have
all the cake that they want;

But this is before you read your mother's memoirs
about you coming back from the dead,

the one you found on eBay for \$1.00
—I paid the \$5.99 in shipping to get it
right out to you that very same day.

That book about faith and finding yourself after
leaving your religion,

the one about your pilgrimage to get back to
us here on the other side;

ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong,

Wait. Stop. I'll be right there.

The Hottest State

She told me that silence exists
before, between, and after us;

I said that she was unnamable—
too beautiful to let anyone else know;

I often drive the streets of allusion,
deconstruction, and reconfiguration to help
keep me straight;

each street across Providence with its
own splendid color going along the lines:
lapis lazuli, sienna, coralline, etc.

she is whispering in my ear as I am
driving:

when will you tell her?

how long will it take?

Down at the blue reservoir we sit in
the old Buick pretending that we are
someone else;

who could have known? she asks;

being known is the greatest sin, I whisper;

and right then I notice for the first time
that she has her mother's beautiful blue
eyes.

79 Degree Probability of Loss

What beautiful death there is in Madonna de Campiglio,
the peasant people frozen in ice in dance,
the slopes of Austria, and now they call it Italy,
another place you must come, one more dream to put your trust in,

and you can't believe you'll ever do it again,
swimming in the light and shadows where you've drowned,
the gum arabic and green volatilize of valle Verzasca—
the river where you saw the diver from Lucerne go down three times,
the way you held his girl friend, the river from the glacier,
minion and nonpareil, crystalline, his body preserved,
Russian experiment in the stone houses of Sonogno,

the ache in my body when your breasts ease into my mouth,
the way your legs cower out, the ecstasy in your pain,
in the white under your flesh in your bones,
the risk, the knife of your spine,
and I take it, twist and turn and bludgeon it,
and the body moves, consumes all of me, and you give in,
and you die in a way too, so cold here in the Dolomites,
always writing by candlelight, the bathroom out in the hallway,
and dance without music—

the sound of your hands against the piano back in the states.

You Know Too Much About Flying Saucers

I dreamed a hole through her head, where blue
cathoray spilled out over space and time,

ten seconds of my stare, my eyes pretending to look
at the red Coca-Cola sign flashing up behind her head
as it went blinking on and off: *Drink Coke! You stupid
dope!*

People say we are like Siamese twins, but really
we are more like Tiananmen Square, 1989;
six murdered sextuplets on a Sunday;

You're crazy. We can't be together, she says every
time we go and remarry down in old, brilliant Mexico;

I love the crazy flashing skies over Acapulco, an
emerald stain the way old George Stevens got to
do it,

both of us with bare feet, dancing under moonlight,
over broken bottles of glass, arms flailing, waving madly;

every day another séance to stop the Nuclear bombs,
all night long as we pray against the missiles landing
on someone else—wet and on fire;

a wave, ten thousand surfers going out from the storm
atop another tsunami; I can taste it! I can bury it in the
morning with my foot down to the floorboard;

water, napalm, flying about; I will fly; sea turtles flowing
in my veins to the other side of the earth; my mouth: it's
got a direct line to Jehovah's red ear, splitting my own
chest open to get down to the delta;

swinging, dancing, spinning, tango atop the cobblestones,
both of us shivering along the gold spires, our souls being
pushed up hard against doors, in heavenly colors, azure-blue,
emerald, until we are falling—

down to the ghost of your words as they are whispering out
to me: "*divided together; falling apart.*"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A 4-time Pushcart Prize nominee, Jeanpaul Ferro's work has appeared in *Contemporary American Voices*, *Columbia Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *Long Island Quarterly*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *Review Americana*, *The Providence Journal*, *Cortland Review*, *Portland Monthly*, and *BlazeVOX*. His work has been featured on WBAR radio in New York City and on NPR's *This I Believe* series. His book of short fiction, *All the Good Promises*, was published by Plowman Press and he is a 2-time *Best of the Net* award nominee. He currently lives in Wyoming, Rhode Island.

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