

Mammal Grafting

“I am a mammal patriot.”

Michael McClure

The projective writing method needs only a start, something with energy and meaning to the poet writing to prompt a launch back into that state of consciousness where the energy of the muse is palpable and leads to a successful projective/organic poem. A successful experiment in consciousness allowing one to be “the first reader of the poem.” in the words of George Bowering.

Poet Michael McClure appears to have first used a “grafting” technique in the 1995 book *Three Poems* and specifically in the poem “Dolphin Skull” which I have written about before.¹ McClure recognized the power in this poem, as he grafted from it again and again. (Could it be because of the power of one’s memories of youth and the Personal Mythology that implies?) In the “Dolphin Skull” afterword, McClure said:

“Portrait of the Moment,” the second section, begins with the twelfth stanza of the first section, repeats it, and then continues without interruption to very *consciously* and spontaneously explore that single moment for as long as it unscrolls in sensory images.

Consciousness melted my travels through Kenya and Tanzania, when watching eagles, lions and baboons, in with the primal stuff of infancy, youth, manhood, and the present – all in one moment. I now see that all moments are one and the same moment.

He grafted again in 1999’s “Crisis Blossom” from the book *Rain Mirror*. First, the section of “Dolphin Skull”:

¹ <https://paulenelson.com/organic-poetry/inside-dolphin-skull/>
and <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/7/4/102/htm>

Now I smell my Grandma as she looks
at me through her thick glasses.
Now I understand the sexual addiction
of my young manhood
was a CRUCIFIXION—
glittering and lovely
AS
an ostrich boa and smashed mirrors
seen on acid.

Then in 1999:

grafting one

NOW I UNDERSTAND THE SEXUAL ADDICTION
of my young manhood
was a CRUCIFIXION—
glittering and lovely
AS
an ostrich boa and smashed mirrors
seen on acid.

Now
I see that perception is a shape
of the darkness
S
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G
itself.

Naked bodies in layers
on shelves in space,
and behind stalactites,
alight with themselves
seduce me
with fleshly softness
of their meat.
Calves.
Forearms.
And the perfumes!

THE PERFUMES ARE LOST
AS MOTHS
IN OUR HORMONAL STORMS
but they direct us.
—They guided me.

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Then again in 2010's *Mysteriosos* and the poem "Dear Being":

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NOW I UNDERSTAND, THE SEXUAL ADDICTION

of my young manhood
was a CRUCIFIXION –
glittering and lovely

AS

an ostrich boa and smashed mirrors
seen on acid.

Now: I am an old man with a handsome face
and after the bloody movie full of guns and stabbings
and helicopters, I stop at the photo booth
and in the mirror is a dog with jowls, a silver fox,
an eagle in the whirlpool. Here's the strip of four photos:
a sincere man with white hair and eyebrows,
eyes almost inside-out, staring from a black Armani collar.
Then the same man, still in front of scarlet drapes, with his eyes
looking up into science fiction in his forehead.
Now his head rests dazed against the side of the booth.

In the last photo I am fully alert: JUST AS I ALWAYS AM,
A SUICIDAL CHILD IN LOVE WITH EXPERIENCE
RISKING ALL TO BE ONLY WITH YOU
as the dragon world with its hundred eyes passes.

-- And I still long to be Shelley.

McClure did this over and over again. In the book *Mephistos* and elsewhere. “The memories of one’s youth make for long, long thoughts” is the Lapp proverb epigraph of “Dolphin Skull.” In the early 1990s McClure’s thoughts turned to his childhood. By then in his 60s his practice of delving into the sensual stuff of his Personal Mythology, as exemplified by his Personal Universe Deck, was ready to be harvested and be the energetic substrate of much of his later work².

Grafting off your own work is the key here and evokes a feeling similar to seriality, going back to themes/feelings/perceptions that are not yet exhausted³. Find a stanza, or a line or two, from one of your old poems, repeat it (really type it out on the page, or write it down if you compose by hand) and see where it leads you. Try lineation different than what McClure called “lawnmower poetry” which is standard left-hand margin lineation that is as creative as how people mow their lawns. You’ll know quickly whether the experiment has juice. If no, come back later or try a different couple of lines.

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² <https://paulenelson.com/workshops/personal-universe-deck/>

³ See interview with Nate Mackey: <https://paulenelson.com/2013/04/21/nate-mackey-amerarcana/>

