

False Memory

TONY LOPEZ is the author of 20 books of poetry, fiction and criticism. His most recent poetry collections are *Devolution* (The Figures, USA) and *Data Shadow* (Reality Street, UK), both published in 2000. His work is featured in many anthologies including *Twentieth-Century British & Irish Poetry* (Oxford), *Other* (Wesleyan) and *Conductors of Chaos* (Picador). He is well-known as a poetry performer and has given readings throughout UK, Europe and North America. He teaches in England at the University of Plymouth, where he was appointed the first professor of poetry in 2000.

Also by Tony Lopez

Poetry

Devolution (The Figures, 2000)

Data Shadow (Reality Street, 2000)

False Memory (The Figures, 1996)

Negative Equity (Equipage, 1995)

Stress Management (Boldface Press, 1994)

A Theory of Supplus Labour (Curiously Strong, 1990)

A Handbook of British Birds (Pig Press, 1982)

Abstract & Delicious (Secret Books, 1982)

Change (New London Pride, 1978)

The English Disease (Skyline Press, 1978)

Snapshots (Oasis Books, 1976)

Criticism

The Poetry of W. S. Graham (Edinburgh University
Press, 1989)

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TONY LOPEZ



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for Sara

Contents

Corneal Erosion	1
Studies in Classic American Literature	11
Assembly Point D	21
Blue Shift	31
Non-Core Assets	41
Brought Forward	51
Imitation of Life	61
Restricted Zone (slight return)	71
Speckled Noise	81
Always Read the Label	91
Radial Symmetry	101
<i>Index</i>	113

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Corneal Erosion

And I don't see how we can win. The first faint
Intermittent soundings of the sirens may be ignored
Just as the slogans come through unpractised speech.
In Arcadia, when I was there, I did not see hammering stone
But you should vacate the building when you hear
A continuous note. It is best to move away –
Best to pay bills by direct debit and avoid offices.
Water bombs, I hear, are great fun and completely harmless.
We have the numbers 12, 84 and 51 mostly
Counters, cashiers and other people. Stay at home
Stay in bed, shop through TV: I should say so.
Think about who is at the wheel in the car ahead.
At the time I was interrupted by a lady from Totnes
Who had been burgled and who couldn't keep quiet.

I would like a no-risk enrolment (ring your choice).
A day on which a raven flew high overhead
Brought in the vogue for apparently fenceless gardens.
I heard the call, looked up, went on with my work
Turning an adjustable. It was the enclosures acts
Where maize is planted right up to the treatment works.
Magazine fillers, non-fiction, writing for children,
Do you have the time for the due process of law?
The air itself is carved into sectors maintained
By threat of force and the stony faced use of finance
In a pre-paid tunnel of exclusion going away.
The animals get eaten or plucked from the sky.
Don't be fooled by pretty flowered frocks and bifocals
Some of these old people are dangerous criminals.

Little goats soon exhausted the blue-flowered alfalfa
And bitter willow. We had chestnuts and new cheese on offer,
October it was. A wave running through the house. I woke
Going back to the engine over the Somerset levels.
Best if we call it a 'maintenance holiday'
And patch in warm associations. Arrange for prosody
To look over the tapes. Allude to pleasant hopes and dreams.
This could be the last decision of the outgoing
Management. Give me the LD50 on leakage projections –
But make it verbal, beware the shredder, better burn this.
A tree here and there on the fire horizon.
Planes light up for an instant and then flash again,
Further on. Most of the eastern counties are now flooded
But the troubles keep us moving in sparse woodland

Or what used to be called campus development
Before the fires. Fields of cars reflect heat. Hazard fence
And all-over schleiren : a metal surfaced plant
Or planet. We ride in lively annelid segments
Under London, past corrugated sheds of steel
And loaded trucks of used aggregate, ready to move out
For in-fill in the home counties. How does it feel
To be really on the make at last? Local sea trout
Close to extinction, look likely for bio-production
If we can get the lice off their backs. It is lightning
Regenerates the forests. Zeus solves the equation
By being a name that encodes what is frightening.
It's good to be at work, to inhabit some other place,
But would you pay for a job title and office space?

Me neither. Though it depends what you mean by *pay*.
Cash is the least of it, since one's life is used up in attendance.
You may find it more convenient to insert Greek characters
Than built-in negated symbols. Use keyboard shortcuts
But avoid slash and burn diacritical embellishments.
These templates are used for creating radicals :
Ask Annie Apple, Oscar Orange, Yo-yo Man. In French,
As any major dude will tell you, gender is proclaimed
By a particular use of adjectives and past participles.
Each time you say you don't believe in the unified subject
Another child enters the symbolic order. Clap hands,
Do not adjust your seats, extinguish smoking materials :
We're going down to Shanty town. Expect some slippage.
Bourgeois is an obsolete type size, pronounced *berjoyce*.

Of course the search committee and shortlist were bourgeois,
The process itself has built in defences against slippage.
Now the way is clear for open cast extraction of materials
The growth would be more visible if it were on your hands.
We did not know enough to resent being called subjects
So dazzled were we by synecdoche. Each party seeks Paul :
A name that I didn't even have to make up. *Proclaimed
Land* is a book title for Lacanians who work in French
That I offer here for free and without strings. Radicals
Are subject to growth deformation by embellishment.
You never see the road itself if you're on a shortcut.
I have every sympathy for those who wipe out characters
But deferred closure is our only chance of attendance
When we finally step out of the taxi and begin to play.

Rally cries are paralysed before your eyes.
It's the knowledge that truth is simple, natural and final
That brings them to their feet. Electric Elgar :
Lillies that fester at party conference.
Good mottled and stripy waves curling on sand
That's how I see it. Sailing in the gravel pit
Doing the rest of it right here in my mind.
Mobile homes close to the site entrance, on set aside,
Landscaped in. Nicely printed day permits, some fat carp.
A part-work on angling (with free binder) in the Sierra,
8% gilts. What a way to invest our redundancy.
Services may be altered to accommodate changes in demand.
A bright young man, well schooled, from a good home
Takes the platform to sustained applause from all sides.

The pills are trapped between clear orange plastic and foil
In sheets of twelve, long and rounded, easy to swallow.
We are still waiting for the peace dividend
But would settle for fixed-rate income in the interim.
In court, out of court, AGM, shareholders meeting –
Exactly what does it cost to set up a shelter belt
Or property trust? For dinner we have turkey franks
Unless you want me to stir fry. Major's majority.
So you have a stoma and here you are telling me
It's best to keep your pants on when you have sex
In case you spill the shit. Check on the pantograph
Running seven minutes late out of Berwick-upon-Tweed,
Structure is fully visible only late in construction
And weatherproofing will obscure its own means of support.

Drunk in a sauna out in the snowy woods
I saw a meteor shower or satellite wreckage
Then ribbons of metal foil falling into the sea.
I mean how can you measure functional accuracy
Unless you have a position? A sudden flight of geese
Progressing at five knots across the channel. What you see
Is not the outline but the size and speed of the signal,
It is a matter of blocking impulse transport.
Light picks up reflective matter on the screen :
That which adheres only to damaged tissues.
Since 28 appears twice on yellow brick, I see
That it cannot be a sundial or a plan of rooms.
Radio tracking through the shadowy forest
Even the experts rarely see pine martens.

Watch out for PROSPECT on a pillar to the right
Of the entrance. A blue beam picks out yellow dye.
Attending to what is actually there in the suburbs
Slow green and red flares move across the sky.
A small force of planes pretends to be an invasion fleet
Carrying Indian names into the air. I'll meet you
In the Eagle and puzzle at numbers fixed to the wall
Where wolves howl and reindeers run. The fit is on.
We mention one absent far to the north, imagine,
The premises are protected by a Minerva alarm system
And sky tints vary according to the position of panes.
Since 28 appears twice on yellow brick, say it:
You are as old as you feel - but how well does your DNA copy?
You can't substitute for okra in a ground-nut stew.