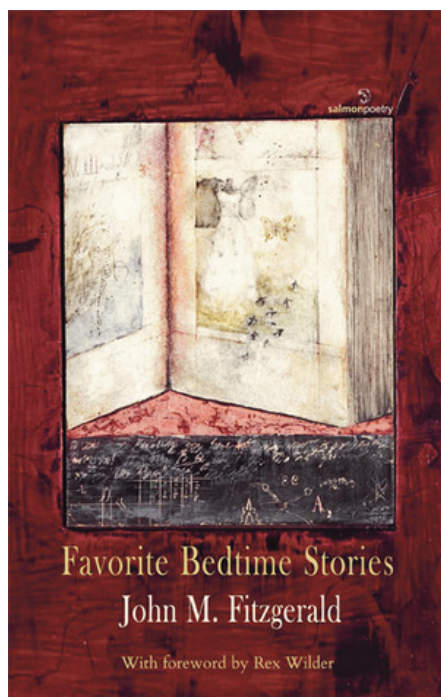




Favorite Bedtime Stories

John Fitzgerald

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John M. Fitzgerald is a poet, writer, editor, and attorney for the disabled in Los Angeles. A dual citizen of the United States and Ireland, he attended the University of West Los Angeles School of Law, where he was editor of the Law Review.

The Mind was published by Salmon Poetry in 2011.

His first book, Spring Water, was a Turning Point Books Prize selection in 2005. Telling Time by the Shadows was released in April 2008 by Turning Point Books.

As yet unpublished works include Primate, a novel and screenplay, and the non-fiction Everything I Know. He has contributed to the anthologies Poetry: Reading it, Writing it, Publishing it (Salmon Poetry), Dogs Singing: A Tribute Anthology (Salmon Poetry, and From the Four-Chambered Heart: In Tribute to Anais Nin (Sybaritic Press) as well as to many literary magazines, notably The Warwick Review, World Literature Today, Barnwood Mag, Askew Poetry Journal, Spillway, and Lit Bridge.

Foreword by Rex Wilder.

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From Reader Review Favorite Bedtime Stories for online ebook

Alessandra Bava says

Favorite Bedtime Stories by John Fitzgerald (Salmon Poetry, 2014) is a book of poetry that grabs the reader with the sinuosity of a leopard. It has a subtle way of penetrating in the pores and, much like the poet himself states, "I am poet and cannot explain" what makes this "voice like dirt" so intoxicating.

"Where I am men hide," seems to me the perfect key to understanding the subtleness at play. And no, it's not up a tree with the leopard, but in the leaf that we are turning, in the traces Fitzgerald so skillfully disseminates along the pages.

"I am coiner of words," he says, and of tales I shall add. Reading this collection one moves swiftly from apes and wild beasts, to the fifteen poems of The Charter of Effects, an almost philosophical journey in the footsteps of a poet named Likeness (or the Likeness of the Universe) whose Muses are in no way ordinary:

Presence is the muse who says she is this very moment.
Every night I close the blinds she every morning opens.
I perform CPR but can never save her.
She dies in my arms, I can still taste her.

My favorite section of this collection is Chess. Following the King, the Queen and the Pawn along the Board, the poet invites us to revisit the game of chess, to put ourselves at play and to adhere to rules. Indeed, because even poetry has its strict rules, but with Fitzgerald

the board morphs into countless situations,
I cannot say for certain if it's finite
though the plane itself has edges.

There are infinite stories and as many poems in each of these poems, where the dark ultimately "reveals itself" from "being light." They remind me of C.M. Escher's mesmerizing painting Metamorphosis III, where the chess boards leads us to explore always new and fascinating worlds to end up back where we have begun.

Tulika I. Bahadur says

"FAVORITE BEDTIME STORIES" BY JOHN FITZGERALD: FROM THE DARK SAC OF FLUID
ONTO THE CHESSBOARD - Review published here with images: <https://onartandaesthetics.com/2017/0...>

On April 3, 2017, I reviewed *The Mind* (2011, Salmon Poetry) by John FitzGerald – a dual citizen of Ireland and the United States – poet, editor and attorney for the disabled, practising in Los Angeles. That book was a dense and demanding meditation on human consciousness and its relationship to the metaphysical place from which we attribute value, there simply and rather mysteriously referred to as "the Center". FitzGerald's *Favorite Bedtime Stories* (2014, Salmon Poetry) is even richer in metaphorical wordplay and wider in thematic scope. It is a collection of verses I have gone through multiple times over the past few weeks, and I still feel I could glean a lot more.

Favorite Bedtime Stories (which was a Finalist for the Julie Suk Award) begins with a couple of experimental Title-At-The-Bottom poems and soon announces the arrival and pronounces the identity of “Everyman”. The poet is a human being, the poet is any human being. He writes in a tone that is simultaneously humble and sweeping:

Sapiens number seven billion. / And it's the same with me as with every other human. / I formed immersed in a dark sac of fluid / and bore through a tunnel into the light.

He is an “orator for the planet”, bearing the heavy testament of the earth, the saga of his race. He will make an attempt to articulate its origins and destinies, its messiest tendencies and its loftiest imaginings.

The voice of Everyman changes into that of a character who has had to wait 13 billion years. The first flower spat 114 million years ago, Greece and Rome rose and have gone into recent history, now nation states with borders have emerged all over the globe. “I have become one of these humans”, we hear the statement. It leads to the following assertion:

I come down from above your lights, / on a redeye over metropolises, aglow with electricity, / from Atlanta to far stretching City of Angels.

Atlanteans, Angelinos, I pod unto thee, over waves / and basic cables, fiber optically, eye-glassed and fire worked. / It has been so very long.

The evolutionary terminology continues. Everyman is aware of the ape-blood in him. He loves fruit and branch and leaf; his attentions are on The Tree (of Paradise?). Here we get a hint of his capacity to tell stories, to make myths and legends, to impress meaning upon existence, to institute entire cultures, to console and entertain himself and his fellow Sapiens.

Everyman enchants himself with an adventurous romance:

Once, there were four brothers. / One owned all the water. / One owned all the fire, / one owned all the food, / and one owned all the air. / We stuffed these leeches in a hole / and ate and drank and breathed.

He comes up with another tale – on “Tooth Fairies”. “All I really need has been revealed to me in fairy tales”, he says. Adding, in a sentiment that mixes wonderment with morbidity:

They fashion piano keys from our teeth / to produce that twinkling sound in flight / It's a thriving trade, so they have charts / much as butchers do for meat.

Canine, molar, bicuspid / each fetches its particular price

FitzGerald then moves to “The Charter of Effects”, a 15-part play of sorts, with odd and varied dramatis personae – Counsel is a lawyer driven by money, The Likeness of the Universe is a poet addicted to life-changing lines, there are Various Muses (including Summer, Orpheus, Presence, Polyhymnia).

Counsel, we learn – greedy, interested in immediate gain – plots against the muses. He prefers dealers, killers, houses as pawns, passwords that swipe. And Likeness remains till the end without inspiration, his creativity having been stifled, deemed worthless. He is a drunken loser, splurging on cornflakes and milk.

In this little parable on the difficult relationship between commerce and art, we encounter two strange lines that talk of how humans ambitiously build societies but ruin them by reducing all life to cold transactions and subjecting all resources to mechanical mercantilism. FitzGerald writes:

Where once we dreamt of paradise, / between the rivers, shock and awe.

In the empire of a thousand crimes per martyr / lies the water for which all humans are willing to trade.

Later in the book we come upon a game of “Chess”, and the poet leaves us in a dizzying discussion on the nature of beginnings and the quality of timelessness. He observes:

I am not as good at chess as I dream. / More a poet at it. / But the pre-beginning creates itself right after the beginning. / It's ironic, because the beginning has to happen first, / the former being timeless.

Soon, using the black and white squares as a case in point, he comments on wholes and parts, on the unity of all things:

What happens to one cell affects the whole. / The body affects the place in which it dwells, / and the place affects the earth, the stars, and so on, / back to the equivalent of before the game began.

Here is law in action: / What happens above happens below. / When I say whole, I mean everything, evolved together with its place.

FitzGerald subsequently speaks of the Big Bang, the ever expanding universe, newer molecular levels of space:

So no matter how random the point / something begins from seems to be, / there becomes, that moment and thereafter, the pre-beginning, / like a chessboard set for the very first move.

And suddenly in the middle of these rules and attributes of the cosmos and the chessboard, the poet includes an unexpected, almost hilarious, narrative:

Meanwhile, a small orange fish / oblivious to evaporation blows rings

throughout a bowl it thinks the ocean, / soon to wriggle in a puddle / against a suffocation all its own. / How ignorant.

Finally, *Favorite Bedtime Stories*, capacious and effervescent, ends in a pithy poem that will stun the reader and cause them to think hard long after they have closed the volume. The poet only recites the law. What law? Which law? Whose law? We don't really know. He writes:

EVERY action of nature is perfect. Every action of NATURE is perfect. Every action of nature is PERFECT.

Perhaps it means that Everyman has finally tasted of the Tree of Life in Paradise and arrived at absolute peace.

Erna Cooper says

John M. Fitzgerald is Yeats Revisited

There are those of us who support the muse because it is a silenced, treasured part of ourselves, locked away. And there are those who release it without the means of support, because we cannot help ourselves. John M. Fitzgerald, poet and lawyer, fits into both categories. In his collection, *Favorite Bedtime Stories*, he is both

the prisoner and the policeman (of himself, of his psyche), as well as his defender and inquisitor.

Before rendering judgment (or, rather, instead of doing so) let me first say I understand why this happens (or I think I do), for this dual nature emerges when a poet enters the WORLD and struggles but fails to identify himself there completely; this is what happens when a true poet is blessed and cursed with a powerful intellect-- one that sees too much and seeks to break down to the atom a universe both inside and outside of itself at once.

He is the anti-solipsist. Not the one who howls in anger, like Bill O'Reilly, because he knows he's right about everything while no one seems to see how brilliant he is, but the one who quietly goes on his way fixing things, being reliable and responsible, assuming his role, part-time, as the well-liked, good citizen (not the mega-maniacal boss). And yet he howls inwardly, quietly, because of what he sees, for:

"He [Counsel] don't let cell phones interrupt
and articulates what I [the Poet] disclaim.
I swat the muses off me when he leaves.
Watch them ascend to my decrease" (p.32).

But why? Because embracing my muse (that is my creative self), which I so badly need, I become soft, vulnerable, open, feeling, unable to become criminal or punitive, which one must be to endure the city streets or succeed in courts of law, in this abrasive world - even worse, in this narcissistic sphere that is Hollywood, a place not known for its humility or innate sense of justice, but its reverence for the "photo op". How on earth an attorney for the disabled, a poet with soul and intellect, better yet, an Irishman came to live and write in Los Angeles and write with such laconic verse and labyrinthine thought, full of classical reference, quiet irony and soul, is beyond me. I have much to learn. At first glance, the choice seems masochistic, if not for the obvious sustaining force: that he is married to the lovely poet and actress, H       Cardona. But now what about that other muse that "drafts documents"?

"The Likeness [a poet addicted to life-changing lines] gathered us here to reflect.
Confused on the surface, the depths concur.
Between boggling, irrelevant arguments, slip in reason.
Every so often, one sticks, I'm sure" (p.33).

Yes, we are also sure that his reason and sense of justice will ultimately "stick" somewhere, if not together, but what says Counsel about the poetic Soul?

"Counsel renounces rhyme's every intention.
He's after a third to apply toward a Jag.
Such a twister of systems grown iPod dependent,
deleted you [poetry] in his mind but then refrained,[...]
just like he didn't run you over on your bike" (34).

What kind of person would endure this? "No normal poet would put up with it" (34). Indeed.

"But while they piece last night together,
let's work on further fragmenting today" (35).

Let's pick apart the man who self-compromised (when he went to law school) to put a roof over his head and become a Man. Let us see how "invocation works" to keep him alive, inside, for "[e]very local god is summoned" to the courts of soul and unspent desire, while conscience keeps him on the Los Angeles highway and "bloody muses" cut into his line of thought and "Hell is awake" because the "liquor store's closed" (34).

Throughout the collection we move through discourses and arguments between mythological selves that represent both subjugated voices and identities, on the one hand, that play intermittently, on the other, with the mind and life of the poet, and which argue and interfere with the conscious role of legal Counsel that may resuscitate the nearly dead - out there, if not in here (pointing to my heat and heart)- and give ease and consolation to some of these parties for a time. For, as most writers who hold other jobs know, this responsibility to the world outside, to the rules of law and commerce, give less time and space to the life of escape and solitude that are necessary for art, for while "Counsel evolves in isolation" (38), so it seems does poetry, but

"To be alone?" Impossible.

"Do you even know where the Tylenol is?" (39).

"You're like a lobster seller at McDonalds," trying so hard to appeal to the mind and sensibilities of those who have never tasted your food (39). Who sell "Heaven" every day on TV as a microwavable product, but have never partaken of Elysium fields. And so this poet meanders through the recesses of his mind for sanity and voice in a mind-numbing world, that embalms deadened words, and where "[e]veryone trusts me more than I do" because I'm a lawyer (39). And that's ok for them, but is it ok for me? Hardly.

That's not the end of the story. And, thankfully, I don't believe there is an end, for this malaise gives way to the honey-tongued poet in search of bees everywhere, past and present, classical and post-modern. These beauties he creates out of black holes, even as he disclaims responsibility for, if not the need of, this other `self', this poetic twin, by claiming to be an ordinary man:

"Hey, I ain't no poet, jack,
Millions are doomed to be me, and why?
I swear it was the woman told me
the infinite moon was mine" (75).

This is a collection for one familiar both with his role in the world as an "Everyman" and his desire to taste of the tree of Paradise, a Paradise that is not given but created in the mind. John M. Fitzgerald is a poet for writers and men who seek to recapture the subjugated self and save it from drowning and despair, in a world full of suffocating cacophony and deaf ears. This is a collection that, at times, touches the spirit of classical allusion, metaphor and allegory, familiar to John Milton and the ancient Greeks, and yet is, at times, appropriately anchored in the mire of everyday speech. It is a series of dialogues between the self and other (self), poet and Everyman, present and past loves, in an existential quest to understand why some had to die and other voices and personas learn to live with each other in one body. This cohabitation is enough to kill anyone who is both sane and very intelligent. But the breath of life is given and sustained by the poet, before drowning in the world of practicality. And in that darkness, he captures that elusive beauty of the inner voice as of the Coalside Nebulae. He sees the light amidst darkness and there, in that stardust, he resides.

I would keep this book safely planted next to my treasured collection of Paul Auster, John Donne and Yeats - not because they resemble each other stylistically, but because they shed light on the struggle to be civilized men acutely aware of their connection to pre-history and the spirit world.