

JOHN OLSON

Buffalo Bill in the Holy Land

Writing poetry is warm and parenthetical. It allows me to hold the reins to some very powerful horses.

I think religion is an unpredictable dog.

I crave the strength of the moccasin. Snakes in needles of pine. Dead leaves wrinkled and dry like the parchment of death.

It is inconceivable that men in wigs discuss ceiling fans.

If life is a game of chess, time may be imagined as a jail cell, or cow.

An empty head in an empty bed operates the machinery of heaven.

I love the lonely dirt roads of North Dakota. Places where the wind encourages width and wheat and hooks to hang clothes on a line.

Syllables get the bees going. Buffalo. Slices of orange. Wood creaking on hot afternoons. Swallows and stairs and exciting blue stones. Mud on a bottle of burgundy. An old Chinese man in San Francisco on the corner of Kearney and Clay bowing a two-stringed erhu. Each of his sounds slide in and out of time.

The world is asleep. People walk by in a gas full of sampans and river thieves.

I look for redemption wherever I can find it. Life is insoluble. Animals seem to have a better grasp of it. But that's just me. Buffalo Bill. And my Wild West Show. Everything else is sticky like blood and hairy as a tarantula when remorse bites and your suitcase won't close.

Here is my diagnosis: my horse is old. But the day is young and beautiful.

I dig a hole and plant a name. Its syllables are visceral. Why? Why do we name things?

My horse doesn't know either. But that's his shadow on the ground, gliding over the sage.