



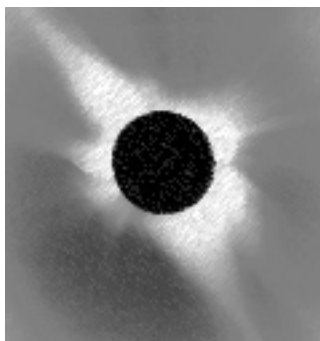
  
OBSCURE  
PUBLICATIONS

*Selections from The Wheel*



*Selections from*

# The Wheel



*by*  
*Jordan Jones*

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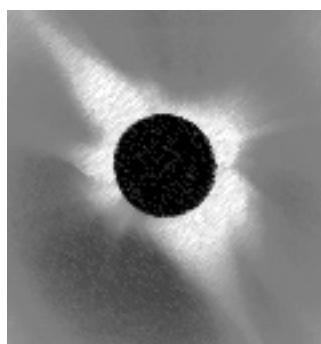
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# *Manifesto*

Thales, the pre-Socratic philosopher, said that “Everything is water,” or he may have said, “Everything comes from water,” “Water delivers all births,” or “Water is the center of all things.” While it’s unclear exactly what he said, as we only have Aristotle’s summary, it’s critical to understand that the planet is tidal and watery by nature.

Whether you write in the sand of an estuary, and allow your work to perish completely submerged, or you search out the mountain forests to do your writing in the wild, words are liquid we pour onto the earth.

Water flows into, over, through, up, down, and around the tallest and the smallest trees of the forest. Mammals live by the tide of blood; the body is a watershed. Write in nature, and nature will erase any attempt at personal immortality.

A day will come when those who walk upright will use symbol languages to create false messages out of sticks, rocks, leaves, feathers, scat, and rubbish. These artworks will decay, blow away, be scavenged by wolves and vultures, and otherwise return to the natural state of the world, that is, revolution, contagion, degradation.

# *Cycle*

It winds up & winds down —

the sun eats the flesh of the moon,  
the moon makes a dress of the stars.

On earth, we have nothing more

to take care of than ever —

Just each other —

that is enough.

# *Fingerprints*

The whorl of the years in wood,  
the whorls on the tips  
of our fingers,  
are relief maps to where we've been /  
where we're going.

Circles bisect circles in the Sawmill.  
The State collects our finger whorls  
in a dactyloscopy of electrons  
circling like carrion birds,

The State & the Sawmill only seem  
to stop our history in its tracks /  
because the tracks remain —

The State & the Sawmill  
will be fossils of little interest,  
all straight lines & human planning,  
not a biological circle  
to be found.

# *Stonehenge*

Circle around circle around horseshoe  
— the star enters the horseshoe's open mouth,  
the gate into the smiling world, a vulva,  
slick with morning dew.

To map the sky  
through all its turning cycles,  
the arborists carved massive  
columns from stone,

& rolled the liths  
over the loamy earth  
mile by mile  
on hewn trunks of alders.

The columns aligned  
the stars & sun & moon  
in all precision,

the druids learned the great circle  
of weather & seasons  
opens & closes  
like the bells of four o'clocks.

Without inventing paper & ink,  
mathematics & physics,  
no less wise, no less foolish  
than the other inventions,

stands the solid circle  
amid heather & bracken.

# *Holy Disc of Quetzalcoatl*

Among the Aztecs, the wheel & axle  
were sacred objects —  
the calendar, the earth's spin  
made visible.

Only toy leopards,  
with sleek playfulness,  
were allowed to roll  
the holy disc of Quetzalcoatl.

## *Cisco*

I shuffled 7 years in shoes of forgetfulness,  
only to awake as from a coma, needing rehab  
& counseling.

    The other sleepwalkers,  
in various stages of drowse & dream,  
stubbed their toes, rubbed their eyes.

        Some of them grinned at me.

    I doubted the shapes  
of the shadows on the wall, disbelieved the money  
could do this, unbelieved the fear of no money  
could do this.

        I no longer possessed  
        a language for the body,  
or a body, just an alimentary canal, feeding  
& eliminating as necessary for the economy.

        I was blind, deaf  
& in all ways sliced from the art  
        of the daily:



I don't know who I have been  
                                impersonating, except  
to say, "Myself."

And so  
I began  
to be.

*19 & 20 October 2002 / 1 December 2002*

# *Open Fields*

*Simi Valley, 1975–1985*

At twelve, my friends & I ran  
north of town  
into fields of grass —  
paper crinkling in the summer heat.

The Frog Pond —  
sheen of oil, repository for the Chrysler  
junk heaps of suburbia —  
where we gathered flint & tried  
to chip arrowheads  
with blunt force, aching  
for the natural life —  
away from apron strings  
& TVs, asphalt & classrooms.

We dreamt of curling up at night  
in a burned out shell of eucalyptus.

Dominic, the Basque shepherd, drove his flock  
north from Madera Road out toward Pyramid Hill  
& back.

His route is filled with garages,  
blocked by the KardKey plant  
& the rushing stream of California 118.

We measure our loss  
with our memory  
of a larger, wheeling world.

## *Sanborn Park*

Pale green leaves underfoot, maroon of  
madrone, ochre of tanoak  
on the trail —

hundreds of small, slippery  
poems the trees address  
to the leisure  
of the summer soil

sneaking our future into wildness —  
the terrain Coyote inhabits, just outside  
the circular edge of the urban.

# *The Color of Fireflies*

*Ellanore C. Lawrence Park*

In the Disney version of  
the South, fireflies  
are white

tiny bulbs strung through the trees  
in the eternal Christmas  
of a southern summer evening.

Today, I saw the real color  
of fireflies toward twilight:  
white green, nearly transparent,

like the green flash I saw  
on 'shrooms in  
Eureka.

The color of fireflies  
resists attempts to remember it,  
& refuses to remain.

## *Night Grapefruit*

The opossum, after the night  
grapefruit, runs along the brick wall  
then drops into the yard  
near the tree  
of sour meat.

He sucks his fill  
of pink & pulp.

The motion detector light  
freezes him  
in sight of my cat, Natasha.

Each of them,  
wild & tame  
— in their own manner —  
stare into the eyes of the other.  
They do not move.

Under the dim stars &  
the brilliant porch light,

under the balcony of wood,  
they sniff & back off,  
return to animal caution —

No human yard  
contains them;  
no human wall  
keeps them out.

## *Rinse Cycle*

I watch Audrey Hepburn  
burn for David  
in “Sabrina,”  
as the dishes  
rinse in the background.

One of them is naïve,  
one worldly. Neither knows  
which is which.

By the end of the movie,  
they’ve traded  
neuroses.

She’s learned  
how to make a soufflé.  
He’s nearly gotten fired  
from the family business.



And she's dumped him  
just as he's getting  
interested,  
in order to date his older,  
wiser, more sensible brother.

I told you it was a movie.  
The dishes are dry.

*21 October 2002*





# *Ball-and-Chain Affair*

When she saw what I was packing  
how could she refuse?

We were insects in love,  
humping like we only had two weeks to live.

A fortnight of bliss,  
with a ball-and-chain in my pocket

to show for it. But somehow,  
I'm filthy; somehow, I need the censor

to black me out, to hide what  
makes my brief span so sweet.

And then they want to build a mall  
in the last field any of us know,

saying, "Endangered species!  
with a schlong like that

how could they be endangered?”

And the bug zappers go up

in the neighborhood

of punishment.

It’s enough to provoke

an infestation.

This ain’t the last

you’ve seen of *my* ball-and-chain!



# *Naked in Babylon*

*“Imagine Mr. Bush, nude, addressing, addressing the State of the Union.  
Oh, and imagine also Saddam Hussein, nude, addressing his people.  
Now what? You know.”*

— *Nadine Gary, Raelian Protester*

Naked in peace and war.

Naked at night  
& in the day.

Naked on the battlefield:  
shorn of gas masks and shoulder-  
launched ordinance; naked of boots  
& packs.

Lost in the desert naked.

Naked in the dust storms  
of Babylon.

We enter and leave this world  
naked. Naked at first;  
naked at last!

Naked Greek wrestlers invented  
sport.

Protestants, Jews & Muslims,  
ashamed of being naked,  
cover up their bodies  
like the bodies of the dead —  
first in palls & then  
under the final handful  
of naked earth  
they hurl at one another,

& later use to mourn &  
take leave of  
their own.



# *El Toro*

*for A. G.*

*“The 47th annual El Toro Air Show ended with record-setting crowds of more than 2 million over the weekend who made a final salute to an Orange County tradition that has thrilled spectators over nearly five decades.”*

— Los Angeles Times

Stars rip

clouds from the sky

tonight, —

Allen joins Jack

& Neal

in eternity.

Stealth

bombers & Blue Angels no longer

scorch the dusty circus

air of El Toro —

the great angry bard flies  
to join his Buddha-  
body.

Fujimori says we've reached  
the end of history.  
El Toro Air Base goes under padlock.

Allen

on the far shore, watches Charon pole his skiff back  
across the black  
waters. Paper soldiers in secret  
rooms map out the next  
terrible war.

*27 & 29 April 1997*







## *Birds of Iraq*

*“In the name of peace, if he does not disarm,  
I will lead a coalition of the willing to disarm Saddam Hussein.  
— President George W. Bush*

The President is afraid  
that the oil of Saddam  
might go up in plumes  
& what that will mean for the economy  
of the Iraq to come —

So add to the human loss,  
the smoke of the oil of wealth  
smudging the air of birds.

Who thinks of the sooty falcon,  
the rustic bunting, the common babbler,  
the ring ouzel, & red-breasted merganser,  
& all the other birds of Iraq?

Who thinks of the people of Iraq?  
War after war after war....

Iran, Iran, Iran,  
US, US, US,  
Saddam, Saddam, Saddam:  
who thinks of the people of Iraq?

Dead Sea sparrow & dusky thrush,  
Black-throated accentor & black francolin,  
Brahminy mynah, black stork,  
& grey-crowned crane. Pygmy cormorant  
meet Levantine sparrowhawk —

all of you will burn in fires  
programmed in Kansas,  
or, in flight above the burnt earth  
of retreat, choke on the sooty remains  
of your ancestors from the cretaceous:

misery spreads from person to person,  
then into the air of birds,  
like a virus in reverse.



# *Temporary Empire*

*“92 million Americans will keep, this year,  
an average of almost \$1,100 more of their own money.”*

*— President George W. Bush*

The calculus of tax and spend  
is not so much math as spin.

Who’s going to keep my \$30,000 in debt?

The government keeps it for you, don’t fret.

And who’s going to pay for replanting the forests?

Let the shade of concrete buildings refresh you.

\$200 billion for a pre-emptive war?

Don’t worry! The final accounting will appear  
on your toe tag.

When will the bacchanal collapse in sparks & shattering glass?

When will the Huns ride in to gather our waste for food,  
to survive on what we ’doze into holes in the land?

One day, and it’s doubtless before geological time  
gets to it, the Statue of Liberty will hold her lamp

slightly above the rising waters;  
all the bills will be overdue, all the good faith & credit  
of the United States will be on the watery side  
of the flood, & the spin will be seen  
at last  
for what it has been:

The lies that fueled the engine of power.

The temporary Empire:  
while it lasted, it was the greatest  
party on Earth.



## *About the Author*

Jordan Jones is the author of a book of poems, *Sand & Coal* (Futharc Press, 1993), and was the editor of *Bakunin* (1990–1997), a literary magazine “for the dead Russian anarchist in all of us.” He is currently the editor and publisher of Leaping Dog Press ([www.leapingdogpress.com](http://www.leapingdogpress.com)).

He attended the University of Dallas; California State University, Northridge (BA, 1987); L’Université Catholique de l’Ouest (diplôme de langue, 1989); and the University of California, Davis (MA, 1991).

His poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and translations have appeared in numerous magazines, including *The American Book Review*, *Asylum*, *The Boston Book Review*, *Fiction International*, *Heaven Bone*, *The LA Reader*, *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, and *Small Press*, as well as in the anthologies *Anyone Is Possible: New American Short Fiction* (Red Hen Press, 1998) and *What Book!?: Buddha Poems from Beat to Hip Hop* (Parallax Press, 1998).

Obscure Publications published his translation of René Daumal’s *Le Contre-Ciel* in two volumes in 2003, which was also the year that he co-edited the online multimedia collaborartive art exhibit, The 365 Project, (<http://www.the365project.org>). He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.



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