

K. Silem Mohammad

Spooked and Considering How Spooky Deer Are

In a 2005 interview with Tom Beckett, K. Silem Mohammad explained the poetics behind the poems in his book *Deer Head Nation* (Oakland, Calif.: Tougher Disguises, 2003), from which the selections here are taken:

The method came out of one developed by Drew Gardner, Gary Sullivan, and others including myself in the “Flarf” group. You punch a keyword or keywords or phrase into Google and work directly with the result text that gets thrown up. I paste the text into Word and just start stripping stuff away until what’s left is interesting to me, then I start meticulously chipping away at and fussing with that. It’s similar to normal writing, but like you have a head injury that only gives you access to certain words and structures.

I chose the keywords pretty much on the inspiration of the moment. I don’t remember how or why “deer head” came up, but for some reason it started to obsess me, and I tried combining it with all these different words, like “spooky” or “terrorism” or “porn” or “hovering.” Some of the poems don’t even have “deer head” in them, but they felt to me like they were part of the same poetic impulse—like “All I Wanted Was to Play Guitar,” which is about chimps rather than deer, or “Wallace Stevens,” which is about Wallace Stevens and Danzig and teenage boys on crack.

The best theoretical concept I can situate the Flarf collage process in relation to is Charles Bernstein’s “dysraphism,” which he glosses in a note to his poem of the same name in *The Sophist*: “Dysraphism is a word used by specialists in congenital disease to mean a dysfunctional fusion of embryonic parts—a birth defect. . . . *Raph* literally means “seam,” so dysraphism is mis-seaming—a prosodic device!” I don’t think I was actually thinking of Bernstein’s concept when I wrote these poems, but the idea of things wrongly sutured together, like the pathos of a badly taxidermied funny animal or a world falling to pieces being stacked back up in clumsily re-ordered columns, was there.

Spooked
for David Larsen

first we get a spooky guitar echo intro
to help you gear up for this spooky time
the voices have no source
(pretty, spooky, quiet)
spooky

downtown area was a ghost town
massive buildings along the edge of a ghost lake
where she handed the package to the unseen ghost
spooky, half seen world of night
ski masks conceal terracotta faces
“drink, Madame?” the manager had appeared
NAFTA, 6 pesos to the dollar
this is downright spooky

a mother dies while being exorcised of a ghost
people view these experiences
as too weird, far out, spooky

a vampiric tree spirit who controls a lovely ghost
turning the recently deceased into
broadly mesmeric collages
of highly politicized anti-imperialist dogma
sung to the tune of “Ghost Riders in the Sky”
(you know, *spooky*)

spooky Arab hero who confronted the West
painted over in favor of the new ghost
“he was an imperialist”
“he was a good imperialist”
like waiting for the spaceship or something is spooky

SECRETARY [*Galadriel-spooky*]: you know of whom I speak
no, I think you’ve told me too many ghost stories
too spooky!

here some feed for the goose: SPOOKY
ooooohhh, spooky
spooky

Considering How Spooky Deer Are

I.

wolves drive deer
off into the woods

leaves tremble
at water's edge

quietly return

all subjects
all happenings
are imaginary

deer simply have
moved into a home
sweet home status

pheasant hunt
flying squirrel

wood duckling

falling from the sky
like a blur
in some hurry to be gone

2.

watch
the weather
and sit still

whitetail ears
above the brush
you consider how
spooky deer are

some typical Santa Fe
architecture

an alert animal's ear
becomes a focal point
might tune
into your calls

*Starfire, party of 74,
your tables are ready*

3.
how humans see deer

["sick freak"] ["complicated"]
the real life of evil deer
who goes around the forest

we can nowadays rightfully call
his stabile and living heritage

the riot grrl kicked the goat's ass
for something as meaningless
as a crow being present

"it was just sleeping"

thousands of free essays
crash into the back of me

I'm a danger to everyone

“oh yeah, that’s me”
“I’m the evil deer”

4.
10 beautiful acres
on hill w/deer on fire

what the deer looked like
when it started on fire

another shot of the deer
really starting to burn

deer on fire in
the forest and no one
to save it . . . oh! oh! oh!

5.
not all animals everywhere were intelligent
other species had no intellect at all

what about the fully formed, intelligent deer
hard-to-see and not-too-intelligent deer

only the less intelligent deer get shot!
only the less intelligent deer get shot!

first step in establishing an intelligent deer
pursuing a large and intelligent deer into a swamp

eyes like those of a “super-intelligent deer”
stuck trying to make a decision

which path to take to avoid the tiger
that will help them make intelligent deer

the artificial intelligent deer would thus die
we would all have no paradise

I guess intelligent deer
intelligent deer have the ability to travel

from Sonnagrams

Mohammad explains his process for composing his neologistic “sonnagrams”—sonnets recomposed by anagrammatizing—as follows:

I feed each of Shakespeare’s 154 sonnets one line at a time into an internet anagram engine (I use AnagramSite.com, as it is the only free online engine I’ve found that will process the number of letters contained in an average line of iambic pentameter all at one time), thus generating a new list of words from each line. For example, by the time I finish scrambling Sonnet 130 (“My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun”) in this way, I have obtained these fourteen lines of raw results:

unthinking eyelash stereos symmetries
creamed lateral friendship horrors
heathen sonnets withdrew freeway rubbish
nowhere swahili badgers hebraic fireworks
sneakiness weathered dadaism hovered
buckshot heiress cheese reunions
defenestrated english heroism emporium
breakfasts rhythm inherits threat mementos
worthwhile keynote speaker alveoli
haunted spastic mailman thoroughfares
gassing redwood vegetarians
kindergarten rhythms sawdust wholesomeness
heavenly everyday beatnik harmonist
animate swordfish eyeball peaches

This initial textual output (which, I must admit, I find to be an admirably realized “poem” in its own right, without any further help from me) gives me a bank of raw material that is quantitatively equivalent to Shakespeare’s poem at the most basic linguistic level: the letter. At the same time, it sufficiently alters the