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# The Book of Flight

José Ángel Araguz  
*Linfield College*

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# THE BOOK OF FLIGHT

José Angel Araguz



# THE BOOK OF FLIGHT

JOSÉ ANGEL ARAGUZ

a winner of the 2015 Essay Press  
Digital Chapbook Contest  
selected by MISHA PAM DICK



#51

## ESSAY PRESS CONTEST SERIES

For Essay Press's 2015 Chapbook Contest, we asked 12 recent Essay authors each to select and introduce a manuscript extending and/or challenging the formal possibilities of prose.

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“MY MIND WAS BRUSHED  
BY JOSÉ ANGEL ARAGUZ’S  
*THE BOOK OF FLIGHT*”

## INTRODUCTION

– Misha Pam Dick

Form: a four-part microtreatise-poem. Like aphorisms that don’t preen, or fragments that don’t mourn—lines as strokes that vary their pressure with sensitivity, playfulness, tenderness, fluidity. Every meaning of a *light touch*. And how that shapes the silences and gestures, gives them intimacy.

Content: imaginative perspicacity. Writing as creaturely. Its modest record. The music of transience, vulnerability, the perception of vital moments. A spirituality of urban animals that fly or walk or think or snack. A seeking. Some larger, darker current forces at work. Ethico-aesthetic intimations. Fear, appreciation, melancholy, need, empathy. And...

Cohort: Webern for pointillist delicacy. Bashō for receptivity, wit, humility. Ditto Issa. Zhao Mengfu for lyrical minimalism, the sense of hand. Wu Zhen for improvisation, motion. All of them for nature. Michaux for invention's resistance. Kafka for minor-key reflections. Heraclitus for conflict. Agnes Martin for quiet, intense beauty. Their pursuits seem like Araguz's in this graceful and haunting composition. With its notes exploring rhythm as the pulse of thought.

# THE BOOK OF FLIGHT

In the book of flight, the butterfly is a rumor.

The moth, a theologian.

In the book of flight, the mosquito embodies guilt, goes from body to body burdened with life.

In the book of flight, plastic bags are brought in to do the work of clouds.

Dead leaves rest in the margins.

Grass clippings, eyelashes, fingernails: errata in the book of flight.

Whatever wind has to do with the ways of shadows, mere  
editing in the book of flight.

In the book of flight, stray hairs line unjustified paragraphs.

The first drops of blood      from a fresh cut      cloud  
    in the book of flight.

In the book of flight, is there space for familiar gestures lost,  
for the hands that made them?

For the ever-changing lines of her face?

In the book of flight, snow goes captured in quotes.



The joke about dropping a penny from the top of a building  
(*imagine dropping a dollar*), the cost written in the book  
of flight.

Last words go buried at the bottom of the page as footnotes  
in the book of flight.

The ringer of bells marks the hour with his work, and the  
hour rings, takes its place, another page number in the book  
of flight.

The moth wavers, tires, its path a line to light: underlining  
in the book of flight.

Crumbs at the corner of your mouth...ellipsis in the book  
of flight.

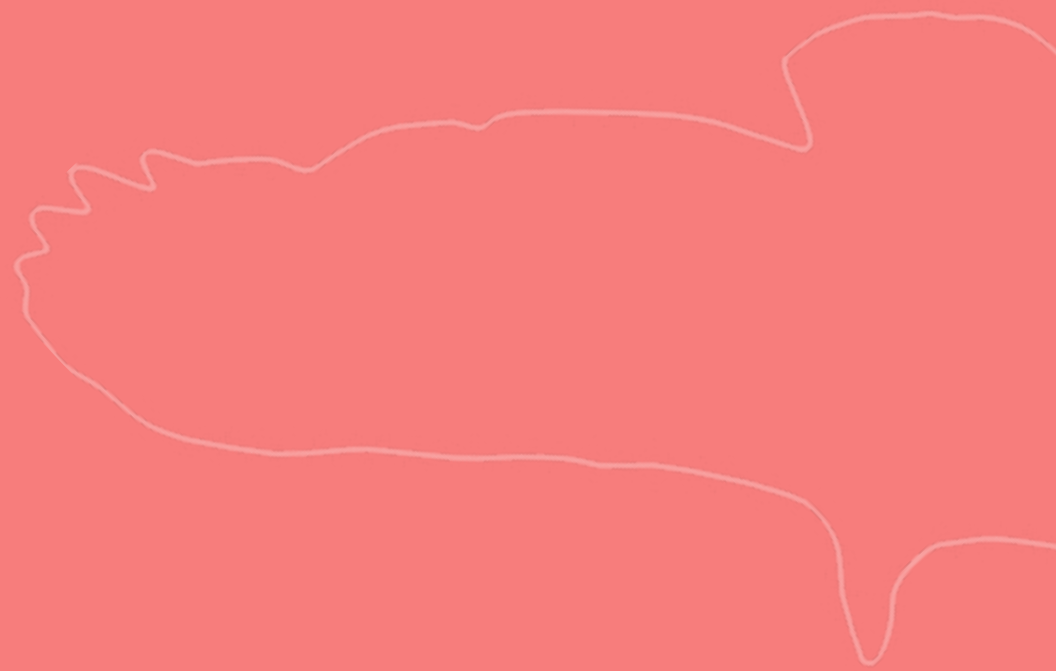
Air recycled, breathed again, as a crowd is made to wait  
outside their lives, index in the book of flight.

The white wings of a butterfly, a space where words are missing in the book of flight.

*I always thought I wanted to be everywhere, but it turns out I merely want to be over there*—endnote in the book of flight.

A man leaving early, not wanting to wake anyone, his breath the air in a fist around a crumpled page, and what's written there, in the book of flight.

# IMPRESSION SERIES



The mother stopped at the airport, shoeless, pockets empty, watches men search through her purse and feels something fall through her when they hold up a small jar of baby food and ask her to eat from it as they watch.

On a given day, one appears on at least a hundred different security cameras, a hundred different mouths recalling their version of the image one sees in a mirror and claims as one's own.

Imagine a strong wind able to lift grass, carry it off, shove it down in a different place, the blades rooted until it came again. After a heavy rain, the poet brings his head down to the dirt and seethes.

I have begun to feel in the rain touching down a sudden hand catching, holding fast.

When travelling, I make sure to know the word for *kill* in the language of the land.

In the city, you are nobody's daughter, nobody's son, there are edges of who you are on every car window, every puddle stepped in.

Fear: flame but no smoke, so that one's silence is a light.

Ears: those flowers stay open long into the night, curious, waiting.

Eyes mistake for windows those patches of skin left open by clothes, and look without thought at something other.

I read cockroaches can survive for seven days on the nutrients of a greasy thumbprint, and immediately begin to wonder whose passing touch has kept me alive.

White noise: the argument between earth and water summed up in the ocean and carried over the highways in the far-off traffic of sleep.

Without words, the animals go on taking the city for what it is: scenery despite the flight of being.

What she means by fear: being lost to a mechanic's knowledge, the casual rhythm of finger and wrist, of eye and cold light across the body that says: *See—that's your problem right there.*

The mother tries to teach her son to pay by speaking slowly and putting money in his hands, but he can only look up and say: "No, it's cold."

The spoon on the table, tense with the curve of someone's face turning over in sleep.

The scissors, afterwards, go back in the drawer with a steel-straight smile.

The television squats in the living room, a chubby devil with a face made of fine soot and a tail that keeps warm tucked into the wall.

The pencil conspires with you—like you split in its body—marking and erasing, alive in a trail of dust and light.

In a mood like the faint impression of life on thick carpet.

The stethoscope is how the doctor learns his gossip at the door of the heart.

Through the walls I can hear laughter but when I try to imagine a face I see only a bird.

# WRITING SERIES



Even a tree wants to look inside sometimes and count its rings.

On revision: *my art is that of my father* surfacing in words that feel different soon as I finish setting them down.  
(after August Kleinzahler, with apologies)

We have no words for time, none that help anyway.

The Dead pulse and wait in the light of a blank page.

I merely move words along in a conversation that I did not start but yet feel compelled to finish.

¡Oye! *No hay palabras, si no musica.*

Please Do Not Touch: Even clean hands can damage the fragile surfaces of works of art.

(sign at MoMA)

On manhood: somewhere a little boy makes excuses for the dead bird in his fist.

The unfingered hands of the scarecrow fray towards heaven.

Thoughts move against each other as tectonic plates, unseen and eruptive.

In a mood like the ocean, which has to live on with the sound of itself crashing, breaking into itself.

I want the grandeur of a lion after a kill, unabashedly devouring one's intent.



The soul bristles, takes after the radish and grows more caustic to tongues the less one is watered, that is, the less one is looked after.

As the moth enters its spiral and curves, from this point growing farther and farther from the light of this page, an innocence surrounds those wings and your eyes here with what I saw fluttering, flickering between us.

Like the comedian who calls what he has to say material, implying that what is presented on stage is not the end only a start, I make my way across this page and give from what I am made from, only instead of laughter a silence builds that you can hear without me.

The page is a tablecloth, words the crumbs from the dark bread of thought.

Workshop: one hears tale of a man presenting meat to his tribe, an act which means luck and a way with the hunt, and another talking over the fire, saying that it is not enough.

From a friend: "I just read the letter I wrote you a year ago but never sent. I would send it to you now, but I suddenly can't bear to part with it, haha."

The muse, the angel, or the *duende*—or perhaps inspiration comes from the lunchlady, who answers the child's anxious glare with an even more imposing one, as if to say: *I can help you to what you want as long as it comes from what there is.*

Writing Dream: in which I find myself at a table writing out, *Lord, take these questions from my head and form houses for others to dwell in.*

I know I must learn from the mirror who, with all its body, holds on to only so much of this world at a time.

Realizing what I stare at while writing is the blank page, not the point fixed in my fingers at the end of my arm, I think of snakes: how they hide in grass and cannot sense what is coming, only that something comes, and how that is enough reason to move along.

The faith and work ethic of the guitar against the wall where a sound rises every time I slam the door.

Occupation: using a pen until it runs out of ink, watching the words begin to fade as they keep coming, until the word arrives only half finished, the rest of it somewhere still in your hand.

# MOTHS AND FLIES

A man, like a twig, travels until broken.

You can tell the weather by people's faces.

As the linguist inquired: you think language has anything to do with words?

In daylight, the moth delivers its news absentmindedly.

Shaking newsprint wings, the moth flaps and unfolds its own story.

The moth thrashes in the corner, as if it would shake itself free of itself.

The moth flails like a kite at a funeral.

In the bread aisle, a moth like a label flying off with its expiration date.

*Steal and starve*, petals on the plant of need.

Spiritual, the fly lingers over what is left behind, iridescent  
at the wake.

The fly glints with what it knows.

Were the fly sun-colored, would it be such a bother?

The fly reads the air around it in earnest, dizzy with interest.

The fly, asking its question wherever it goes.

The fly follows honey, garbage, anything really, whose  
essence is strong.

The fly, inconsistent in its prayers.

The fly, eager to catch up on what he's missed.

There are those who read like flies, the words on the page  
lightly walked over.

Graffiti at Ropes Park: here graphic promises and dated  
declarations ("*por vida*"; "*mi corazon*"; "was here") bloom  
on concrete, as if these lines and colors could live nowhere  
else but at the feet of beachside mansions, amidst broken  
brick and chipped shells, like unfixed stars.

The clouds speak of what was and how it held and can hold  
no more because of weather, and out of those fragments  
one makes out what one can and moves on.

No matter the distance, stars feel personal.

One day someone will say to me: "To hell with you and your stars." That will be a dark day.

There are those who approach death as on a conveyor belt at the airport, without any desire to make an effort in any direction.

On the back of a receipt left on a table: "Let's walk into the sea together." Around me, the sound of breath coming in and out in waves.

Overheard: "Waitresses work harder than busboys. We have to smile: you couldn't smile."

Jobs like these are like holding your breath: do it for too long, and you die.

From a friend: "I have written no poems lately, but I have cried for less."

Worries stack in my heart like chairs at the end of the night—  
each one waits to be set in place again the next day.

Literary criticism: she puts the book back on the shelf and  
thinks, *There is no life in it.*

A fly whines, swings up and up, hard against the ceiling:  
I hear thud after thud until the rhythm its body beats  
becomes a music that quickly grows faint.



# AUTHOR BIO



Born and raised in Corpus Christi, Texas, **José Angel Araguz** is a CantoMundo fellow. Winner of Rhino Poetry's 2015 Editor's Prize, he has had poems recently in *Prairie Schooner*, *Borderlands* and *Huizache*. He is pursuing a PhD in Creative Writing and Literature at the University of Cincinnati. Author of the collection *Everything We Think We Hear*, he runs the poetry blog [The Friday Influence](#).



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