

SIXTY FOUND POEMS FOR THE NEW TOWER OF BABEL

Note to readers:

This text is a collage composed of imagery from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim texts and fragments of contemporary news and popular media.

Its companion piece is a twelve foot tower and the poem cycle is divided into twelve sections, one for each foot of the tower.

Each section consists of one short poem presenting an image from the religious/scholarly text, followed by four responses from modern sources.

Recordings of the poems are voiced simultaneously by mechanisms in the tower.

1.1

**The top of the tower was burnt,
the bottom was swallowed,
and the middle was left standing to erode over time.**

1.2

To blame: an encampment at Sepulveda Pass.

All that remains: a scorched portable stove, a pot, a cheese grater,
burned pages of the *Children's Illustrated Encyclopedia*.

1.3

"Asked to leave voluntarily is ridiculous. Wishy-washy, useless."

"They know they can stay, they do stay, and they are not about to leave."

"They cannot set up in OR NEAR the Hills. Period. Bleeding hearts aside."

1.4

281,893 acres, burnt.

1,000 structures, burnt.

Countless wildlife, burnt.

2 humans, burnt.

17 humans, swallowed by mud.

1.5

Who will wear the handcuffs?

2.1

Shoot one hundred arrows into heaven.

If they return dulled and bloodied,

your war against God has a chance.

2.2

The four islands of the archipelago should be sunken into the sea.

Japan, Pyongyang said, no longer needs

to exist near us.

2.3

Smartphone alerts beeped in unison.

Television stations cut to black screen,

white script warning of missile attack.

Children crouched under desks, arms over heads.

2.4

“That military may come marching down Pennsylvania Avenue.”

“That military may be flying over New York City and Washington, DC, for parades.”

“I mean, we’re going to be showing our military.”

2.5

Operation Blue Jay, secret.

Operation Bumblebee, secret.

Operation Chrome Dome, secret.

Operation Garden Plot, secret.

Operation Giant Lance, secret.

Operation Head Start, secret.

3.1

It took a whole year to hoist a plank to the top.

**Materials became so valuable that they cried
when a brick fell and broke. When the worker
fell and died, their eyes were dry.**

3.2

No talking. No standing up. No cell phones.

No drinking water at your stations.

If you finish your work early, you must sit down and read employee manuals.

600 iPad covers per day, or 1 per minute.

No guests. No gossiping. No revealing your pay. No leaflets.

3.3

“He told me to put the mask away.”

“The EPA had said the air was safe to breathe.”

“I trusted him.”

3.4

Mortgage origination, done by robot.

Paralegal work, done by robot.

Accounting, done by robot.

Back-office transaction processing, done by robot.

Who will wear the neckties?

3.5

Workers bend over crops under Louisiana sun.

Officers on horseback, armed, oversee.

Punishment for refusal to work:

time in solitary, no family visits.

4.1

**So precious was the tower deemed that God
struck its citizens with confusion.**

See how well you live together now, God said.

4.2

Kerosene torches fill Nameless Field.

“Our blood! Our soil!” “You will not replace us!”

Countermarchers lock arms, sing hymns.

This is how the terrible night begins.

4.3

Speeding car rams into crowd of counterprotesters.

The mayor responds:

“I urge all people of good will — go home.”

4.4

An Ice agent asked Hernandez if he knew

Spanish because he was going home. “I am home,

I told him, but he just laughed.”

4.5

“Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?”

“I am the least racist person you will ever interview.”

“We have some bad hombres here and we have to get them out.”

5.1

**The tower's builders were changed into apes,
evil spirits, demons,
ghosts walking among us.**

5.2

“Congratulations, you five ladies no longer have to pretend to be attracted to Harvey Weinstein,” said the comedian. The audience laughed and clapped. Witnesses all, dressed for the red carpet.

5.3

In 1000 incidents of rape:
310 reported to police,
57 lead to arrest,
11 to prosecution,
7 to conviction,
6 to incarceration.

5.4

Friends taunt an allergic friend with a peanut butter sandwich.
Let's see if he dies, say the friends. The friends laugh and clap.
Teachers, students, they stand by. Someone else will intervene.

5.5

One in two racist hate crimes, reported.
One in four homophobic hate crimes reported.
One in ten religious hate crimes, reported.
One in nineteen disability hate crimes, reported.

6.1

**Heaven tottered, poured water
onto the earth. Fear of deluge made them build
their homes on stilts. Bring it on again, God, they said.**

6.2

Water crept up the legs of the Zoave
statue, next to the Pont d'Alma.
He was in it up to his waist.
Rats came up from their dens, looking for dry
shelter, ran about underfoot.

6.3

"It's gonna be a foot and a half higher than it's ever been in history."
"We don't know exactly where it's gonna go."
"Everything I have is in there."

6.4

Sea level rises if temperature rises 3 degrees C.
Osaka, Japan, 5.2 million people displaced.
Alexandria, Egypt, 3 million people displaced.
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1.8 million people displaced.
Shanghai, China, 17.5 million people displaced.

6.5

The children spend so much time in the ocean that
their eyes see more clearly underwater.
Like sea sickness for people who live on land,
they get land sickness when they leave the sea.

7.1

With no common language, they could not work together. One worker ordered a brick, received mortar instead. It makes you want to hurl a brick.

7.2

120 billion emails sent in America per business day.

122 emails per person per business day.

28% of business day eaten by email.

7.3

The 45 year old man entered his former workplace, shot a person, carjacked a semi-truck in the parking lot.

7.4

See yourselves as one team. You are not above the engineers because you can put together a few graphs in Powerpoint. Prioritize user stories in a product backlog. Assign acceptance criteria.

7.5

“I can only give you the best information that I have.”

“I can’t say definitively, but I’m not aware of any communication.”

“I can’t say with 100 percent certainty, but not that I’m aware of.”

“This is the information that was given to me by those individuals.”

8.1

He—God—has no right to keep the upper world to himself.

Let's build a tower. Put a golden idol on the top.

The idol will shake his sword at the sky.

8.2

Reality star says she has 'totally given up' on Snapchat.

The next day, shares fall 7.2%.

8.3

The participants were unknown comedians willing to do anything for fame. They sat in the dark, watching only their favorite baseball teams.

If their team won, they were permitted to eat with their face on camera.

If their team lost, they sat in the anonymous dark and ate nothing.

8.4

She wanted a tummy tuck, a breast job, and a new nose job to fix the old one. Two years later, in the *The Swan's* finale, she was crowned the second runner-up.

8.5

"i thought y'all were so weird for talking about eating tide pods but now i been thinking about how weird it is for so long that i'm thinking it might not be weird and i wanna eat one too what is this"

9.1

If you are too sick to work, tough on you.

If you are too pregnant to work, tough on you.

If you are nursing a baby, tough on you.

Carry that child in your apron.

9.2

“The public sector results suggest that the vast majority of employees infected with H1N1 would have stayed at home if that were a viable option.”

9.3

31 year old woman dies of congestive heart failure.

159 hours of overtime in the month before her death.

Cause of death: *karoshi*, death by overwork.

9.4

A family earning \$30,000 would receive a \$574 annual credit for childcare.

Childcare average for a four-year-old:

\$4,439 a year in Mississippi.

\$17,863 a year in Washington, DC.

9.5

“They really liked me but I had one child already and soon

I would probably want another, so they would have to

be careful how much they invested in me.”

10.1

**The rebellious angels hung in the tower by their heels,
and gave lessons in magic to whomever came by.
They seduced with their whispers, knew what your ears needed.
Soon, you could not tell magic and miracle apart.**

10.2

“If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten.”

“It is in your moments of decision that your destiny is shaped.”

“Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.”

10.3

“You become what you think about most.”

“But you also attract what you think about most.”

“Remember that your thoughts are the primary cause of everything.”

10.4

“Count money. Imagine you hold in your hands all the money you need.”

“Believe you can manifest money quickly. It begins with your thoughts.”

“It’s raining money.”

“Be childlike.”

“Be positive.”

10.5

Platinum membership for only a \$65,000 fee.

“Experience a full week of exquisite rejuvenation.”

“Experience ultimate adventure with fellow power players.”

“Maximize your momentum and mastery.”

11.1

The leader's best plan to control the citizens:

convince them that noncooperation is cowardice.

Courage is what makes happiness. Don't be a wuss.

Join me in raising my fist. Join me in laying these bricks.

11.2

"Even on positive news—really positive news like that—they were like death and un-American. Un-American. Somebody said treasonous. Yeah, I guess, why not? Can we call that treason? Why not? I mean, they certainly didn't seem to love our country very much."

11.3

Boston Police Department uses Geofeedia to monitor social media of ordinary citizens

discussing ordinary affairs.

Flagged: #blacklivesmatter, #muslimlivesmatter.

"Our main focus is public safety."

11.4

The Utah Data Center, code-named Bumblehive.

Your data: if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear.

In the past, we could only gather data after crimes were committed.

but what if we could build a national data warehouse containing information about every person in the United States?

11.5

20 percent believed the government had gone

too far in restricting civil liberties

in the fight against terrorism.

26 percent said it had not gone far enough.

12.1

Among them were twelve citizens who refused to carry bricks.

Not our tower, they said. Not our leader, they said.

Arrest them, said the leader. Lock them up.

The citizens accepted the cost of refusal.

They knew truth could not be kept in handcuffs.

12.2

“They say a good guy with a gun stops a bad guy with a gun. We call BS.”

“That us kids don’t know what we’re talking about, that we’re too young to understand how the government works. We call BS.”

12.3

WE ARE THE GRANDDAUGHTERS OF THE WITCHES YOU FAILED TO BURN
NINETY, NASTY, AND NOT GIVING UP
MY MOM IS PISSED
THIS IS MY RESISTING BITCH FACE

12.4

“I think the courage comes from a little girl inside of me and my commitment to doing right by her.”

“Finally the world was able to hear. I don’t give a shit what it costs me. All I can do is the next good, right thing and let go of the results.”

12.5

#occupy #blacklivesmatter #impeach #metoo #enough
#womensmarch #dumptrump #vote #notonemore #fuckthisracistbullshit
#lovetrumpshate #ecomoday #dreamers #greenbiz
#loveislove #sanctuarycity #pride #motherearth #amnesty
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