Letters to Goya / Titles | Titles / Letters to Goya

Anne M Giangiulio
LETTERS TO GOYA
POEMS, TITLES AND LETTERS TO THE DEAD

JAMES MAGEE
LETTERS TO GOYA
POEMS, TITLES AND LETTERS TO THE DEAD

JAMES MAGEE
—Beth Henley, Pulitzer-winning playwright

I love these words. Like the objects for which they serve as titles, they leave me speechless:
—Bob Ostertag, leading edge composer

Magee’s Titles, like the work of Byzantine iconographers, transcend the mere notion of a title, to produce a phenomenon hard to designate with a single word, hovering between poetry and opera, melodic rapture and philosophical delight. They are literally elating.
—Joachim Pissarro, Bershad Professor of Art History, Hunter College, NYC

Magee’s Titles are alternatively haunting, tragic, loving, ruminative, terrifying and, in performance. Homeric. There are few boundaries in the human mind and, in Magee’s, there are none.
—Richard R. Brettell, Ph.D. Founding Director, The Edith O’Donnell Institute of Art History
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Orange...

Give unto others before

the ceiling collapses about you in the turn-around room.

Pork upon pork.

My thoughts bake.
Outside a car idles near the curb

as

July lies helplessly in a pile of twisted knots.

We, the scrambling chimps of this world, the nipping hyenas,
would be better off simply working together in one immense intergalactic whorehouse.

Most of us would be plumbers, accountants and ticket takers.

a few would play the piano
in the ten-thousand room palace carved into the face of a mountain.
a place of pilgrimage for souls threatened by toads and free parking.

The unto others we once would have them the unto you.

The young would care for the old, and the old, in turn, would hum into the ears of the young.

the legless would be tenderly lowered into warm baths, and
the bereaved would be reminded once more that there are no departures.

Blessed are the poor in spirit for they shall be comforted.

Together we would lie quietly on a 200-acre bed

and spread our legs for a stranger in order to destroy the strangeness between us,

but we would keep our prices low.

while his semen flows warm and sweat over the tables and chairs in the great bedroom
down the sides of the red-carved mountain and over the parking lot.

out into the rivers and great lakes and oceans of orange monkey love,

for, dear Jesus, as you well know, our oldest profession remains the most charitable.

Blessed are they who give of themselves at great risk.
and a record player that works.

But you keep telling me to get out of bed:

'Clouds or no clouds, the cats must be fed,

and so must I. my apple pie boy.'"

Bear down on it

or tear it up in anger.

Yet who owns this hillside house, anyway?
Does its occupant have clear title?
Is he a drug abuser?
A user of children?
Should I buy a taser?

Then Jordan, scratching himself,

motions to me to climb again into his boat.

saying. "We must get back"
MIDDLEWORD

By Kerry Doyle

"It is you talking as much as myself. I act as the tongue of you."
— Walt Whitman

"I've got to talking again about rejoicing. About how important it is to your soul to never forget.
It's just that sometimes I can't believe how beautiful the world is."
— The Duchess

"I've been slithering around on this wet ground on all fours for so long now."
— James Mage

The words contained in this small surprising book are a window into the life of James Magee. Or perhaps they are many windows, some that look into mirrors, others that lead out to open doors. His has been a long life—and a complicated one.

The more you get to know Jim, the more you understand that his life will never be visible from a single vantage point. Those people who knew Jim well, and even some who don't, are aware that Jim has several alter-egos, perhaps somewhat less psychological than a split personality but more complicated and complex than a durational performance.

There is Ansel Earlemore, a retired librarian from the Midwest who took up painting late in life to great success and whose work has been exhibited in museums across the United States and collected by both individuals and institutions. Horace Mayfield has had a more modest career but, like Livermore and Magee, maintains his own independent residence and studio in El Paso, Texas. In the poems contained here we can see that the practice of channeling real or imagined others is central to Jim's being in the world. It is a kind of incarnate spirit that is embodied and expressed through a myriad of forms.

This book presents two bodies of writing by James Magee. The first is Let It Be, a collection of memoirs filled with letters written on a manual typewriter from the Walsh Trailer Park in Sweetwater, Texas. Turning the book around, you will find a second collection, a selected compilation of tales from Jim's artwork, representing decades of both writing and performance by the artist and his multiple selves. Reading this book is not unlike the act of trying to understand Jim's life. It requires turning, twisting, reconceiving. You can enter at any point and find the story changing and growing as Jim plays conductor to a symphony of voices familiar and strange.
Magie bought his workshop/warehouse on Myrtle Street in El Paso, Texas, in 1985. A huge space to create very large projects. In one corner of the workshop was a tiny and very dirty bathroom, and these boards were its wall. On the other wallboard, from the right, about eye level if you are using the toilet, someone had scratched a bit of graffiti (see facing page). Magie was intrigued by this little bit of graffiti. It reminded him almost magically of Goya's paintings of The Duchess of Alba, especially the one La Maja Dormida (1797–1800), as reproduced in "The MiddleWord." The Duchess had been Goya's patron, and they may have been lovers; no one knows for sure. Many stories swirl about their affair. But whatever the connection, Magie was inspired. He ripped the boards from the structural trusses and framed them in steel and glass. This became La Maja Dormida (Duchess of Alba), one of his assemblages.

A number of years after he had created the assemblage of impulse Magie traveled to Sweetwater, Texas. He had her good friend from his roughneck days in the Texas oilfield was from Sweetwater, a dusty Texas town on the way to Ohio that carried a special sort of charm for Magie. The purpose of his journey was somehow to create a "tableau" for his next assemblage. Jim got a cheap motel room and spent about four days taking notes from The Sweetwater Reporter newspaper from 1955. From his research, he created the early 19th century Duchess who lived, oddly enough, in Sweetwater. Waski Trapper Park. This Duchess finger-poked and strangely beautiful letters to her love interest. Franklin, the Court Painter to His Majesty, Charles IV of Spain.

Her letters to Frankie became, in effect, the "义乌" in Magie's La Maja Dormida (Duchess of Alba), pictured above. It made perfect sense to James Magie. And it still does.
The following letters, dated
April 5th through September 15th, 1955,
from the Waikiki Trailer Park, Sweetwater, Texas,
were written by
Doña María del Pilar Teresa Cayetana de Silva Álvarez de Toledo,
13th Duchess of Alba
to
Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes,
Court Painter to His Majesty, Charles IV of Spain.

LETTERS I–XXIII

April 5, 1955

Oh, Solo Goya,

Can you believe it? Sears bath mats on sale for a dollar a mat and
I am standing here, like a damn fool, trying to figure out whether I
should rush down there before they're all $5.95 bought up.

So indecisive. I keep thinking back on you lecturing me how no man,
having put his hand to the plough, and turning back, is fit for the
Kingdom of God. But then again, maybe I am already in the kingdom right
here at the Waikiki. It's unfair to expect everyone to be an self-assured
$5.95 as you. I think charity is a matter of grace, like strength, given
forth from the earth from which you were born; and Lord knows, and I don't
His Name in vain, the earth around Fuendetodos is plenty hard enough for my
chinky-chin-chin.

Your darling,

The Duchess
July 3, 1955

Dear Goya,

Today I loaded up the Chevy with my gear for a fishing trip on the Brazos, but blew a gasket 8 miles out of town. So I guess I'll spend the fourth here in Sweetwater. Thinking of you on this holiday.

Love,

The Duchess

July 5, 1955

Dear Goya,

If thinking about going down to the Sky Room tonight at the Blue Bonnet Hotel. They're putting on a show chicken dinner for the 14 Dale Co munite grads and Evelyn, who's trying to improve herself, Sky will be receiving her diploma. The only problem is the Sky Room still has no carpet on the floor and the floor is filled with cracks, and I mean those cracks that separate the planks of wood.

Well, you know Frankie //wah// how I hate cracks of any kind. Step on a crack and break your mother's back. Last time I was in the Sky Room, I couldn't even walk across the floor to our dinner table. I just stood there, frozen. With everyone in the dining room egging me on, I felt like a fool. But I couldn't move.

It's even worse outside the AAF. I wish they would repair that side walk. Last Saturday it took me over fifteen minutes to walk just from the bus stop to the front entrance of the store, the concrete was so fractured; and when I left, an hour later, with two bags of groceries in my arms, it took me even longer.

Thinking of you,

The Duchess