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Hybrid Poem and Interview by Joshua Gottlieb-Miller

Author's Note: This piece is from a longer series of hybrid poems. In each poem, I quote (in italics) Trader Joe's grocery-store employees—coworkers of mine from 2012 to 2014—and pair the poem with excerpts from later interviews with the people quoted. Some were audio-only or video interviews I transcribed. Aside from excerpting for publication, the interviews weren't edited.

The excerpts that follow this poem are from a video interview I conducted with Bruce Bull Lyon on Wednesday, January 20, 2016, at the Madison Public Library in Madison, Wisconsin.



Reincarnation

Aphorisms pile up
like opportunity buys:
*You have the rest of your life
to get where you need to be
right now*, Bruce tells me.
There's no timeline on your life,
he adds. A customer rewinds,
keep taking it easy, somehow
means something more
than to keep scanning
at the pace
I've set myself
and to which she seems
happily accustomed,
while we shoot
the shit like it deserves
its target heart.

*An honest person makes
honest mistakes*, Boss

lies. Heather asks the juice,
Who will teach me

*to love what I'm doing?
And why do I have to learn?*

Keith whispers
by the trash, *Remember
when we worked here?*

Shoppers promise,
*I could never do
what you do*. Do you
understand beneath me?

My belief in reincarnation relies
on this newly-dead customer
kicking the soul out
of me or you, but most likely
I mean, when I mean me,
and I do, I believe I will
continue to change
in ways I can't prevent.
To be fair, I've thought
about this before,
and no longer know now
what I was thinking then.



Interview Excerpts: Bruce Bull Lyon

0:18—I'm pretty sure *I never said this, but you're the expert.*

[I ask Bruce to read the poem he's quoted in.]

1:29—I hope *I didn't botch that too much.*

Bruce, you worked in a grocery store?

I did.

Bruce, now you're a customer service associate for a home colon-cancer screening test?

Correct.

What does that mean?

It means that I talk to people about their bowel movements all day long. Make sure they collect them correctly. Send them in to us so we can test for colon cancer.

Reincarnation

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Do you enjoy this job more than you enjoyed working in the grocery store?

I...don't know. I enjoy—I enjoyed—the people I worked with so much at the grocery store. And that I miss, because it's a different atmosphere. It's a much more—it's much less personal, although you're talking about much more personal subjects. And I just...I missed the people I worked with. Most of them.

2:37—Bruce, when I asked you, like, who you are, aside from your job, you mentioned being the minister of sunshine and a prophet of rage—and then you also said that you're uninteresting and a dad and a wiseacre, and you once told me that your life changes when you have a kid. If you were going to square all of those things up into a ball of a person, who is that person?

Ummm...I don't know? Some yahoo, some wiseacre who's a dad who likes to think he's a prophet of rage?

I think you're a funny guy.

Yeah, funny or funny?

6:54—Is there a time in your life you've "gone for two"?

Rarely [laughs]. I'd like to think I would, though, which might be going for two in its own way.

I'm wondering, do you think reincarnation only means that the last you returns?

Good question. I think it's the all of you. I...I would hope you'd have those memories and those experiences. Hmmm, I don't know, I've never thought of it that way, which, which you comes back, because I'm certainly a different person than I was. You know, I carry a lot of those same things, but I'm a different person than I was—younger. Probably change when I get older. I never thought about reincarnation. Well, not that much.

Art Information

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Joshua Gottlieb-Miller is a PhD candidate in poetry at the University of Houston in Texas. Currently he tutors in a writing center, teaches a senior memoir workshop for Inprint as well as poetry for Writers in the Schools, and is the weekend desk attendant for the Cy Twombly Gallery at the Menil Collection. Joshua lives in Houston with his wife Lauren and son Owen.

Follow Joshua on Twitter [@JoshuaG_M](#) [7].

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