

An Al<sup>k</sup>īm.yā's  
Alphabet

An Alchemist's Alphabet  
a collection of poems  
Joseph Lisowski

# An Alchemist's Alphabet

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by Joseph Lisowski

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## Biography & Acknowledgements

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After growing up under the shadow of Heppenstal Steel Mill in Pittsburgh, PA, Joseph Lisowski spent much of his life near the sea, including ten years in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, which serves as the setting for his three published mystery novels. Watch for Looking for Lauren, coming out in 2008 from Eternal Press. He has lived many lives: a wide-eyed boy, a keeper of keys, a beachcomber (there are poems somewhere commemorating them all). Now he watches old Stooges' videos with his youngest son near the outer banks of North Carolina, where he and his wife Linda are professors at Elizabeth City State University. The novel he's putting finishing touches on now, The Obeah Sprig, is also a mystery. This detective novel, though, is set on Andros Island, the Bahamas, and Pittsburgh. To solve any lingering mysteries, please google *Joseph Lisowski*.



all of these lettered poems, over time, appeared in *The Dande Review*.

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## A

---

In my hand is a blank page.  
I've been staring at it  
for some time. Words  
don't materialize. I feel  
I must do something about it.  
After all, emptiness  
has very little rights.

Avoid is more appropriate  
for my outer space, that black hole  
whose surface I scratch  
with the letter A.  
It is not a jar on a hill,  
more like an A frame,  
but it will do since  
no slovenly wilderness  
will appear or disappear.

I consider it an island,  
not an atoll, not at all.

## **B**

---

The letter B is for bold.

Or is it bolt?

One binds, the other  
breaks free.

I prefer biscuits to bagels,  
or better yet, a crusty rye bread  
with barley soup.

Most good Americans would say  
B is for Business or we are the Best.  
I prefer bullshit, butter, or breasts,  
whatever's for breakfast, brunch,  
or could be served in bed.

## C

---

The letter C is not  
for caterpillar, no  
transformation here.

Living in an age  
more suited to carpal tunnel,  
I seek other holes  
for comic relief,  
mining unusual words  
for genitalia.

I get a rise  
riding the seas.  
And if a woman's inclined,  
I accept the cup she offers.

I know I should be more careful.  
But after a case of Corona,  
I grab whatever can I can.

## D

---

I am dangerous  
but dumb,  
a delirious dimwit  
who believes  
in doughnuts,  
debits,  
devils,  
and love.

Why deny  
the rapture  
of dementia,  
of forever forgetting  
(but I'm getting a  
head of myself)?  
That dent in your head  
demands discipline,

demands discipline  
that won't deceive.

## E

---

“Energy is Eternal Delight!”  
or so Blake once believed  
when he enjoyed everyday life.  
I wonder about his position now.

I favor effervescence,  
a bit of the bubbly  
on the way to euphoria—  
thank God for endorphins,  
eagles, egrets, and endomorphs.  
(I really prefer effluvia.  
Egregious of me, won't you say?)

And then there's my etchings.  
You'd like to come,  
when you can see them, of course.  
Forget about essence:  
excite, enlight, exit, end.

## **F**

---

It's fun to be foolish,  
freckled, feckless but fearless.  
Fancy's child's fortune  
is celebrated today.

Oh, how wonderful it is  
to grow into age,  
rather than falling,  
failing to fit.

Happy birthday joy!  
My fantastic son  
is four and four and four today.  
Hooray!

## G

---

“What is the good?” Socrates asked,  
“What pleases or what endures?”  
One seems to exclude the other.  
What are the rules of this game?  
 (“gome” or “gamen,” as Medievalists claim).

For god’s sake, don’t miss the G spot.  
Good grief! Don’t keep Lucy hanging,  
Charley Brown. “Gobble, gobble, gobble,”  
said the turkey to the goose. Go for it—  
gamble, gambol, gather.

## H

---

How do I love thee?  
Let me not count ways.  
Hmmm? Horny hippos in mud,  
wholly happy in heavenly shades of night  
falling. What's the worst  
that could happen—hippos with herpes?  
Hippos are harpies? Harpo as a hippo?  
Hardly.

Hop on your favorite  
hobby horse and ride.  
No sense in beating it  
To get the deserved response.

## I

---

I am an idiot.

Indulge me, please.

After all, I'm not an imbecile,  
merely intellectually challenged  
or, perhaps, intelligently obscure.

Unlike Jude, I am a prince—

Russian prince Myskin, no less,  
an affectionate appellation  
for one not known to imbibe,  
inhale, ingest, insert, inhabit.

Blue indigo is what I orchestrate,  
the mood of hearts inflamed.

I am an island.

Or, if you prefer, an idiot,  
as I said before.

## J

---

“Jumpin’ Jehosaphat!”  
What a jewel of an expression.  
It jogs my memory and out flows  
Superman in black and white, Rocky King,  
Private Eye, Studio One for adults,  
Hopalong, Cisco, and Wild Bill for me—  
watch out for the guy in the black hat,  
and all Indians except Tonto!

The world was ordinary gray then,  
like a sky painted with steel mill dust.  
Those old shows taught dependable lessons—  
be good, do right, obey the law.  
Dull, predictable, dependable.

Now everybody demands color.  
So what do we hear?  
“Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!”

## K

---

King, of course, is what first  
comes to mind. Kong  
is an afterthought. How  
can a male primate prefer candlelight,  
caviar, romance to concupiscence  
or the raw kinetic power  
of Lust, which is only a letter away?

I distract myself thinking  
of kisses, sweet chocolate  
on the tongue, a craving,  
a taste to kill for.  
There, I've said it—to kill.

Quick, here, now, caught in the castle keep,  
the quaint queen's quente  
is what commands my keel.

## L

---

Luckless/lucky in love,  
I've always/never been.  
Sweet surrender lies  
on the boulevard of broken dreams:  
“lover, lover, lover, come back to me . . .”

What's left? The right way  
to leave behind loss?  
There's little gain in grief.  
Let me not lose my life  
foolishly—longing for life,  
looking for luck, loving the losers.

## M

---

Monsters are too easy to understand,  
I mean how they come to be.  
Take Dr. Frankenstein—  
he could not love his creation.  
The Wolfman repressed his libido by day.  
Dr. Jeckyl secretly coveted hide.  
All perfectly ordinary, easy to concede.

And then came Hollywood  
covered in slime.  
Invasions without reason.  
At best, an occasional off-rhyme.

Even to a moron, the universal theme is clear:  
what truly terrifies is in the mirror.

## N

---

Never no mind, you.

Not what you thought, taught, no?

Life, that is, that near side of nothing

no one wants to discuss: nil.

If I said zip, zero, I'd be ahead of myself.

My numb nuts get nothing in gear.

A check up from the neck up

ain't Nobodaddy's refrain.

I need you to notice—

It's you I'll never not love.

## O

---

Outrageous, you might say,  
the audacity of the ostrich  
pretending not to be visible  
by covering his eyes.  
If only Oedipus knew that trick,  
what different outcomes would occur.  
And for Othello, too, demanding ocular proof.

Observe, oscillate, opine,  
and understate the obvious.

Ophthalmologists are rarely optimistic.  
Ospreys are rarely obese.

## P

---

Period. I don't wanna  
think about it. I mean,  
the end of a sentence  
or that time of the month  
for my wife. Or not.

Perspicacious Penelope  
pranced on a pony preening.  
Perhaps she presented a problem  
attired in periwinkle panties,  
peach pumps and pearls  
(orgasm delayed).

If only I could purchase a piece,  
if only I could part,  
put my piece in the tart  
and find peace.

## Q

---

I've used all my clues with K,  
killed the quest with both eyes blind,  
a quiver of arrows shot into a queue.  
"I have a question," my son asks.  
It's his most dependable refrain,  
whether on quartz or quarks,  
quarts or Eliot's Quartets  
(quick now, here now, always).  
He's eager to know  
while I prefer to quaff  
a pint or three or more  
until I'm in a quandary,  
queasy, quixotic, unable to query  
all that's queer. Quote me,  
if you dare.

## R

---

Robbers, roustabouts, rabbits, and rakes  
have little in common, a little larceny,  
perhaps, if the folly is ripe,  
the reason rotten. Remember  
what the door mouse said.

Was it “Rodents and legumes?”  
“Rats and beans?”  
Regardless, one river can be red  
as another. Everyone knows  
one man’s relish  
is another woman’s raspberry.  
Lick quick! Record refrain.

## S

---

Who cares about sin?  
The serpent in the garden?  
A snake in the grass?  
Egyptians believed him  
to be a symbol of healing,  
the Hopis, regeneration,  
a sincere recognition  
of sudden surrender.  
Inadvertent secretions  
stain the Sunday sheets  
after the service ends.  
Nothing more than spit, he claims.  
Forgiveness and reprieve  
for unswallowed spilled seed.

If sin leads to death,  
what new life surfaces?

## T

---

Spring came yesterday  
on heels of thunder,  
cold wind, threat of snow.  
A terror alert of yellow  
reflected ordinary time.

I hoped for hope,  
would settle for sun.  
Instead, I thought of trains,  
trucks, toys, anything to transport  
me from this travail  
of nature's cold tears.

## U

---

Umbrellas, of course, are the answer.  
Ubiquitous, universal, but ultimately  
useless in hurricanes or even strong storms.  
So, what's left? The umbilical cord buried,  
undulating rhythms of earlier passions lost?  
Who's to take umbrage? Women  
on unicycles looking for unicorns?  
Hardly. Undine is not a myth  
for this century. The updraft is  
no matter what you say, how loud  
you shout, you are not unique.

Every eunuch knows that.

## V

---

Vain, vainglorious, violated.  
What else can you pretend to be  
when trying to disguise vulnerability?  
I am a verb without subject,  
without verve, barely able  
to voice complaints.  
What virtue is there in verbiage,  
an unattached part of speech?

Where is vision? Veritas?  
Lost in voluptuous fantasies  
that release venom with such velocity  
nouns are poisoned and adverbs  
forget how to speak.

## W

---

Windows—whatever  
we look through,  
wind in our eyes,  
tears, blind sight.  
No wonder we wobble,  
walk away from winning.  
More fitting to wake to work,  
which causes us to wonder, wander.

What have I won, really,  
in this life?

## X

---

In Xanadu . . .  
there's X-rated pleasure,  
unnatural acts, extreme elixirs,  
but you must travel  
to get honey from that hive.

X marks the spot  
where the xenophobe rests.  
Anyone not of the right party  
is asked, axed, Xed out.

## Y

---

Yes, yes, yauza!  
You can't deny the affirmative.  
Got to accentuate the positive.  
Yellow bright like sun,  
You yell, "yes, yes, yes!  
Eat at the Y!"

Life is yearning,  
a pelvic yodel—  
Yum, yum, yum!

## Z

---

Zing went the strings  
of my heart, heart, head, hump?  
Whatever? No, no, now I remember—  
it was zither, the strings  
of my Z, part of the Zeitgeist  
when I played in Zanzibar  
under the big top, easy, easy.

Long ago I longed for a girl  
named Zooey, my anima,  
a virtual animal.  
When I finally got her in bed,  
I lost my head. Me  
A praying man too, 'tis true.

When she left me  
there was nothing left to be  
but a Zombie.