



Photo by Carlos Blackburn

Introducing José Kozer

Jose Kozer (Havana, 1940) is a distinguished Cuban poet and essayist who has lived in the United States since 1960. In 2013 he was awarded the highly prestigious Pablo Neruda Prize in Chile in recognition of his lifetime achievement as a poet. The author of close to 100 books, Kozer is at once astonishingly prolific and extraordinarily multi-sided in his interests and approaches to poetry: at once very Jewish and very Buddhist, an observer of life's humblest minutiae and one steeped in high culture from East and West, conversant with the Spanish Siglo de Oro poets and influenced by Americans such as Pound, Stevens, Creeley and Olson, a poet of what lies before him now and of long-ago memories, a clear-sighted materialist and a mystic, a verbally inventive humorist and an unflinching tragedian. His books have been published in Mexico, Spain, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and Venezuela, as well as in bilingual editions in the United States, England, Switzerland and the Ukraine.

One of poetry's tasks is surely to push us beyond complacencies of thought and feeling, to provoke us as readers to return to the intellectual and emotional work needed to live fully alive in this world with all its horrors. "Imago Mundi" strikes me as just such a provocation. What would it mean to live after Auschwitz? What could ever be justice or recompense? Rather than settling for Adorno's "No poetry after Auschwitz", let us think of "No religion after Auschwitz", "No family after Auschwitz", where would those precepts leave us? I find it chillingly appropriate that the last word of this poem is "tongue" - in both Spanish ("lengua") and English signifying language itself as much as the physical organ.

—Peter Boyle

IMAGO MUNDI

Salió de Auschwitz por patas, se ladeaba, anduvo
sin volverse unos
kilómetros, rebasó
las fronteras, y años
más tarde se hizo
carpintero, su interés
era extraer de los
pinos blancos tablas
desbastadas para
fabricar el marco de
los espejos donde
contemplaría a sus
antiguos verdugos,
féretros construirles:
construir el más basto
cajón entre todos para
sí mismo y unos pocos
sobrevivientes, se
reunían dos semanas
al año a beber
aguardiente, hablar
polaco chapurreado.

A sus dos hijos les inculcó el odio a los nazis, a
perpetuidad: los
animaba a imaginar
desde pequeños y
en cuanto tuvieron
uso de razón a
desollarlos vivos,
bugarronearlos,
mantenerlos durante
años encerrados en
estrechas celdas,
pájaros a los que se
les cortan las alas,
se les deja la jaula
abierta, altos muros
insalvables.

Era su legado. No una venganza a lo Talión sino
un legado. Ante el
horror nada era
excesivo, lo
consideraba otra
estrella amarilla,
sólo que incorporada
a otra gente que sus
hijos reducirían a un
ornamento: estrella
que era en el fondo
una dádiva. En la
familia jamás se
celebró la Pascua,
no se dejó de mezclar
la carne con la leche
(¿ortodoxias después
de Auschwitz?) ni
hacer ascos al
lechón, el chicharrón:
hablar a los eslavos
en yidish, chinchetas
a sus almas, puntillas
a las entretelas de
sus miocardios.

El hijo mayor se convirtió a los veinte años al
catolicismo, tomó
órdenes, se recluyó
en un monasterio
benedictino (nada
menos que en
Francia, afueras
de París) evolucionó
acabando monje
tibetano (vuelto
todo un *rinpoche*):
el menor se hizo
peluquera (sic)
llegaría cosas de
la vida y los avances
de la medicina a
menstruar.

El superviviente de Auschwitz viviría con mucho

más años que toda
su familia inmediata,
primero moriría el
mayor (la sogá al
cuello un accidente)
al año su mujer
(entre el bajo vientre
y los ovarios el mal
se regó) (la segó):
luego vino el menor
o lo que fuere (Sida)
(el agua al cuello) se
ahogó: en los mares
del norte tras ametrallar
a los últimos verdugos
de Auschwitz, quitarles
el pellejo para pantallas
de lámparas de noche,
extraerles los dientes
de oro.

Del padre se supo con el tiempo que jamás se casó,

no trajo hijos al mundo
(¿hijos después de
Auschwitz?) le fue
del todo imposible:
estuvo reconcentrado
tres años y unos días,
lo rescataron soldados
rusos, veneraría esa
soldadesca un largo
tiempo: murió de un
soponcio una tarde
tropical, casi centenario,
meciéndose a la hora de
la brisa, tras toldos, en la
hora anterior a la luz que
se doblega ante las
sombras, tras volver
a imaginar nazis morir
por crucifixión: lenta
asfixia, o si se prefiere

cepo y hambre, hambre
y garrote vil, maniatados,
sajar, sajarles bisturí
en mano (lección de
anatomía) la lengua.

* *

IMAGO MUNDI (Tr. Peter Boyle)

He cleared out of Auschwitz, tilted sideways, walked
for several kilometres
without turning round, crossed
the frontiers, and years later
became a carpenter, his
interest was in
extracting level planks from
white pines to make frames
for mirrors where he could
see his former
torturers, to make coffins
for them: to build the
simplest casket of all for
himself and a few
survivors, they'd get
together two weeks a year
to drink strong liquor and
speak mangled Polish.

In his two sons he inculcated hatred of the Nazis, in
perpetuity: from when they
were little, in so far as they
had the use of reason he
encouraged them to imagine
flaying them alive, giving it
to them up the arse, keeping
them for years locked in narrow
cells, birds with their wings
cut, the cage left open, high
insurmountable walls.

It was his legacy. Not eye for an eye revenge but
a legacy. Facing the horror
nothing was excessive, he thought
of it as one more yellow
star, only now it belonged to
a different people his sons
would reduce it to an
ornament: a star that
essentially was a
gift. Passover was never
celebrated in the family, he
didn't refrain from mixing meat with
milk (orthodoxies after
Auschwitz?) and he didn't turn
up his nose at suckling pig, pork
crackling: never stopped speaking
Yiddish to Slavs, little
thumbtacks stuck in their souls,
nails in the linings of their
myocardia.

His oldest son converted at twenty to
Catholicism, took orders,
withdrew into a Benedictine
Monastery (and what's more
in France, on the outskirts of
Paris) evolved ended up a
Tibetan monk (finally a complete
rinpoche): the youngest became
a lady hairdresser (sic) such is
life and with medical
advances achieved menstruation.

The survivor of Auschwitz would live many more years than
all his immediate family,
first the elder son would die
(the rope round the
neck an accident) a year later
his wife (between her ovaries
and lower abdomen disease
spread everywhere) (it cut her down):
then came the younger son
or whatever he was (Aids)

(up to his neck) he drowned: in the
northern seas after machine
gunning the last torturers of
Auschwitz, peeling away their
skin for lampshades, extracting
their gold teeth.

Concerning the father eventually it was learnt he never
married, never brought children
into the world (children after
Auschwitz?) for him a complete
impossibility: he was in the
concentration camp for three years
and a few days, rescued by
by Russian soldiers, for a long
time he'd venerate that military
rabble: he died of a fainting fit one
tropical evening, almost a hundred,
behind an awning, rocking at the
hour the breeze comes in, the hour
preceding the moment light
gives way to the dark, after
again imagining Nazis dying
by crucifixion: slow
asphyxiation, or if you prefer
in the stocks from starvation,
starvation and the foul garrotte,
handcuffed, lancing them, scalpel in
hand (an anatomy lesson)
lancing their tongue.

from an interview with José Kozer by Paul Nelson

Paul: José Kozer was born in 1940 from Jewish parents who immigrated from Poland and Czechoslovakia. He left his native land in 1960 and lived in New York until 1997. When he retired he was a full professor at Queen's College where he taught Spanish and Latin American Literature for 32 years. After living for 2 years in Spain, he moved to Florida. His poetry has been translated into many languages, has been widely anthologized and has appeared in literary journals all over the world. His work is the subject of several Master's and Doctoral Dissertations and has been studied in many graduate and undergraduate courses. In 2013, he was awarded the Pablo Neruda Latin American Poetry Prize. The latest book in English is *Tokonoma*, published in Spain in 2011. First of all it's a great honor to be here with you this way, I'm very grateful for this opportunity. The second thing, I have 3 books here: *Anima*, *Stet*, and *Tokonoma* and the affinity... that you have with Peter Boyle seems to be, to me, a very good one. I can't read much Spanish but it seems to me that the work, your work, in English is incredibly vibrant. And maybe, of course, assuming there has been an evolution in your work since *Stet*. Instead, I understand that too but it just seems to me there's an affinity that you have with Peter Boyle.

Jose Kozer: It is an affinity that has developed throughout time. We met in Caracas, Venezuela, many years ago and he was kind of the official translator of [Eugenio] Montejo, who died afterwards. Montejo was a fine poet, very linear, very transparent, totally away from the neo-baroque and dense poetry. And then, so at first when Peter came to me he said, "I'm very intrigued by your poetry. I want to branch out but I'm very afraid as my Spanish is not very good." And I said, "I've seen your translations of Montejo. They're very good. If you are willing to take the chance, I'm available so please let me know." So we started corresponding and he began to work on my earlier poems and I realized immediately two things. He's a modest and good human being. Low ego in the sense that he's not going to fight for useless causes or for useless reasons. He's very rational and he's a very fine poet himself in English. So we started developing this relationship. At one point he said, "I'm connected with Shearsman which is a very good editorial house in England. Why don't we do a book of yours? Which one would you choose?" I said immediately *Anima* for a number of reasons. A) It's sort of like the middle road between my earliest and today's type of poetry that I do and B) It's a book that I love very much which was written, contains 60 poems in 60 days, one poem after the other at one point. And they are all very connected, very natural. They simply came out. They were of course corrected and re-corrected and he began to look into them. At one point he said to me, "You know I've read the book twice and I love the book. It means a lot to me to the degree that it's affecting my own work, it's affecting my poetry." And what can I say? I was happy to hear this. I began to notice something very interesting which is, he could translate extremely well the difficult areas of a given poem. But he made constant mistakes, not of vocabulary because you can check everything through Google and dictionaries, but it was tenses. He would confuse an imperfect with imperfect subjunctive and he would even confuse a present tense with a past. So I have to be careful working with him to alert him to those mistakes. He was very grateful and open and we worked together on this book for a long, long time. To make the story short, he's now interested in working on one of my most difficult books *Caresa de Causa* which happens to be one of my most difficult and most Jewish books and I said to him, "Peter! Don't do it!" (both Paul and Jose laugh) He's old, his wife is very ill, he has no money, he has a difficult life. Peter had polio as a child and for him to walk is extremely difficult. He had cancer at one point and he's, you know, of a certain age. He says, "No no no no no! I love this book and if

you permit me, I'm going to do it." I said, "Look, of course I'll permit you. I'm very happy to." I was working this morning on half of a very long poem in the book that he sent me, it's perfect! It's perfect! There are moments when I said that this is better than the original. This is unbelievable! He has grown in terms of his own sensitivity to my work to such a degree that, of the mutual respect and mutual care for each other, I mean of course we are now very good friends but we care for each other and have such a beautiful relationship. There's no ego in him, there's no ego in me when we deal with this poetry. I'm not looking for any praise, he's not looking for any praise. We simply, almost as a matter of fact, relate to the issues which are of a technical nature. And I'm in heaven! I've found the ideal translator in English. He did *Tokonoma*. He's now doing *Caresa de Causa* and interestingly enough they published a book of mine in Cuba in *Matanzas*, which is a book that I care for very much which is called *Indole* and Peter said, "I read it, I love it, and I'm going to do it!" He did it and we just sent it to University of Alabama Press with a good possibility of publishing the book bilingual, out of a University Press which I think is where you should publish in the U.S. nowadays. They are the only ones that are doing something interesting. So here's a typical example of a situation where author and translator, translator and author, both the author being a translator and the translator being an author, can work together very peacefully, very harmoniously in an ideal relationship.

(End of Part 1)

Paul Nelson: There are so many different sidebars that I can take with this but you mentioned Matanzas which means "slaughter" in English. (Both laugh)

Jose Kozer: Cabrera de Infante says: "What can you expect of a country that has a province called 'slaughter?'" (laughs)

Paul Nelson: Well you know the fact that I lived in a city that used to be called Slaughter is also very interesting and wrote a book called *A Time Before Slaughter*, but you know we're just, we're still, I'll say this, I won't say we or presume we, but I think there's a good chance you feel similarly that I'm still basking in the glow of Obama's recent overtures towards beginning to take apart the economic blockade against Cuba and to me, one thing is that in some respects the revolution won and that Cuba and I take so much pride because I see the U.S. government with 1,000 military bases with the torture and the militarization of police and all these other things that we see, these horrific things going on and the one little country in the world who said we don't want your aid, we don't want to be your whorehouse, we're not going to take your shit anymore. Essentially they finally won and... it's a beautiful feeling as long as in 10 to 20 years there's not a McDonald's on the Malecon.

Jose Kozer: Well they won, I know what you mean by that, yes they won and they lost. They lost because the ideals of that revolution have not been fulfilled as they should have been. Many mistakes were made and the mistakes are on both sides of the coin or shore. Cubans in exile have made many many mistakes to this day and Cubans on the island have made many many mistakes in terms of repression, in terms of destroying the economy of a country and the issues involved in here are so complex that I would need hours to air my feelings which are never to begin with very solid because I'm not into politics. It's not my world and I don't know exactly how I stand with certain issues or many issues, so it's a really dangerous road for me to take. However I know one thing. I'm a liberal, I am center left, I have a natural detestation for right-wingers. They are the ones that persecuted my parents in the Slavic countries and in a sense they are the ones that expelled me in the harsh 60's and 70's from my own country, which I do not resent. There's been good things to it,

but I could resent and why not? How dare you expel me from my country? It's mine like it's yours. Let's be positive and let's hope that right now there are new generations of Cubans that have left Cuba and that live in Cuba. There is hope that this step is one more step towards a better understanding, a better political relationship between a beautiful country such as Cuba and a beautiful country such as the U.S.

Paul Nelson: I take Uber X to get here and stay in an Airbnb place, and instead of my money going to some high end hotel chain and spending \$100-\$200 a night at a Hyatt Hotel chain, I'm spending \$40 to stay in this place and it's going right into the pocket of another guy just like me who happens to have an extra bedroom.

Jose Kozer: I agree with you. We are using them constantly and this is a new world. What was only the U.S. in the last decade is atrocious and we know where it comes from. This is specific people. There are specific names and we know it. The Iraq invasion is the beginning of everything that is happening today and this is the cause of someone or some people who decided they wanted to do this and we, like fools, we accepted it. Having said that, at the same time there's something very positive coming out of this. There's a new generation or several generations by now that are saying, "Look I don't want to work for Apple, I don't want to work for these huge multi-national companies, I don't want to be a part of that system. I don't even want to be politically oriented. I'm going to find my niche and I'm going to live differently." This is happening to my children and to our young people and your examples deal with - and the problems were both your examples. Uber is not the nicest company on earth. However, as you said, I'd rather that than these monopolies that try to control the whole world and manipulate everything. People are beginning to say, "I can find my own way of dealing with reality. You know what? I'm going to open up a small restaurant where I will specialize in a certain type of oriental food, Vietnamese food or whatever and if I can make a living this way, I don't need a huge corporation of chains and restaurants to make huge money." And this is the road to take, this is the road in which I have always believed because it involves frugality, independence, a certain kick in the butt to all these people and saying to all these idiots who think they can control me. No! You cannot control me!

Paul Nelson: So you think this is the path for Cuba in the future?

Jose Kozer: I would hope so, I would hope this would be a path for China, for this country. But it's beginning in this country. I don't see this yet in Europe, Asia or Latin America. I must say this about the U.S. There's a stamina in the people here with all its' deficiencies, ignorance, and personal idiocies, not idiosyncrasies, idiocies. There's something in this country that I believe in which there's a certain attitude towards life and reality that means, "I'm not going to be beaten up. I'm going to find my own way." And excess of individualism is no good but an excess of social community is no good either. There has to be a middle of the road and this generation, already younger than your and much younger than me, are doing minimally but it's picking up.....doing the right thing. I have such a belief in this, one of my daughters, my youngest daughter just finished a long doctorate in clinical psychology and when I say to her, "What are your plans?" She says, "My plans are two basic things: I want to make money because I need to make money and I want to help people." The two are conjoined, the two work together. I don't separate making money from helping people. What I don't want to do is make money for the sake of making money. I've made that a point in the past 10 to 15 years of my life. I'm a poet and I've published a number of books. They're very hard for me to get. I have little access to my own publications, but when I get them I sell them. I don't give them away. Why? Because I need \$25 bucks. Yes I need \$25 bucks and why not? Maybe for a good bottle of sake.

But moreover, I want to establish clearly that this object in this capitalistic society in which I live also has a place. Books are not to be given away unless there's a good reason to do it but the principle of giving books, which only poets do (no painter would do this, no novelist would do this) has to be changed. I'm changing it. People are beginning to pick up. At first I was criticized by everyone. Of course he's a Jew, he's mercantile, all this cheap nonsense. I took it, I fought it and I'm winning this battle. It's a small battle perhaps but it's a battle.

Paul Nelson: You know the interesting thing is that whatever they pay for these books, they're going to increase in value. (laughing)

Jose Kozer: Not only that but when you give a book away, they don't read it!

Paul Nelson: That's right.

Jose Kozer: You buy your own. You have 3 books of mine in here. You're not a rich man and yet you might have bought each book through Amazon. I see that you've read them. Not because you came here to my house to interview me, but you had read them prior to this issue. Why? Not necessarily because you spent your money. But part of it is that. Part of it is that.

Paul: I also put in the time and date when I finished and in this place the particular place I finished reading the book. So I know where I was in time when I first encountered that and so I can kind of fit it in because you've been extremely important in my own search for many reasons. You say exiled from Cuba, you didn't use the word "exiled", but you went back to Cuba in 1961 or....

Jose Kozer: I left in 1960.

Paul Nelson: But then did you go back?

Jose Kozer: Once in 2002 for a week.

Paul Nelson: So you didn't go back until 2002?

Jose Kozer: Correct.

Paul Nelson: I read something where you went back for the revolution.....but that's not true.

Jose Kozer: No no no no no! That's a different story. In 1958 when I was very young, I went to my father one day and I said, "Dad I'm going to the Sierra Maestra to fight for my country." My father was a very peculiar guy. He looked at me and said, "Uh huh." The next day I was in New York. He physically took me and got me out of Cuba because he knew I would get killed.

Paul Nelson: It doesn't turn out well for poets who get involved in wars in Cuba does it? (both laugh)

Jose Kozer: I agree. So I spent one year in New York from 1958 to 1959. When the revolution took over in the early 60's, no I'm sorry, early '59. In May 1959 I returned to Cuba. I participated, I was gung-ho in the revolution. I was very happy with what was going on. So were we all and at one point I became very disappointed. I thought this is not for me. Part of it was political, part of it was that I was a young restless man. Now I'm an old restless man. Nothing has changed. However at that point, in 1960, a year after having

returned to my country, I decided to leave. I went to my father and I said, "Dad I'm not happy with what's going on. I'm leaving." And my father said, "Well you should stay. This is getting interesting" (even though they took his store and money). I said, "You do what you want. I have to do my thing. I'm leaving. Can you give me some money?" He said, "No there's no money left." So he gave me \$50 and even though I was young and crazy, perhaps the Jew in me, the first day I arrived in New York for the second time, I went to the bank and I deposited \$25 out of the \$50 which says a lot about my personality and you know, the next morning I was working. Many things happened in my life, throughout all that and up to 2002. (February 7th, 2002). I never returned to my country even though I had many requests from the Cuban government to go back. But I always rejected them because when I asked if they would permit me to do this or that, they would say, "No we have to train you in Marxism/Leninism and I would say, "Fuck you!"

Paul Nelson: (Laughs) But you didn't say that in so many words!

Jose Kozer: Oh yes I did!

Paul Nelson: You told them no!

Jose Kozer: No no I don't mince words. Today I mince them a little bit but at that time I was very bold. So...that was the only time I had been back in my country. Now I'm being asked constantly to go back and I will go back you know. It's just that I have to... I've become very well known in Cuba and for me to go there, it becomes very public. I have to know exactly what I'm doing because I don't want to hurt my country. I'm not going to hurt my country! I'm an asset to my country just like how many other people who are brought are assets to Cuba and Cuba needs us. And they know it. It'll take time. The Castros have to die first, some of these old farts in the exile community have to disappear also and the new generations are something else. They are really something else. I'm hopeful.

Paul Nelson: I remember the days 20 years ago when it was "Fidel o Mas Canosa, la Misma Cosa." (Both Laugh). So you mentioned how your work has evolved from *Anima* to *Tokonoma*. And I find that in just these this books, it's just an astounding evolution to me that, I think the easiest way for me to describe it is that there's so much energy in this book that it's more fully realized. Do you think it's just the path of a poet who's been writing for so many years and it's just that you get better or, you know many poets, they hit on something that works for them, then they write that book over and over and over and over and you're *not* the kind of poet who would do that so it would seem logical that there would be progress in what you do just because of the nature of the kind of poet you are? Do you recognize, well you obviously recognize that there is an advance in *Tokonoma*, to what do you ascribe that advance or that more powerful energy of the book?

Jose Kozer: There's so many things in your question. Number 1-writing poetry has become natural for me. There's nothing self-imposed, not even a need to write poetry, even though I don't stop writing poetry. It's a life. It's a life that has daily, all those daily moments in which for some reason, which I do not understand and do not care to understand, a poem begins. The minute it begins in my head, I take one of these notebooks you see here and a ball point pen and I begin to write and put down something that is a process, something that is very natural in me. Words flow in my head and they flow from my head to my hand, from my hand to the notebook and the poem gets written, as I've said many times in many interviews in 25 to 30 minutes. It's almost blindly done and yet it is done after years and years of working, of being very disciplined. Also of setting time aside to do this and it's part of a process where I organize my life since I was a young man to this

day to be able to write. Not that the writer comes first, not that the poet comes first but that that poet has to be integrated into my daily life. And I have to organize my daily life, and this means a lot of things. It involves a lot of issues in such a way that that poet can write a poem. And the more he writes, the better for him. And I believe in that. I am very prolific. Someone just sent me a paper they wrote about my poetry which is fascinating. I'm known as a grafómano. He is the first one who says, "Kozer is not a grafómano, not at all! He is simply a man who writes!" At this point I have almost 10,300 poems written. Who has written 10,300 poems, the way my poems are, in the history of mankind? I broke the Guinness Book of Records for god's sake! And this guy is saying "And he's not a grafómano. The whole conception of grafomany is totally cock-eyed! A painter like Picasso (and I'm not comparing myself to him or anyone) or a composer like Bach or Beethoven, you know, they worked every goddamned day through inspiration and perspiration and whatever you wish, why can't a poet do this? And people attack me constantly, especially in Latin America, which is full of idiots, saying to me, "Well you couldn't be good because you write too much" to which I retort by saying, "You couldn't be good because you write too little." I mean quantity is not an issue and the people who attack me are the first ones to recognize that quantity is not an issue. But since they have no quality, they have no way of dealing with a person like me who has written endlessly and as this guy says in his paper, "You can say anything about Kozer but all his poems are good. In every poem you find something valuable." Said by him not by me.

Paul Nelson: So then the answer to the question that I'm getting is because you write so much that there's just a lot more practice that goes into it.

Jose Kozer: Of course! One of my books is called *Practica*. One of my issues in life is, coming from Zen Buddhism, you must practice every day whatever. Your posture, your position, your relationship with your wife, your relationship with money, your relationship with society. Everything takes practice. Man is habit. Habit is man.

Paul Nelson: What you do every day with your life is what you are.

Jose Kozer: Exactly.

Paul Nelson: And so you are a poet's poet! (Laughs) Because you're writing so much.

Jose Kozer: Exactly, exactly! Now in terms of evolution, I do believe in evolution rather than revolution. And I think there is indeed an evolution in my work but it's not a linear evolution. It's an evolution that zig zags and goes back and forth and I think if we look at say, to use as an example, *Anima* and *Tokonoma*, we're dealing with 2 separate moments that at one point get united into the life of a human being who writes poetry. One of those 2 moments. One is a highly spiritual, occidental moment and the other one is a highly spiritual, oriental moment. The occidental moment is harsher, it's more Jewish, it's more, uh, heartrending than the oriental moment. The oriental moment is more lyrical, it's more peaceful, it's more harmonious and it's more fun. I laugh and have more laughter and more tongue-in-cheek elements in *Tokonoma* than I have in *Anima* or *Caresa la Causa*. Why? The Jew in me was always happily unhappy, meaning I've never denied being a Jew. I'm glad that I'm a Jew. But at the same time I'm Catholic because I was born in a Catholic country. In early childhood I saw the Catholic Mass, respect the Catholic Mass, enjoyed visually the Catholic Mass. I would feel nostalgia for that Mass versus the, say, Protestant or Jewish less-elaborate (aesthetically speaking) type of relationship with God. OK.

Paul Nelson: The ritual.

Jose Kozer: The ritual. Indeed! And I am a man of rituals. The relationship with the occidental world; Monotheism, Judaism, Catholicism... is so harsh! Think of the God of Israel. He commands! He tells you what to do. He's a God of revenge. He's a God of harshness. He's a God of "Do it my way baby or I'm going to expel you from paradise" for god's sake. He creates paradise and he expels me afterwards because I, you know, screw? Well that's very screwy isn't it? I was always unhappy in that sense with my own Judaism. Why does it have to be so harsh? When I came to the states at age 20 thanks to Kenneth Rexroth, and I discovered oriental poetry in English translations. You know those famous books, 100 Poems from the Japanese, 100 Poems... they changed my life completely. There was a little dinky book called Why do I live in the Mountain? by some possibly occidental fake who wrote a la Chinese, you know, that book changed my life. It was a shitty book. I don't know what happened to that author, I don't remember them. It was the first time I came into contact with the oriental world. I began to balance in my life the need for the harmony of Zen Buddhism, of the oriental world with the need for harshness and rectitude and pain, that I'm accustomed to as a Jew. We are a race or a nation or ethnic group of pain. We dwell in pain, we come from pain, we move towards pain, day in and day out. Oriental cultures, they know how to get drunk better than we do. They know how to handle drink better than we do. They know how to eat much better than we do and they know how to walk much better than we do. I've learned many of these things from them. The two of them call for a better world and place where East meets West and West meets East. And it's happening, first historically speaking in the U.S. I was lucky that I was able to participate, being a young man, age 20 of the Beat Generation, Greenwich Village, New York City, the craziness of the Beats, the craziness of the hippies, because all of this, which was very trying and very dubious, and at the same time was very serious and very real.

Paul Nelson: It almost sounds to me like what Father Matthew Fox calls the *via negativa* and the *via positiva*.

Jose Kozer: Yes.

Paul Nelson: You mentioned, and I do want to talk about the community that you just made reference to, but you did mention that you said on several occasions that the poem should take 20 minutes... here it is, page 157 in the new book (I made a note of it). It says "What's the problem? A poem could be made in 20 minutes. It doesn't deserve any more time." (Laughs) So immediately when I saw in *Stet* a similar comment, although I think it said 45 minutes in there and I asked you about that and you said "No it's 20 minutes." You said that to me before it came in the book. It seems to me, correct me or fix anything I might say, you're sitting down, you're writing organically, you're going where the language is taking you, you're harnessing that. It's almost like you're riding this moment with a hyper attention, and if some bird were to fly by your window as you're composing, chances are that bird is going to make it into the poem and when you're done with it, because you've been writing so much, because of your practice, you don't really need to go and do a whole lot of fine tuning. I her essay *Some Notes on Organic Form*, Levertov said that "if you have to really mess with a poem afterwards it hasn't incubated properly." It seems to me that your process is a very organic one.

Jose Kozer: You're absolutely right. It is organic, it's natural. You know, I can almost pin point when I was about 44 or 45 years of age, a moment in my life when I stopped wanting to write poetry and poetry wrote *me* in a sense. That is to say it became so natural, not easy, *natural* to write poems. That's when it becomes

organic. That's when there is no difference between my liver and my hand writing poetry. There's no difference between my kidney or peeing, or defecating, talking or sleeping. I've written so many poems, lost of course in my dreams at night while dreaming and sleeping. I've written so many poems that way. And that's very organic. When I get up in the morning, I have some sort of a feeling of nostalgia. "Ah I think I lost a good poem." You know, I've written so much that I don't care anymore. There was a time in my life when I was reading Tolstoy systematically where I would fall asleep. I was reading *War and Peace* and I had stopped reading on page 210 where something happens. I would fall asleep and I would continue writing, as if I was Tolstoy, the story. And I knew this was happening to me and it was such a pleasurable thing. I could continue where Tolstoy technically stopped because I had stopped reading that night because I was tired and wanted to sleep. My relationship with writing has been since early childhood this way. I'm not afraid to say anything. People have said to me, "How do you say something like this?" in a poem or "Who cares about what you just said in a poem?" And I say, "I don't care that you don't care!"

Paul Nelson: (Laughing) It's like when you say in a poem: "I'm taking a shit!"

Jose Kozar: I simply don't give a shit!" I'm, in many ways, a very tense, anal and repressed human being. (Paul laughs). Yet when I write poetry, I'm exactly the opposite. I become adventurous, bold, I do whatever I feel like doing. I give no explanation to anyone. I'm master in there and you cannot touch that. That's why people that hate me, hate my guts, hate my existence, people that wish me dead, they do not know how to handle me. I'm always escapandome. [Sneaking.] I always have the door open where they cannot catch me. This has to do with an inner freedom that has been developing throughout the years. Also, I am voracious. I'm a skinny man with a huge appetite. I eat hugely but I don't gain weight. I write constantly but my poetry remains very famous. One experience I had recently because of computers, I went to the computer and I looked at the space my 10,000 poems occupied and it's just a sliver. I said to myself "10,000 poems and this is it?" So to help my ego, I looked at Shakespeare and his sliver was smaller than mine! (Laughs)—————

Paul Nelson: There you go.

(End of Part 1a (mp3) Jose Kozar Interview)

Jose Kozar: Let me give you an example because it just happened today and it's very fresh in my head, because I write the poem (a long poem) and an after hour I even forget the title.

Paul Nelson: Typically what time of day is this happening?

Jose Kozar: In the morning.

Paul Nelson: 7am?

Jose Kozar: Uhhh...I can start a poem, say, 7 or 7:30 and go for a walk with Loupe, come back and I continue the poem naturally, you know, where I left it. I don't even have to re-read what I have in there. While a couple of lines that are happening in my head, I come back, take my notebook and I write by hand what you see here.

Paul Nelson: (I have to get a picture of this.)

Jose Kozer: Let me give you an example of how this poem, if I can remember what happens, this started last night. It was written last night. I'm sitting down in bed reading a wonderful biography on August Strindberg, and there I am reading about how Miss Julia became Miss Julia and it's fascinating you know? The whole process and I'm happy. It's the end of the day, I'm tired and for some reason something comes to me that simply says, "Unos niños incidentes," some trite incident, and this happens in my head and I stop reading the biography of Mr. Strindberg. I took this notebook which, you can see, is a new one. I have more than a hundred notebooks like this, and I wrote down, "Unos niños incidentes" in my notebook. I don't know why these words came and I don't know where they came from. I don't know why I decide to write them down but I do. I put Strindberg's biography aside. I'm sitting down in bed, it's maybe 6:30 at night. I go to bed religiously every day at 8:30pm and this process begins where "Unos niños incidentes" is becoming a poem. It's a poem of memory where I do not know whether, when I write or live and I retell what I wrote or lived, if that happened as I'm saying it, half way, as I'm saying it, or it's pure fiction or fantasy. The three things come together and the three things are valid. It is a reconstruction. It is a reality that springs from someplace. It is memory, but memory you know, ten seconds after something happens to you and you try to recall, it's already changed. There is no memory. There is constant fiction within ourselves, constant fiction when we deal with reality. So there I am sitting down, I begin to write, memory ensues, and all of a sudden I am in my house in Havana, Cuba where I was raised. I am in a certain place in Buenos Aires where I was. I am in Nerja where my wife lived for so many years. I am climbing the Himalayas. I am in New York and I begin to retell a story I have retold several times in prose.

Paul Nelson: Could you read a little bit?

Jose Kozer: It's in Spanish! ...of a given day when I was walking out of St. Andrews Bar and some guy approached me with a knife to kill me unless I give him money and I refused. I began to talk to him and I tried to convince him that he shouldn't kill me or I shouldn't give him money because I'm in exile. I'm a poor man. I have no money and, as a matter of fact, he should give me money! (Both laugh). And he's looking at me and can't believe his eyes! And I'm talking and talking very cordially, explaining things, moving my hands ala Cuban, and I see his knife coming down, and at one time, he's totally taken by my discurso, by my speech, you know. And I ran! I ran three blocks, turned around and the guy was still flabbergasted, looking at me running with his knife in his hand, lowered. I've told this story in several books in prose but never in poetry. For some reason, it comes back. I tell the story. At one point I refer to Calle Cuatro con East Broadway which is where this happened. It's very factual and at the same time very inventive. And there's a moment in the poem where I question my whole process of dealing with memory and I'm questioning, of course, something larger than me. Memory is a universal issue in an age where we are dealing with Alzheimer's, where we are dealing with Dementia senil for the first time. Seriously, medically, socially, politically, it's an important issue. I'm 74, it's around the corner, isn't it Kozer? And there in the poem there's a moment where, in dealing with this. I begin to move in a different direction, saying, "Wait a minute!" I may not know whether this incident happened as I tell it. I may not know exactly who I was when I was living in that place in Havana, Cuba, and I was 14 years of age to which I relate so deeply but I do know one thing: I know what I had for lunch today. And my lunch is composed of...

Paul Nelson: (Laughs) You are describing your lunch?! Lol

Jose Kozer: Exactly! And you do see...

Paul Nelson: I see the change in the text.

Jose Kozer: Exactly! You do see that the long line, the never-ending line, the Proustian river line has turned into what we call "goteo" dripping. And the dripping is the description of this lunch. So that... the lunch is

being described totally fictitious. As a matter of fact, to be honest, yes I had yesterday, fresh tuna with asparagus (it's in here). I say that I use aioli, which I can't have because my stomach is a mess. The poem moves, because of the tuna, to Almería, and to a certain place called **Osene?** where I used to go to a Tibetan monastery with my wife to pray and do certain things, where I was very happy years and years ago. All that comes back. And the ends at the point where I fall asleep. I wake up again. I use on purpose the word *recordar* which in Spanish has two meanings. An actual meaning which is to remember. And an old meaning, an archaic meaning that is not used anymore. It's in Jorge Manrique, where *recordar* means to wake up. Because what is waking up but remembering? So I use *recordar* here on purpose and I have finished the poem by saying: "Perhaps I'm dead and I'm trying to wake up and I close the notebook (I was finished) and all of a sudden, and this is why I agree with you so natural and organic that this happens to me. All of a sudden I open up the thing again and I wrote in parenthesis, saying ... (Applause!) And in the applause, the applause comes from three musical instruments that are being used as a companion (as companions) to the whole poem. It's a performance! This is what I'm doing. It's a *poesia performativa* in a sense. That's why when I read in public in a sense, it's so easy for me to fall into a trance because all of my poetry is a performance.

The three instruments that I use are all minor, archaic instruments. One is a *zampoña*, which is used by the Inca Indians, one is the *berimbau*, the Jew harp, which is hardly ever used, and the third one in here is the accordion which then at the end because Buenos Aires appears I change to the *bandoleon* which is an accordion, a *concertina*, that only, for tango, the Argentinians use. You see? There's also a process in here! There's naturalness, there's practice, there's experience, there's habit, there are changes and I am going to say this because I'm so prolific. People say to me, "Man! You've written 10,000 poems?! That's a feat!" What? Wait a minute. Multiply by two because every poem that I've written, I corrected and the second one is always somewhat different from the original. So... not ten. I've written 20,000 poems because the corrections are also poems. And that's why I keep my notebooks. I want people to eventually see the way it came out and the way it ended up as I feel it should have ended.

Paul Nelson: So writing a poem is natural and easy but it's also complex (Jose says, "Not easy!") Well it comes to you in 20 minutes? You hear about people like Lorine Niedecker sitting without a fire in a parka in a tiny little (Wisconsin) cabin (in winter) slaving over these two lines for months.

Jose Kozer: But Paul, those are the two different processes that poetry and I think anything else goes through. One is very belabored and a very slow-moving process, and that's personality. The other one, which has to do with the Cuban in me, but goes beyond that. That's very fast and almost automatic but neither one nor the other mean quality and neither one nor the other mean facility. There's nothing facile about this. The proof in the pudding is that when I finish writing a poem, I'm happy. I feel in Heaven and I'm absolutely devastated! The tiredness, the physical tiredness, what I have given, into the poem after writing so much. I wonder why I still... I don't suffer, there's no suffering in the process, there's joy in the process but... why do I still get so exhausted with it? I have to fall into absolute silence. I have to empty my head from anything. If Guadalupe comes into the room and says, "Can I ask you something?" I say "sure, ask me." But I'm not there and I know that I'm not there and she knows that. That's why our relationship has worked so well for 40 years together, because she understands very well what it means for me to write. So, in many ways, in terms of what I do, and I don't want to personalize this interview, but in terms of what I do, there's so much misunderstanding. And the misunderstanding does not come from within because I'm a good human being. It comes from outside, from envy, from (Paul interjects: "projections") projections, from frustrated desires of many people... everyone wants to be a poet.

Paul Nelson: Sam Hamill likes to quote Ezra Pound who said "more people are interested in being poets that are interested in reading poetry."

Jose Kozer: Yeah, or in writing. One thing that I used to counter some of these attacks when they attack me, I say, “Look! While you’re wasting your time attacking me, I’m someplace writing another poem.” And I think there is a validity to this.

Paul Nelson: (Laughs.) I look at the poem on the page and there’s that classic indentation, not of the first line, but of the second and subsequent lines until the beginning of the next stanza. There’s a certain iconic lineation that...

Jose Kozer: ...that has to do with a problem that I had to solve. Something was happening to my poetry... every time... I used to send the poems to editors differently, that is to say, “This line would begin at one point and would be much more extended.” But when they would publish it, it didn’t fit in the book. So what they did was they cut it at one point and they would put it underneath of a fucking bracket man! So my poetry started being published with fucking brackets all over and I hate brackets! I love parenthesis. (Both laugh). I’m a parenthesis man, not a bracket man. So I decided at one point to change the structure of the poem simply to be able to have it published right. If you take my first 20 books, they’re very poorly published because of this and it was my fault. I’m not blaming anyone for this. Some editor said to me, “can I do this?” And I said, “No, no, no, you have to respect the way I send it to you.” It was my mistake! Versus the last, say, 20 or 30 books, that I’ve published that are, from my point of view, perfectly published because I sent them this way. And with the pdf and computers, it’s impossible to make mistakes. So, the editor is very happy, I’m very happy, and it’s worked for me. That’s the reason you see them visually this way now. I just got a request from Brazil, which I’m going to, tell you about, and I haven’t told too many people, which is a great request. An editor in San Paulo with whom I get along with very well, and is a wonderful human being, has an editorial house called Lumme. He’s published already.

Paul Nelson: Francisco dos Santos.

Jose Kozer: Ah so you know him of course! He published your essay. Yes, well he made me an offer, which is unique. He said, “I want you to send me enough of your poems to complete 1,000 pages and the rest of all your poems until today. That book of 1,000 pages, which will have probably 400 to 450 poems to do a DVD that contains the rest of your poetry. All your prose, all your interviews, reviews, photographs and so on and so forth.” So I wrote back and I said, “Ok! Thank you! But will it fit in the DVD?” He said, “Yeah don’t worry about that. I know technically what to do.” So this year, 2015, will have a Jose Kozer book called, in Latin, *Nula Diaz sin a linea*. (Not a Single Day Without a Line). Which Harry Matthews used in a book called *20 Lines*, which is a beautiful book based on a statement by [Standall? Standall?](#) says at one point, “To write every day, 20 lines. Whether you’re a genius or not” which I think is wonderful, no? On the basis of this, what he’s putting together is 1,000 pages in a huge book. It’s going to be a big book! (And the DVD with all these poems). I’m in heaven and this is going to happen. I know Francisco, I know he’s doing it already. He sent me the cover. He sent me at first a cover, which is a mandala, and both Guadalupe and I felt we didn’t like it. And he accepted it and then he sent me a second one and he said, “Before you open it, I’m sure you’ll like it.” And indeed! It’s a Chinese guy in a river fishing the with cormorants, the way they fish. It’s a beautiful illustration, a beautiful lamina which is what we call them in Spanish. So I know this is going to be done. But what’s interesting, and it says a lot about my process and how people perceive me already, at one point after we agreed to this, he says, “You know Jose... you have right now, as of today, 10,115 poems! Why don’t we round this up to 10,200? So write another 85 poems, send them to me, and then we’ll publish, with the DVD, altogether 10,200.” I said to myself, “Man! You think I can write 85 poems just like that?” So, you know, I didn’t question it any more. I kept on living, I kept on writing. Six weeks after, I sent him 85 new poems. Complex. Some people haven’t even written 85 poems in their entire life! And they’re good poets. I’m not knocking anyone down. Who am I? What’s happening to me? What has happened to me? Who is this

individual? This so called Jose Kozer that has lived in this way since he was 14 in Havana, Cuba, until today, age 74 in Hallendale, Florida. An old man sitting in front of you doing poetry and doing poetry and doing poetry. Why? What for?

Paul Nelson: It's all in the parenthesis. It's the power of the parenthesis (both laugh). What is the allure of parenthesis for you? You know when I read it...I'll read the poem at night and as I go into the parenthesis, I want to connote, somehow to the person listening that, you know, I'm reading parenthesis. So I change my voice a little. When I record my own, I change the equalization of the parenthesis, the parenthetical thoughts. For example, "and I am the Buddha in question. One more, pure fusion in a few more hours. A four horseman, hollow gallup, four seasons that change in 24 hours. I turn off the lamp." You get my point.

Jose Kozer: I get your point and some people have said to me, "You can take a poem of yours and do two readings. One, the poem, and the other one, just the parenthesis." They're a poem apart, they're a poem in itself. From my point of view, this process began years and years ago. Why? I have no recollection. Why? I have no idea. You know, I've had to say publicly, "Ladies and gentlemen! I am not the owner of parenthesis. Parenthesis exists beyond and above me. Please forget that" because I've become el poeta de paréntesis and I'm tired of parenthesis. So what I noticed is that it was musical. Whenever I was writing I was always listening to music. Normally, Vivaldi. That type of music. And many times when I began writing in the early 80s, I would first read someone like Wallace Stevens, to use an example, in English, not in translation. In English, I'd read it out loud to myself, I had Vivaldi on the record machine and perhaps this musicality created a need for my hands to take some materials and enclose them. It's also, I think, personality. I'm very retentive. I'm a very retentive and anal human being. For me to flow is very difficult. And also, my poems are so filled with information and materials that at one point, I have to stop the poem. That's where the parenthesis comes in, to put in there some material. Agglutinate that material and then let it flow again. So, it is a way of interfering with myself. I think it's also a way of resting. It has to do with musicality. The flow of the poem can be totally musical and the parenthesis becomes the adagio. The parenthesis becomes like an apócope, staccato. The combination is, to me, fruitful and helpful. It helps me also to rest, to relax, even though the process is so fast. But it allows me to rest for a moment, to be retentive and it's also a lot of fun.

Paul Nelson: (Chuckles) When I interviewed Jean Houston, she said that we are living in a time of whole systems transition. As we see, from the conversation, the change in capitalism from high end hotels to the AirBnB. Cooperative capitalism, the sharing economy, however you want to call it. So it's evident that we are in a time of whole systems transition. Even the climate system perhaps is the biggest example of that. She said, "But we're also people of the parenthesis" because we're living in an age after the death of the old gods and before the birth of the new. So without attempting to, your love for parenthesis may have something to do with the fact that you and I especially, more so than our grandkids, are the people of the parenthesis. Because the old ways are clearly not working and the new ways have not really gotten their footholds yet, as they will.

Jose Kozer: Let me make a parenthesis. You just mentioned, through this quotation, you're talking about this person, the death of the gods and waiting in transition for the new gods. While we wait in that transition, I've noticed something in my poetry. I've noticed something in my life also. Monotheism is beginning to bug me a lot. I like Buddhism because it's less monotheistic than the other religions. I think monotheism is perhaps of solipsism, autocracy and somewhat evil. Who concocted this idea of a one given absolute God? Why can't gods be plural and sharing? So my poetry in the last 10 years is filled with paganism. I still don't have the new gods, but I have the old gods that we killed and we mocked and we destroyed and obliterated. And I'm coming back to them and they mean a lot to me. They fill my life with great joy, w/ great understanding. Their sexuality, their eating habits, their drinking habits, their way of being androgynous (bisexual, trisexual), their way of sharing the bed, the meal, love and hatred, their anger, their goodness...you know, it's so

complete. It's so refreshing and relaxing. That, perhaps in this transition poem and the parenthesis is part of this transition, it's to the benefit of society and the benefit of mankind, womankind, to kind of refresh ourselves with these anthropomorphic gods. I have nothing against them. This all began by reading an essay by an Italian woman on Ezra Pound, you know I've forgot her name by now, it's a 40 to 50 page wonderful essay, where without justifying his so called anti-semitism and the mistake he made by WWII by standing next to an idiot like Mussolini, you know, she says, "We must understand that Pound was not anti-semitic per say, he was anti-monotheism. It dawned on me that indeed Pound saw monotheism as evil. And he was fighting monotheism. He made the mistake of constricting that fight to the Jewish tradition in a moment when the Jews needed a voice like his on our side rather than against us. So, because of that essay, it kind of confirmed to me that I should get away further and further from this crazy monotheistic vision of God and move into a more pluralistic society in terms of the higher elements.

Paul Nelson: And a veneration of nature and of those things in nature and yet we see the images that come into your work from nature are things like the heron. Also the ant is a regular feature.

Jose Kozer: It's beginning to bug me more than the parenthesis. You know, people are beginning to say, "Is he obsessed with ants?" (Paul laughs) No I'm not! No I'm not.

Paul Nelson: What does the ant represent to you?

Jose Kozer: It represents hard work, it represents...

Paul Nelson: (Laughs) I knew you were going to say that right off the bat! (Laughs) I just knew it! It's going to take the ant a long time to get there but god damn it, he's going to get it done and it's going to be done right. It might not be done on your time but it's going to be just fine for him.

Jose Kozer: But it's also beyond hard work. It's Cuba. Cuba was an ant hill for me. I remember as a child going a Cuban tree and/or canals and at these canals I could see lines and lines of ants, black ants, blonde ants, going through doing their work. All the children, we would take gasoline, pour it, light it on fire and kill all the ants. An issue of which I am not proud, nowadays, perhaps I'm paying for that in, by using...

Paul Nelson: Oh they're coming! (Laughs) They're coming José.

Jose Kozer: They're going to own the world! They say cockroaches are not the ones, ants are the ones who will survive. To me they represent hard work. They also represent a complex and complete society like bees. Bees and ants represent that. They're also very beautiful. They don't really do any harm. Once in a while they bite you but that's minimal. I have a fascination for insects. I've had it since I came to Florida, quite frankly. I had forgotten about them. I'm not animal oriented. I don't like animals. I'm afraid of dogs, I'm afraid of cats. I'm allergic to cats. When I see a cat I move away. I'm superstitious about them. I never had domestic animals and I don't want to have them. But insects fascinate me. As a matter of fact, in a poem I wrote recently, I used 2 emblems: one is a type of mosquito, an insect that I see in a window, perched for hours and hours, sometimes 2 or 3 days, he or she is there, just perched and I say to myself, "Doesn't this insect have to eat? Doesn't it want to go away?" And then one day it disappears. Well I have a fascination for someone who can, Buddhist-wise, remain in the same position for hours and days and I imagine that this insect, his head is empty. He's in Nirvana. So using that image, and another animal that fascinates me is the earth worm which I see downstairs in the pool in this building where I live walking by the edge of the pool endlessly. Coming from where? I don't know. Going where? I don't know. I wonder if the animal knows where he's coming from or going to. And to me they represent an animal that works for mankind. These earth worms, inside the earth, do a wonderful job. They oxygenate the earth, they are important for crops and you know, I see some of these Haitian guys, this one guy, he kills them! He steps on them. I went to him and said, "If you kill one

more of these animals I'm going to complain about you to the administration and I'm going to get you kicked out of here. You're a criminal!" And he said he thought I was crazy. I said, "I'm not crazy! You're crazy because you're stepping on this little animal that didn't do anything to you and that is beneficial to mankind." Then he understood. Two days after, he came to me and he asked for forgiveness. I forgave him gladly and he doesn't kill them anymore. . . .

....

3 poems from Draft A April 22, 2016

1.

Eventually physical fatigue took overtook me.

I sleep under a window where night thickens a
bridge I've lost ,
traffic lights prevent me
from rethinking my present
situation I can't find
a shred of clarity, and
less in these rushing times: in
my loss I sink in sleep fatigue
consoles me
until I awake, dense and
still, unable to relax. I see
only some spots they
don't grow enough to be
shadows, and
I cannot be where there
are no shadows: and
where I'm not
tranquility surpasses me
converges on my fatigue
black dot (tiny)
and a tree appears
incontestable
(it cannot be named)
the phantom doesn't distract me, a
dog barks in the distance
and does not unsettle me, I
cease to have weight hunger
is a tool for work and not
an

effervescence or a
table from which
to eat and converse,
raise the glass, scrape
the plate, and keep
talking:
I'm sleeping
within the dream
where I sleep
before a window
providing a bridge, and on
the table (it's past noon)
a plate with square pieces of
squash, pumpkin flower,
round slices of *corvina*,
Guadalupe's hand
(I am asleep)

narrates all of it,
hence also my
tranquility

where fatigue ends
fullness sprouts in the
vicinity of nearby Aldebaran.

I feel no appetite at
all Neither do I care
to sit
Enumerating (in truth) the many
aspects of my lack of appetite.

In short I see no signs of anything, still no
signs signs of threat looming
and of course, I
quiet down: I sleep and
Guadalupe clears the table
I hear water running
water traffic lights change
decompose into prisms
the bridge, once iron,
concrete, wood, mulch, spores,
(pollen): my
resurrection.

If I rest
enough
I calm down
Death loses its foothold,
I succumb to thickest sleep,
cobwebs return, and worse,
the vision of the fly

at the eye of the spider web:
a belch, a sneeze, a wind
welded to constipation,
its own bad odor
I consider threatening,
I see Guadalupe withdrawing
And I'm already thoughtful.

2.

JK, 75-Years Old, Self Portrait

Death's pretext for writing
and clearly seen the many poems I owe to
Buddha, Cuba, to
Guadalupe.
I have spent a life mumbling literature, my
friends from adolescence
selling shoes,
winning making
good money, me hardly
anything: not only that
the very cynical spew
the malicious lie
from that clique
that of them all it is
only
I who has been happy.

Happy, if I get 5% of their
sales, at three
cents per shoe
and I keep
writing, at this
point
I think I'm able to
dedicate a poem to their women
(an occasional one, short
and as vulgar as can be).

That a yoeman like me has made it
to where he has can only be
explained by considering
the competence,
as is found in
the business world, is equal to
or more mediocre than
this servant of
the longest erasure that
has been written
in a long while:
on one side Ungaretti,
in the middle
Baudelaire
and the unspeakable mob
of shabby slackers, at the other
extreme we are a few
from Neruda's
gang and equally
all liars.

I live and lived making clean shots
through writing
it's small consolation to
admit that he who lives by
the sword dies by the sword,
I'll die with my boots on,
boots (short is the stretch
between boot and manure)
of rubber with a tight fit.

3.

JK, 75 YEARS, DAY

Over the years, he ran out of imagery.

Of ideas he always had few and those few dried
to jerky.

He stopped studying, knowledge complicated all
And, confounded and confused, he fell
into the great Oblivion.

Not unfortunate, it says.
A short breakfast,
the wide-brimmed hat stalls
hot or cold weather
brings a river-bank
walk, arrives (one hour
later) to a point of trees
and shadows what trees
which shadows (of
whom)
sits observing: the isle of reeds,
some herons,
an occasional seagull, scabby
vultures (never missing)
drinking water from a red
thermos, growth among the
willows of
the wild watercress,
snatch and collect and
save a few handfuls
for the night, chew a few sprigs
it gives the mouth a spike
of dry wicker
and dream a while of wicker
baskets: bread baskets: hats
made by hand.
And from his
hands making a
chest, a wardrobe and an
urn.

A plate lunch of boiled tubers
usually sweet potato,

taro and potatoes, and as
contrast
a boiled carrot dish,
rest a while,
dedicated full afternoon
various concentration tasks: repeat

and write
one hundred times
for example, an
ideogram, a famous phrase in
Latin, Greek, or
Hebrew alphabet,
or for example
unroll a rice paper sheet and
admire its whiteness. And
by extension "whiteness."
And
snows. Let's say
snows. And it appears the
white sorrel on
high, he is arrested
forever between
time and space,
horseman wanted to
recognize the white
landscape around it:
first, of course,
one should be
there.

At night, joy. The party starts.
Dinner a salad of leaves
and wild stalks two
fruits (one will always
be the same). Sleep
or watchfulness it doesn't matter,
doesn't matter whether
umbra or light:
foolishness of mind, a
frightened mind or
anxious. The point
which makes the leap &
breaks the imagery, delivers
the
mind of ideas,
thoughts,

the need to reflect on or
know, takes a
first lap (scheduled)
around a spin
in a center of
circumference (never
stops) and see (sees it)
how his body
it delves in the
movements, each
time faster
a Ferris wheel, one
distaff, a weather vane, a
wind chime (you never
know, if external
or in your head) A
doll (mechanical):
shrinks, is reduced, on
high, the heavens
seduce and whistle
and splinter,
fuse (spinning) at
zenith or nadir
in a star.

* * *

Read the rest of the interview and poems in [Tiovivo Tres Amigos](#) (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; 1 edition (August 28, 2016))

[Audio 1- Kozer on the "anacoluto" & on the Neo-Barroco process 1:38](#)

[Audio 2 - Kozer on poem as Confucius or guide 3:51](#)

[Audio 3 - Kozer on the Serial Poem 6:16](#)