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## Tribute to the Poet: Fr. Michael Costanzo, Cri de Coueur

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## Tribute to the Poet: Fr. Michael Costanzo, Cri de Coueur

### Abstract

Contains excerpts from Fr. Michael Costanzo's poetry book *Water Lilies*: "Whirlwind, Section 1, No. 2," "No. 5," "Desolation the Queen," "No. 11 Rita," and "No. 9 Horizon."

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

Anyone who had the pleasure of conversing with Fr. Michael, either over coffee in his office or at the various little cafes he favored, knew him to be a very complicated man. My favorite conversations were about his love for opera (for which I remain only a neophyte) and his poetry. Ultimately, our talks led him to give me the privilege of writing the forward to his collection of poems *Water Lilies*. This is what I best remember of Fr. Michael and can think of no better tribute to him than to examine the complexity of his thoughts found in this particular work. Written over three decades, do not be tempted to see the change in voice as an evolution of spirit, his reflections changing with age. It is, rather, much like his beloved opera – images of life filled with joy, despair, hope, and redemption.

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*Tribute to the Poet:*

*Fr. Michael Costanzo, Cri de coeur*

“And then He said ‘Let Flowers Be!

To bring these worlds to stillness

Dances of life, reflexes of me.’

And the Almighty created man.

He walked the earths and conquered stars -

Shelled in his ego he trod on lilies.” -- *Michael Costanzo, Whirlwind, Section one, no. 2*

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Man cannot see beyond everyday experience, a failure to recognize the transitory nature of his very life, leading him to forsake the beauty of creation. The balance between the search for wisdom and experience is tempered by the realization that death is always present as the ultimate end. The collection is divided into four sections and spans his work from 1979 – 2010.

*Whirlwind* is filled with trials of lassitude and the death of spirit. We witness an empty shell waiting in vain to be of use once more. The soul is laid bare shut within a life of solitude. There is the embrace of death, sorrow, and despair with a deeper question of whether the cup of sorrow truly makes better the saddened heart.

*No. 5*

I am desolate

My mind is a gray sky

on a snowy day

My heart a bundle of emotions

I'm soaked under a deluge

of passions

Will this night of darkness  
swallow the remnant of my  
dreams?

*Desolation the queen*

And I...

I long to be free

*Vanitas* reverberates with the echo of Ecclesiastes (1:1-18). If all is vanity, should we despair of our daily life? Where is hope and solace? Can there be consolation in faith alone? With the presence of doubt and sorrow, where are we to find our source for renewal?

*No. 5*

Bathe this slowly decomposing spirit  
in the scarlet blood of your living son,  
Mother of Sorrow who stand by his cross.  
and free this son from the guilt of sin.

Let the angel of sorrow help to beat  
his repenting breast and cancel  
from his bowed head the mark of guilt

And make him an instrument of love.  
From the burning despair of his heart  
let spring a song of comfort and peace

In *χλοροφιλλα* we feel the breath of Dante, we gaze upon the work of Vermeer, every poem a still life. We witness within each a snapshot of womanhood; at once both Dante's Francesca, as lover and muse, and woman as the giver of light and harmony.

*No. 11 Rita*

lines for her painting "Larmes de la Mer"

La cathédrale de mon âme -  
fatiguée jusqu' à la mort -  
engloutie, les flots noirs  
sur mon corps, sur ma vie

Je suis dans le ventre énorme  
de la mer, ma mère inconnue;  
je cris mon anguisse, je vois mes larmes  
qui montent à haut, du fond -  
vide et blanc

The poems in *Sunrise*, *Sunset* reflect on the beauty and simple intricacies found in everyday life, whether whimsically reflecting on preparing a cup of espresso, momentary solace in an airport chapel, or marveling as a baby sleeps in the poet's arms. Yet, there is still the melancholic voice.

*No. 9 Horizon*

I see the sky and the sea  
unite as one  
from the parapet of my vessel  
in the elusive distance  
we call horizon,

Fr. Michael – a very complicated man, indeed. In this collection, there is almost a longing for death -- not as an escape from life, rather as a chance to return to the his childhood vision of Eden. The human as ego confronts death as the enemy. The human as spirit accepts death as the lover. Both lead to oblivion; the former returned to earth, the latter enveloped in the embrace of eternity.

*Dan Edes*

# OUT OF PARADISE

41 poems of  
distress, humor, and hope



Michael Costanzo

# A Vision of Beauty



Michael Costanzo

