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# Reader's Guide

for Peter Mishler's  
*Fludde*

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## Author Asks:

1. I was drawn in the earliest drafts of these poems to embody a childhood self. What does it mean to re-embody childhood? What must a poet do to avoid sentimentality or a false nostalgia in this kind of embodiment, and successfully, authentically inhabit a child's voice?
2. The summary for this book explains that I drew on William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* to make these poems. How would you describe the relationship between *Fludde* and those texts? What are successful and problematic ways of drawing from an earlier work of literature?
3. I was humbled by, and grateful for, poet Dean Young's introduction to the collection because it avoids a close reading of the collection's meaning in favor of observations about the power of poetry. Two of his insights stand out to me: he states that poetry can serve as "a companion for our dream life" and that "poetry provides us with ... an illumination of sparks as opposed to, or at least in addition to, the steady artificial light of reason." What does Dean Young mean by these statements? How do these statements work in tandem with each other?
4. Poet A.R. Ammons described poetry as a "disposition" as opposed to an "exposition." What does this mean to you? What is the difference between these two ways of describing poetry? How does this description of poetry as a "disposition" rather than "exposition" relate to the poems of *Fludde*?
5. I conduct interviews with contemporary poets for Lit Hub, which are all available by searching the site. What do the kinds of questions I ask my interview subjects tell you about my aesthetic sensibilities or approach to poetry? In what ways do you see these observations play out in *Fludde*?
6. On behalf of *Fludde*, Mónica de la Torre wrote: "It's when we're closer to being persuaded into thinking that the role of invention is to come up with tools to best convey real life's inconceivable scenarios that we most need our imaginings." What does she mean by this? What does this mean in the context of *Fludde*?
7. In what ways is surrealist art or writing a political act?
8. As I wrote these poems I realized that many of them suggest or directly express the experience of trauma and loss as well as the effects of those experiences:

grief, anxiety, fear, dissociation, obsession, compulsion. What is the relationship between these physical and psychological experiences, and the distinct attributes of poetic making: rhythm, meter, voice, form, syntax, line, music, image, symbol?

9. On the cover of *Fludde*, a torn price tag is abandoned on industrial carpet. In what ways does the cover of the collection relate to the poems within: their thematic concerns or the poems' speakers? In which poem would the cover's setting most likely occur? Is there a particular speaker from one of the poems whom you'd imagine discarding the tag?
10. Benjamin Britten's 20th century opera *Noah's Fludde* is the story of Noah's flood written for amateur players. His opera was adapted from a 15th century medieval play, which is a retelling of that same story in Genesis, which has its roots in Babylonian literature; namely, the Epic of Gilgamesh. Flood narratives abound in our literary imaginations. Why do you think this is? What is the efficacy of a flood narrative set in the contemporary world? What is the efficacy of this book's flood narrative?

## Writing Exercises:

### Repurposing Pop

Think of a popular song lyric that haunts you. The line "two girls for every boy" from the oldies pop song "Surf City" has always disturbed me. In the song, this line suggests a kind of cis-, hetero-, unsettlingly acquisitive "paradise." In my poem of the same title, I repurpose that line to starker effect, critiquing those troubling notions. What line from a popular song can you repurpose in a poem to expose its alternate meanings or resonances, and thereby critique the original?

### A Door to the Unconscious

Imagine the voices of your consciousness and unconsciousness as separated by a door with a slight crack in it. You stand on the consciousness-side of the door. What can be heard through the opening into the unconscious? What is heard only faintly? What do you mishear? Transcribe the language you hear into lines. Another way to consider this prompt: when transcribing the unconscious, what language and voice do you hear within you as opposed to that which you might hear in your "train of thought?" Don't be afraid to hear and transcribe nonsense, non-sequitur, or a voice you don't recognize as your own.



# Further Reading:

1. The Water-Leaders and Drawers of Dee (15th century mystery play based on the Biblical flood story)
2. The Poetics of Reverie, Gaston Bachelard
3. Songs of Innocence and of Experience, William Blake
4. *Noye's Fludde*, a one-act opera for amateur players by Benjamin Britten
5. The Happy End/All Welcome, Mónica de la Torre
6. Children's Dreams: Notes from the Seminars Given 1936-1940, Carl Jung
7. Trauma and the Soul, Donald Kalsched
8. Sula, Toni Morrison
9. Complete Poems of Vasko Popa, trans. Anne Pennington
10. Cold Mountain Poems: Twenty Poems by Han-shan, trans. Gary Snyder
11. Door in the Mountain: New and Collected Poems, Jean Valentine

