

Tocayo

Also by Joe Doerr
Order of the Ordinary
(as Editor)
The Salt Companion to John Matthias


## Joe Doerr



New \& Selected
Poems \& Songs

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for my mother,<br>who always insisted that I draw my own tree i.m. (1927-2015)



# Love Favors the Prodigal: 

## New Poems

FOR THE SAGE \& SAVAGE



## Tocayo

Come, all ye tribes of serpents and foul fish!
Beetle and worm, I have a feast for you!
—Aleister Crowley
The first strains of Tannhäuser made by a Sawzall Specifically B/E/B/G\# - before Ascending into approximations of whale song, Ground their way through a stubborn length of rebar On that Miércoles de Ceniza -

> Consequently I

Rejoice[d], having to construct something upon Which to rejoice when the Roach Coach's wheels Came crunching through the damp caliche Abaft of its breakfast-announcing cuminous stench.
Toting a plate of beans and chorizo, my cea Lightened by unsweetened milk, and a enyipede Curious about the gray flecks on my heel, I commandeered a stack of $2 x$ and sat Anxious not for company, br morning solitude.

But he sat too, having Ging hasked permission, His coastal Texas accent fat and green and smooth, Though his features gave the lie to all of this and more.

The Rastafarian tam of Garvey colors-
Red, black, green, and yellow bands of woolWorn Pericles high and pushed off the brow line, Made him seem less politic than refined.

He called me tocayo, shook hands as Joseph, Talked of carpentry, women, Melville, and time.

The last he claimed to be done with killing; Having done it had smothered his yen to hang fire. And murder, to which he no longer cottoned, Was anathematic to his new moral code.

I'd heard the rumors; he was no angel, An anti-santo and apoca-prophet, yes, But one whose company was the picture of peace.

Prior to the prolix yarn of his conviction and sentence, He had made it his business to furnish the dead:
Great slabs of purple heartwood,
Spalted tamarind, wengé, and mun
Became in his hands the bedsteads of the breathless,
Terminal fixtures for those whinnying with us not.
He'd made a simple living, so he claimed,
And called it Queequeg's Coffin,
Selling to those who wanted something
Uniquely final, or finally unique.
He'd made his own as well; or rather, Made one for himself-it was carefully work Of Yaje and Cocobolo in the classic coffin s
An elongated hexagram with a simplesjing iid
On which he'd carved a persona $\mathrm{A}_{\mathrm{m} \text { : }}$
A white rose blooming from an-encrusted cane.
When finished, he'd placed if in the attic hollow, A space above his living place of rest-
The bed he shared with a woman who'd betray him-
Ready to receive him, ready there and waiting for his time.

Impassioned men are prone to crimes of passion, And by some trick of nature find it difficult to bear The same propensity for passion found in othersOr such was Joseph's theory; and as theories go, it's fair. He'd killed the man who for a time at least Had lain beneath his coffin; had lain beneath, Above perhaps, the woman he desired;

Had come, at any rate, between
Two objects of his passion-his words, not mine.
Fifteen years of punish and appeal, Fifteen years of contemplating time, Fifteen years of books and conversations
Had placed something like redemption in his grasp.
The woman who'd betrayed him never gave up
In her efforts to secure him an appeal,
To secure him his release.

She'd worked three jobs
and went through all her savings;
Lawyer after lawyer threw his hands up in defeat,
Till one agreed to take the case
For a most unusual fee,
And managed to make a fine appeal
Before a sympathetic judge.
The sentence was reduced tofinde Served-Joseph
Had no idea who had beefersible for this.
The day he was released ke saw her standing
Near the entrance, near the exit, nearly frantic in her joy.
She embraced him, he forgave her,
they remembered who they were.
After the marathon making up,
and over a bottle of wine,
He'd asked her how she'd paid for such
A brilliant, young attorney who had argued
His appeal with success.
Your coffin
she had answered
it brought you back to me.

My coffin
he kept saying
it took me back to her.
The coffin
I repeated
it raised you from the dead.
-para mi tocayo


## The Catch

A heron's rasping call from somewhere higher than dusk settling in the canopy of cottonwood sounding desperate as it echoes through the creek bed.

The men appear from downstream, two of them, in cotton shirts and cut-offs, cautiously wading from the deep pools to the sandbar.

Along this stretch of arroyo the high banks surrender to suburban lawns of Bermuda,

St. Augustine and Buffalo sprawling from the edges P \& Kos their exotic for nim by endrast to the tangle
of beggarstick and broomedge,
bristlejoint and chess
where I stand drinking,
a guest in a backyard
not my own,
one eye open
for arrowheads in the chirr as the last minutes of daylight turn blue.

Hold,
and all at once
three hands are raised in greeting;
all eyes present
narrow with suspicion
of the other,
posture is contagious, growing mannish and compressed.

Then distance
between us narrows
and soon we are speaking.
punta de flecha
vino
canto del garza
mi hogar

It is revealed
the men have traveled to this city
to find work
quite unlike the work
they knew as other men
in a distant village by the sea.

It is revealed the men long for homes that are no longer, for connections with a past that has all but passed aw

It is revealed
the men are fishing
with homemade nets and anchors,
and if one were so inclined
to use the language of the courts, the men are poachers
who worry that I
or someone who is not me
will choose to use such language
to reveal them tonight.

A heron's rasping cry from somewhere higher than the darkness now settled in the canopy of sky sounding desperate as I walk up from the creek bed to the lawn.

Then something more:
¡Señor!, they whisper, ;Señor!
¡A ver nuestra pesca!


## The Driven

## I. Hill

Not quite the hushed Vosges it led to, that road from South Bend Regional.

Not quite the enemy's country, either, though Old Blue Eyes' own 'September Song' would penetrate the static of an FM station, declare war on the gravity of expectation, and mock conspiratorially with the catch beneath the shotgun seat
where Offa's shadow rode.

Not a proper taxi-preposterous that hatchback ridiculous in dimension-my circus miniscar all the more outrageous

## for its inconvenient

I hit the brakes and the prof slio \&rward;
I press the gas and the good erratshuttles fro.

## II. Peck

The last train departed Union Station, South Bend in 1971.
None of us knew that in the year of $M$ and Other Poems; all of us strangers in town, we circled W. South in our golden ratio, not quite unaware or unawares-
"What is the sign in you of your maker?
/ We are to say, It is movement and repose."
The man who speaks of primordial imagery speaks with a thousand tongues-and if by pondering signs
he misses, yes, his train perhaps he catches something other: Did you see that homeless guy? I think he was a Mexican; the spiral on his poncho was hypnotic. Hypnotic.

## III. Smith

"My gentle mother's furious resolve." The Fox held the line with his tongue running circles round its contours before he broke it and the silence in the car the way Leopold Bloom might break an egg against his palate.

I, pleased held found my poem worthy of recitation, steered him to another bit
of manuscript I felt he might enjoy.
He'd an empty styrofoam cup er eld Toft -Where-?

The floor is fine, I freed,
Cid he chuckled:
I rode once with Robert Sly who'd
brought along a fast-food meal;
the wrappings he kicked beneath the seat. Christ, I told him, some Iron John you are.

