



On Earth As It Is

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2010

# For a Recently Discovered Shipwreck at the Bottom of Lake Michigan

Matthew Olzmann

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# on earth as it is

*prayer as story, story as prayer*

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*photo by matthew simmons*

## *For a Recently Discovered Shipwreck at the Bottom of Lake Michigan*

*Matthew Olzmann*

*4/2/2010*

Dear Shipwreck,

Even though you're over a century old, they say that everything inside you is still intact. Even the crew? Must be lonely. I'll write again.

*4/6/2010*

Dear Shipwreck,

So what's it feel like to have everything inside you still "intact"? That's what I want to feel like. But I've actually never felt my "insides" at all—I think they're positioned in a way that keeps them from banging around. When I was small, I would jump up and down for hours trying to make them rattle. Nothing. I am an empty rattle.

PS. Please write back.

*4/24/2010*

Dear Shipwreck,

So I was talking to my priest the other day. He's worried that I'm having some kind of existential crisis. Meaning: I'm trying to rationalize God by replacing the ephemeral with a tangible object. Or: I've replaced one object that's been hidden from view with another object

that's hidden from view. Or: Every time I speak to you, I'm talking directly to God.

If this is the case: Lord, I noticed you haven't written back yet.

5/9/2010

Dear Shipwreck / Metaphor for God,

I was thinking of Basho today, and I wrote you this poem:

*O, Shipwreck, untouched by moonlight,  
molested by billions  
of writhing quagga mussels.*

Is "moonlight" too heavy-handed? Not believable enough? Let me know what you think...

6/24/2010

Dear *The L.R. Doty*,

Sorry I got your name wrong, initially. Apparently, in life, you were known as *The L.R. Doty*. What an odd name for a boat! (No offense, I'm just sayin'). Did you know there's a poet named "Mark Doty"? Wait—are you two related? Damn. If so, I'm embarrassed to have sent you my little poem. (Is this why you haven't written me back?)

6/29/2010

Dear Mister-Too-Good-To-Write-Anyone-Back,

Fuck you, man. I don't care if you didn't like that poem. That's no excuse for ignoring my letters. I will say this real slowly for you:

Write. Me. Back. You. Dick.

6/30/2010

Dear *L.R. Doty*,

It's me again. Sorry about that last letter. I'm just frustrated about some things. I'll forgive you, if you forgive me. No harm, no foul? Right?

7/2/2010

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Listen. What I was trying to say is this:

When I was a kid, my dad took me to a beach on your lake. I know what it's like to sink, to be angry because no one on Earth knows if you exist.

There had been a storm the night before, and the ripped-up pieces of crayfish covered everything. Then, I thought that scene was horrific. Now, I wonder if that was you.

Matthew Olzmann's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Kenyon Review*, *New England Review*, *Salt Hill*, *H\_NGM\_N*, *Margie*, and elsewhere. He is a Kundiman fellow and the poetry editor for The Collagist. Currently, he's a writer-in-residence for the InsideOut Literary Arts Project.

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