

Two Poems

by [Peter Lopatin](#) (June 2020)



Winter Moonlit Night, Ernst Ludwig Kirschner, 1919

Sestina: For a Lovely Ghost

A woman I cared for believed in ghosts.

She said: *'they haunt my daughter's house
and trouble the stairway landing at night.*

And they glow. They come and they go. They murmur late.'

And when she told me this I nodded: *'Yes, I know,
it must be troubling for you to visit there.'*

I wondered aloud if, next time she was there,
she might think in other terms than ghosts,
like the myriad things we know we know:
the sinews and bones of a living house,
the purple hauntings that keep us worried late,
all the half-considered vagaries of the night.

If I were with her now, vigilant all night,
I would help her find the glow she sees there,
as I see her now, watching, lingering late,
hoping, in her stealth, to trap her ghosts
and force an account of their doings in the house.
But this woman I would never really know,

glowed from a source I couldn't know,
and now, though I try to stem the intrusions of the night,
and keep the spirit-glow outside my house,
sealing all the cracks I see there,
choosing doors that can't be forced by ghosts,

her ghost still comes, whispering out of sight and late.

I've known other hauntings too, not all of them late
or dark, but with causes no less hard to know,
all native to my heart, my soul's proper ghosts.

They chatter, sometimes all night,
and gather round my bed, loitering there,
trying to evict me from my house.

She glowed, a ghost in her daughter's house,
glowed, I say, as when we lingered, hands caressing late,
fingers exploring fingers, each wanting something there,
something for each, wanting to know
the evanescent thing that would vindicate the night
and, in one grand gesture, frighten off the ghosts.

But ghosts teach their lessons late at night:
she is sleeping there now, aglow, and in my house,
that she is not here is all there is to know.

What There Is at Night

Don't tell me this and that about the world.

I've heard it all before: the battles, the doubts,
the plangent bells, the rosy glow of intimation that
took you from your errant path and
set you back on course.

Tell me instead what you see in the dark,
when shadows appear of things out of sight.

Show me now what there is at night
when you walk the meadow and your
anxious steps on the wet, black loam
are all there is to hear.

Tell me how you
feel inside when high clouds
dim the faint quarter-moon and it
fades from sight. I want to know
what there is at night.

What do you see below the surface of the lake?

At one hundred feet, do the fish

rest their tired eyes and feel a
colder current flow?

Some tell of heights that churn the gut and
tighten the heart. But is it really so?

Do you know of maps that
show those places?

And tell me how that heart still beats
when there is no moon and
stars are the only light.

I want to know what there is at night.

You've seen the village streets
when the baker and his wife
are still asleep. But have you heard the
dough rise in the quiet of their shop?

You know all other hearts asleep tonight.
Can you hear the one that beats
in time with mine? And in between
each beat, is there (as some have said)

the deepest silence and the darkest light?

But if I wake you now, you could
lose your sight, and the thing that
I most seek would simply dissipate
in a sickly light.

So what to do? (My need is great.)

I must find out what there is at night.

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Peter Lopatin was born and raised in New York where he earned his JD degree and practiced corporate law for thirty years. Along the way, he studied philosophy as a graduate student at the New School for Social Research. After retiring from his legal practice, he obtained a Certificate from the New School in teaching English as a Second Language and has been an ESL

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