

The background of the entire page is a surreal, painterly landscape. The sky is a vibrant, hazy yellow-green. A bright red starburst or sun is positioned at the top center, with numerous thin, radiating lines extending downwards across the sky. Several large, semi-transparent yellow circles are scattered throughout the sky. In the lower portion of the image, a dark, calm sea is visible. A small, dark boat is on the water, and a dark, rocky shoreline is on the left. The overall mood is mysterious and otherworldly.

Colonization Of a Cold Planet

Ken Stange

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KEN STANGE

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Colonization Of a Cold Planet

A Verse Play

Ken Stange



Two Cultures Press
2008

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ISBN: 978-0-9809273-0-6

Acknowledgments

This work originally appeared in the periodical *Northward Journal* (#25, 1982) published by Penumbra Press.

The inspiration for this work was George Whalley's *The Legend of John Hornby*. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1962.) This wonderful and well-documented book describes how John Hornby, a self-proclaimed wilderness expert, took his naïve 18 year old cousin, and another young man anxious to learn about survival in the North, to spend the winter of 1926-1927 by the Thelon River in the arctic, in the barren lands of the Northwest Territories. The expected spring caribou migration failed to pass their camp, and Hornby, deluded about his ability to live off the land, had not brought adequate provisions.

Cover Design Ken Stange

For my family:

URSULA, CHRISTIAAN AND KATHERINE

Colonization Of a Cold Planet

NARRATOR

Stitched into the warp and weave of nothingness and the silent howl of space there are pockets of matter, minute by comparison to the surrounding void, but concentrated and substantial nevertheless. Like biological magnets these planets attract indiscriminately all that is vital in the universe, including most naturally that which is evil and unstable. One such planet, cold and forbidding, is Mobius, which orbits around a Blue Giant in the constellation of The Crab. Far from that part of nowhere where human beings originate, Mobius is a new hiding place for Hans Grosz, once murderer and still wanderer: a small man, and tougher for it. Not at all a mean man, but a strong one. No longer a young man and no longer a passionate man, Grosz is still a bit of a fool.

GROSZ

here i can do what i like
be it nothing
and like what i do
being small
doesn't matter
if you're tough
like the stunted shrubs
that share eternal winter
here with me and the wind
and the wind
and the long long dark
of a forty hour night

NARRATOR

With Grosz are two youths, his nephew and his nephew's friend. The nephew is named Caleb, rightly and naively. He is only seventeen on this frontier, fresh from the green earth, ignorant of his uncle's crime, innocent of the length of winter. He has followed Grosz here, expecting to be changed from boy into man by the harsh land and his uncle's guidance, totally unaware of the form these rites of manhood sometimes take.

CALEB

I am safe as a house
with Hans . . .
I can be independent . . .
be a man
once I learn
to make my own way here. . .
With someone as strong as Hans
to guide me . . . I am
confident of the future.

NARRATOR

Caleb's friend is named Myles. Little is known of his background, although there are hints of an unsatisfactory love affair in his recent past. He is twenty-one, dark-haired but light-complected. He is more mature than his friend Caleb, whom he met less than a year ago, and because of his maturity less inclined toward blind trust in Hans Grosz. Myles seems to have almost drifted into the expedition to Mobius. Whatever his motives for coming, he harbors no illusions about Grosz as an initiator into manhood, or even as a guide to survival.

MYLES

This Grosz I don't fully trust him for there is something not quite right, his gnarled confidence frightens me, it's too facile for this place, something about him: unhone'd edges, rusty surfaces, unhoiled weapons, his gait is crooked, and he has this tender green growing-tip that doesn't suit a man his age, this childishness of view. I fear I'm fool to travel with him, come here for winter, but then so what, I've played the fool before, though never in winter, with a gnarled old man.

NARRATOR

The planet they have come to is feminine, but no Mother Earth. The planet is not indifferent (like the surrounding universe). It is actively hostile. The planet has longed for life as only the sentient dead can, but it envies the little life it harbors and both hates and wants intruders. The planet Mobius is a succubus, frigid and tempting. It is also articulate.

MOBIUS

why think of summer . . . when there's only winter
or of empty stomachs . . . while you're still sated
why think at all . . . animals do not think
and they survive . . . for their small time
why think of the womb . . . once you're born
or of a woman's breast . . . when you're just boys
here on the hard crust . . . of my loving substance
o i understand how . . . you must feel here
amidst the indifferent void . . . here at the very
brink of expression . . . where *nature's* a word
that sticks in your throat . . . like a small bone
or like the thoughtless . . . silence of my winter
here on your new home . . . here in your new grave

NARRATOR

Mobius has only three seasons: winter, deeper winter, and deepest winter. (Mobius has only three virtues: purity, patience, and pain.) The three men arrive in winter and move deeper. They have two hundred days to wait for the next supply ship. Grosz was responsible for bringing enough staples to last this period of time. They hope to trap some game. Grosz was over-confident in his estimation of the amount of food they would take from the land, an over-confidence typical of him. After the ship that brought them to Mobius has lifted off and passed from sight, the three men stand beside the gear and supplies and stare around them at the barren landscape: a hard, reddish, rocky surface, pocked with old and eroded meteorite craters. There are some small blue-green shrubs scattered here and there, only growing with any density beside the winding, red and murky river they have chosen as their home site. The rocky plain extends to the horizon (a long horizon for the planet is larger than earth) and is only broken by a few small hills that look like wrinkles on the rocky shield.

GROSZ

here at last like a word
on the lip of time
we stand among these few trees
if trees they be
stand like them
out of place but here
nevertheless
(there is marrow-chill in the air
shivering the branches but
me I'm warm enough
with happiness)
i love this desolation
i could dig a small trench
set root in it
and clinging to rock
live here forever

CALEB

We are settled by a wide river.
Hans knows
how to survive . . . He's been
around . . . but the river
is red which upsets me
I don't know why . . . We drink
the water anyway . . . It
is like home in some ways but
it is strange here
and I'm glad I'm with Hans.

MYLES

Finally here and alone and I don't like it
for this place is nowhere, dry as sun-baked
gravel; the river's a bad dream, red and wide
as a field. I fear this place already
for it has no heart: all that beats here
are the waves and the wind, and they don't care
about time or us. There is no contact here
with the land either: beneath a dead shell
it is hard with cold. This is not a place, this
is a corpse preserved for eternity, a zombie
that will consume our lives casually, as the
river consumes its own shore. This place is nowhere.

MOBIUS

what a lot of fools . these affronts to entropy
scraping at my surface . these superficialities
waving their finite futures . in an infinite space
rather like flies buzzing . overhead in a lost summer
they lack even the reality . of larvae and maggots
in a warmly rotting corpse . or even the blue sun's
thin glare on snow-fields . what a lot of fools these
transients and glimmers . wisps of time in eternity
ignorant of being no more . than evolution's error
what are they doing here . here at my hard edge
fools fools fools fools . o how i do love them

NARRATOR

The snows soon come and cover the rocky landscape with a white blanket. The planet's axis angles now more obtusely relative to the cold sun's rays. And its orbit is on the outward swing. They are going deeper into space, into winter. This is the movement of the spheres, the cool music of an expanding universe, running down and out, a movement contrary to biological evolution - and more inexorable.

GROSZ

we work like beasts
of burden
(this land has a strong back)
that kid Myles worries
overmuch about food
spends all his time going up
or downriver setting the traps
while i dig and dig
dig out the basin for the shelter
(we must have deep roots
or the wind
will scatter us)

CALEB

The shelter will be ready
and just in time . . . but
I knew it would be . . . It is
colder than I expected
but then I'm accustomed to other
warmer places . . . Hans says
I'll harden
like the shrubs here
after the wind works me
for awhile.

MYLES

Damn it, why did I come here? I hate it. I hate Grosz and his cockiness, his silly joy in this place. Damn it, time will kill us, only time can end this madness. I can tell already that Grosz knows much less than he admits - the way he stops working just to stare around, his face a map of bewilderment. The strange creatures we capture in our traps do not struggle, as if they were resigned to death, and their flesh is bitter, as could be expected on this forsaken rock. What we are supposed to do here, I don't know. Nor why I came. I only know the biting cold and the fear that our shelter won't be adequate, that the food won't prove sufficient, that Grosz will not be humane or strong enough to survive the growing cancer of my hatred for him.

MOBIUS

let the living work away . indolence is my way
like the wide red river . o cool sweet indolence
that issues from a crevice . from the spread thighs
of a lascivious river . sweet thick and sickly
a river's life is sexual . while man's life
is dry as fear's mouth . the river banks are like
wide thighs moistened . from a deep flowing cold
cold as an old lover . moving under control
but full of vengeance . o waves beating beating
against the soft cold . and yielding shores
of salacious lakes where . the river's waters come
and come and come again . those icy spasms of foam
o let these three work . for what does it matter
when it gets colder . they will be stilled
like a lovely frozen river . and lie down with me
to be at last my forever . to be my cold lovers

NARRATOR

As the universe swings outward from whatever it calls centre, so too does Mobius swing outward from the cool blue star it calls source. The deeper penetration of stillness into movement proceeds. And with it comes the terror. They have been on Mobius for less than fifty days when it begins in earnest.

GROSZ

weird
the rocks seem alive rising from the snow
and the shrubs quiver
like the instant before
release
(the river is a red fuse but
the explosion will be white
we'll be blown to ice shards
the silence will be deafening)
bury me in an ice cave
stalactite stalagmite
bury me in rock
pictograph sarcophagus
(no
here they leave you on the surface
let the wind
pick your bones)
hey why these thoughts?
what is the matter with me?
all is well

CALEB

Our shelter is warm but fresh food
is scarce . . . I
checked the traps early
but was disappointed . . . nothing
not even tracks . . .
And the weather much colder
all day
still the river . . . I don't understand
it is still flowing . . . Hans thinks
it will freeze any day . . . Hans
seems suddenly less happy . . . But
I feel confident
still.

MYLES

Already this place is destroying us, already we feel it draining us: Caleb is weak as our tea, and Grosz wanders about acting the fool. So this is the house that Grosz built, four synthetic walls to contain our nightmares and our hunger. Although it is still early by the calendar, the wind has changed to breath exhaled from some frozen demon's lungs; already ice forms crystals in our bloodstream. O yes, so this, this is the house that Grosz built: a goddamn tomb.

MOBIUS

now the time is right . for rivers to go under
stop the unholy frothing . end the surface flow
time to go hard as granite . be hard as my ground
be hard as my being . while still flowing
flowing down in depths . where the cold wind
cannot touch her . superficially frigid
while still in her way . moving quietly on
a motion in secret . a sweet secret emotion
the river schemes on . deep within me still flows

NARRATOR

Because the orbit of Mobius is so highly elliptical, with the passage of time the sun shrinks noticeably in size, eventually becoming no more than a small blue circle that barely rises from the horizon during its short daytime journey. And because the sun had been such a prominent feature of the skyscape when they first arrived, this startling diminishment of its grandeur upsets the three men. Although they, from the start, have had virtually nothing to say to each other, now they retreat even more desperately into the privacy of their own minds.

GROSZ

so it's cold
so it's dark
this is the way to be
i will not let it bother me
we must be like lichen
with lichen's strength
(nature weeds out the weak
for they spoil her beauty)
our strength must be like.
the lichen
tenacious to rock
impervious to pain
a thin layer
between air and ground
a feminine thing
soft but tough

CALEB

Storming all day so had to
lay up . . . which means
one day less
hunting . . . Hans says
not to worry . . . but I do
a bit . . . for Hans seems
sickly
and Myles won't talk to us
at all
which is difficult in a small place
with the wind howling
all the time.

MYLES

Hunger gnaws my gut like those rat-like things we trap. Grosz has led us into his private hell, a lifeless, frozen wasteland, into the rotten core in the centre of his dream. He has these delusions of being an animal, has this insane longing to be natural, bestial; that is why he failed to bring enough food. He wants to live off this badland, but this land starves even the leathery plants that cling here. And now his madness is growing. The foul water from the river feeds it. And the thin light surely helps it grow, for the sun here is a symbiote, feeding on madness, feeding madness. It has waited many eons, waited in this empty sky, waited for someone at last to come, someone with a tumour of madness, ripe to feed it.

MOBIUS

the circle is closing . the pincers coming
together at long last . in tight uniformity
the river shore is quiet . quiet as outer space
this is my most natural . my finest longest hour
a time to be still . and observe all movements
freeze into sculpture . in stasis is beauty
for all change is ugly . white is the ultimate
the truest colour and calling . the unnameable glory
wondrous albino terror . made enduring as landscape
o brittle winter season . sweet cessation
where green's but a dream . this is the final
reality and the final hue . the final muffled cry

NARRATOR

Because of the scarcity of game and the inadequate supply of staples, it becomes evident to Grosz that they will run out of food long before the supply ship returns. Thus he puts them all on strict rations. Whether out of vanity or some nobler virtue, he discreetly makes his own proportion smaller than the others. The cold continues to thicken until the air seems nearly solid. Although the temperature inside their shelter remains tolerable, the lack of food causes everyone in the party to suffer from frequent chills even when in the warmth of the shelter.

GROSZ

things aren't good
now
(must admit it
food is an obsession
grabbing our throats
with great raw hands)
things bad even
(the keen edge of winter
cutting into our compatibility)
bad
(our words seemed spiked
we probe each other
for permafrost)
things wrong
this is not the way
to go thru winter
one should endure it
with noble quiet
(this season in this place
will not tolerate
the loquacious)

CALEB

Hans talks more than ever I've seen him
but always to himself . . . which
worries me
somewhat . . . But then Hans
has much on his mind
and little
in his stomach.

MYLES

Damn Grosz to another hell, damn him for taking us to this one, this black hole in the fabric of space. Grosz wanders 'round muttering to himself, to the ghost of starvation that haunts us. Caleb is useless. Damn them and the damn cold. I see everything thru a sheet of ice. Grosz's features are distorted so he appears as an old woman, fragile and bitter, like this weather.

MOBIUS

this season is my only . season my one time
and Grosz is right . it is difficult very
difficult to tolerate . the harsh sounds
of exhalation and ugly . ugly inspiration
stop their breathing . let silence rule
the over-loud or alive . is outlawed here
all must be muffled . down to woolen silence
this is the way to end . a universe begun
with a big bang . only the shush shush
of falling snow . or the soft footfalls
of stupid beasts crossing . endless snow-fields
on the way to their death . the only loud sound
permitted is ice shifting . a resounding crack
signifying greater cold . in the buffered quiet
and why should i tolerate . the ill-prepared
the foolish and the mortal . the thinking things
my crust is a dried crust . they want to be here
then let them suck at it . let them scratch at it
then let them try . try to live off it
i will laugh and let them . even let them love it

NARRATOR

The three men manage to survive on the thin rations, but they do no more than barely survive. Every once in a great while they have some luck with their ice-fishing or their traps, but the fresh meat is quickly consumed and the small stockpile of food continues to diminish rapidly.

GROSZ

my joints stick out
like stumps from broken branches
on a barren tree
and they creak
when i move
(again like an aged tree)
i am shrub i am grub
from underground i come
(have i roots? can i move?)
i must eat
for i feel strange
but the creatures we trap
are thin as i am
and as ugly

CALEB

I try to rejoice
over our good fortune . . . We
just captured something . . . a strange
thing it is
with six legs and blue fur . . .
But it tastes bitter
and makes rejoicing difficult . . .
Hans threw up
and so did Myles . . . Myself
I'm keeping it
down
so far.

MYLES

We are desperate, eat anything, no matter how grotesque. Christ, eating is so important. I never knew how important. Christ, he could feed the multitudes with a few fishes and loaves. We need him. Grosz, he can't feed three. He can't feed us three, the holy trinity. Mind, my mind wanders these days. Grosz, yes, he can't feed us, even though he starves himself. He does, I know it. It is not self-sacrifice. He does it to prove how tough he is. The man's mad, Christ, mad as the sun, thin too like the sun's light, damn sun so like an apparition, it visits us so rarely, we've begun to doubt it. Each night I pray for peace, and then try to kill by day. Although the day is as short as our supplies. Surely this, this can't seem to Caleb some kind of lesson, a way to learn anything except cold pain and fear. But who can say what he or anyone thinks or feels.

MOBIUS

this season is my lesson . the way to shape stone
is with time and ice . and a long long waiting
men have no right here . they're not prepared
by eons of tempering . in the hell of cosmic
genesis and growth . and the long long waiting
no life has no place . here or anywhere really
life's a brief indulgence . of blind evolution
it is not pattern . it does not matter
the striation of rock . is pattern or the stars
their burning interiors . amidst the deep winter
of the spatial void . these things matter
these are patterns . but life is not pattern
it is ephemeral as cosmic dust . without its span
so winter is a holy season . rejoice in its starkness

NARRATOR

As the cold becomes even more intense, the small game that existed somehow on the barren plains now becomes more and more scarce, until at last the only source of fresh food is the fish Grosz catches through a hole in the thick ice of the river. Myles is feeling very ill and stays in bed most of the time. Caleb is inept at fishing. Grosz feels burdened with keeping them alive.

GROSZ

when i fish
i have to keep putting my hands
in the icy water
to prevent frost-bite
(but the water not only conceals
the searing pain
it also hides the damn fish)
unlike the land
underneath, the river is still alive
but it hates us
(river-bed, death-bed
i lay me down to sleep
pray the cold my soul to keep)
it hates us
i fear it
i see it
icy
eye

CALEB

The traps are empty
again . . . still . . .
But found under the snow
a very welcome addition
to the larder . . . Some
prickly fish
we'd thrown there for bait
months ago . . . And
a cache of meat we had quite forgotten . . .
having not eaten it before
owing to it not being
good . . . Ate it
with relish.

MYLES

Grosz goes to fish, but brings back nothing. That is appropriate. Nothing is everything here. Nothing is what we will be soon: bones to dust to nothing. I am sick now, the fever in me, sick to death, my bowels clogged with hide and fish bones and the unpalatable biscuits Grosz rations out. There is no hope. Except Caleb, all smiles, trying to be cheery. He holds hope like a quick poison. I wish he'd swallow it. I wish he'd die. There is no point in this slow wasting away. In fact, I know now that there is really no point at all.

MOBIUS

foolish this looking for reasons . there are none
rejoice this holy season . but don't look for reasons
rejoice and give thanks . for the return to normal
the glory of entropy . the triumph of silence
i will take you now . my three cold lovers
and pull you to my breast . it is time for rest

NARRATOR

The silent bond that exists between Grosz and Caleb, the bond that has excluded Myles from the start, grows stronger as Grosz grows weaker. Myles stays in bed constantly, watching Caleb and Grosz like a jealous lover. Grosz now is too weak to go fishing, and rarely rises from his bed either. Only Caleb is still capable of moving about. He nurses the other two, Grosz with affection, Myles with patience.

GROSZ

i am not well
my joints jerk in and
out of position instead
of smoothly
and i cannot do much
(what to do?
grow?
shed leaves?
root deeper?)
much? much?
and Caleb is not good
at anything
poor lad
tries so
and Myles does not like us
(it's in the air
like a musty smell
his hatred of us)
this is not the way
it should be
(be, be, what to be?
rock moon night
what?)
this is rock
this is moon
this is the long night
that does not break
but only slyly hints
at day
(teasing)
we are here now
like the small flowers
we used to see
in the cracks
in the rocks

CALEB

We all stay in bed except sometimes
I crawl out and grovel
in the snow . . . for fish scraps . . .
Sometimes finding bloody snow
for soup . . . It is hard but
I try to be cheerful.

MYLES

Grosz is talking to himself constantly, muttering about flowers. Caleb is in love with him, just like a damn puppy. Even now! After bringing us here, here to the end of the universe, here to the very brink of infinity. I get dizzy. I feel it: we're falling, toppling, like false stars from heaven, we're falling falling towards shards and debris and the sad unholy ecstasy of oblivion. The only thing to do is burn, burn on the way down, burn with all the passion, all the hate I can muster in this shell, this discarded husk of life.

MOBIUS

they make so very much . . . of so very little
their piddling suffering . . . of what importance
is it compared to the birth . . . and the death
of order and chaos . . . the living are so trite

NARRATOR

The extreme depth of cold passes at last, and the temperature begins to rise slightly, but it is too late: the ice in their veins has traveled to their hearts. The returning orbit of Mobius carries the three men like a hearse.

GROSZ

I am sick
(no ledge to climb down
on this mountain
cannot flower)
cannot be
and when i try to explain
to Caleb why
God is less constant
than the speed of light
he thinks I'm delirious
(delirium arterium
i know what i go
where i do when)
the flowers were red
i think with long stamens
but i never saw bees

CALEB

Situation is very serious . . . Last night
Hans said he could last a week
if I would . . .
but he had a bad night . . . legs paining him
so now he says that two days
is the most.

MYLES

The only thing keeping me alive is my hate.
Even it is being drained by watching Grosz die.
He is suffering more than I am. I feel little.
The fever has me. I am bone and hide, I have
become the food we've eaten now for months.
I am garbage. I am rotting garbage. Goddamn.

MOBIUS

go make your preparations . how very human this
this absurd planning . even of one's own death
no animal wastes his time . any of his precious time
alive planning his own death . does light prepare
for darkness or fire . for the fading of embers
irrelevance and idiocy . that is all there is to life

NARRATOR

The first light flickers out: Hans Grosz dies in his sleep, muttering about rocks and flowers. Caleb finds a will under Grosz's pillow.

GROSZ

I hereby bequeath
to my dear nephew Caleb
everything
I may die possessed of
& all which might come later
which is to say
nothing

CALEB

Hans is dead . . . But
I am too weak
to cry.

MYLES

The bastard died last night, leaving me nothing
to live for. It is over now, though I ache
like a tree with a spike to its pith, I feel okay.
For I know this is my last day. It is over now.

NARRATOR

The second light flickers out: Myles dies within hours after Grosz's passing. Outside the shelter, the first thaw in many months begins. The snow drips from the roof of the shelter.

CALEB

I am alone . . . but I am not afraid
for Hans has taught me
to be brave
and independent . . . I am confident
for Hans is with me
and the snow is melting.

NARRATOR

The supply ship arrives five days later. Inside the shelter they find the three bodies. Beside Caleb's body is a note.

CALEB

Dear Father:
Hans Grosz
always wished to go beyond
where other men went . . . And wanted
someone with him
and I was the one
this time . . . I realize why
he wanted a boy of my age with him . . .
I know why now . . . for Hans was alone
and had to show someone
what this world
and the next
are . . . I loved him . . . He loved me. .
Very seldom is there true love
between two men . . . This
is important . . . This
is hell Father . . . and I am
afraid . . . But . . .
Goodbye now . . . And thanks
for all you have ever done for me. .
Your son . . .
Caleb.

NARRATOR

The orbit of Mobius swings around the Blue Giant and out again, as it will for eons to come. Time is relative. Space infinite. Quiet the norm.

MOBIUS

why think of summer . when there's only winter
or of life when there's . only the stretch of time
why think at all

A Few Notes On Oral Presentation

THIS VERSE PLAY is presented through five voices, three male voices and two female voices. In my mind's ear I hear the following types of voice for the various parts: the narrator should be a woman with a very commonplace voice, clear but undistinguished, very unobtrusive and matter-of-fact; Hans Grosz's voice should be gravelly and coarse, but not resonant, for the man was small; Caleb's voice should be young and ingenuous, sweet even; Myles' voice should be slightly more mature than Caleb's, slightly deeper, and his pronunciation should be more careful and emphatic; finally Mobius should be a woman, a woman with a rather shrill, irritating voice, should sound a bit crazed, like a witch perhaps, but not too melodramatic. Each voice stands alone in the emptiness of space and time; the voices never directly communicate with each other in the play. A distinct verse-form has been used for each of the characters, and prose for the narrator, and this distinctiveness should be reflected in the voices.

The question of 'rests', of the temporal length of line breaks, is very important in contemporary prosody, and they are very important in the poetry of this play. Each line break is intended to be a real 'rest', for here, as in much of the cadencing of contemporary short-line syllabic and breath verse, the break or 'rest' is critical to the proper sounding of the poem. This doesn't mean, of course, that the reader should have time to rush to the washroom between the end of one line and the beginning of the next, but neither does it mean that the lines can be carelessly run together as is so often done with accentual-syllabic verse. Stanza breaks too should be observed, as well as—in the case of the Mobius sections—the mid-line caesura—which is indicated by a dot surrounded by spaces. The following rules of thumb are close to what I hear in my mind's ear when reading this: stanza breaks are rests just slightly longer than those normally following a period in prose; line breaks are rests just about equal to those normally following a comma in prose; and the dot-caesura is a rest about the same length as those natural caesuras that occur in

such meters as iambic pentameter or alexandrine, where a long line breaks in two from its own weight. These rules, however, are slightly misleading, for the rest in verse is qualitatively different from that in prose or that following regular punctuation even in verse. When a reader rests after some form of regular punctuation, there is a clipped characteristic to the pause: the word is completed and silence of some definite duration follows. When a reader rests at a line or stanza break in verse—assuming regular punctuation is not concurrent with it—the last word *is held* rather than concluded. If one were to measure the length of time involved in the comma break (for instance), one would find about the same total duration from beginning of the last word before the comma to the ending of first word after the comma as you would in a typical line break involving the same words. However, I believe you would find a shorter duration of total silence in the reading of the line break, because in this latter case the last word is held—not clipped off. (Incidentally, I think this partially explains the predominance of iambic and anapestic meters over trochaic and dactylic in English language accentual-syllabic verse: it *is easier to hold* an accented syllable at the line break than an unaccented one.)

Finally, I could certainly ‘envision’ sound and music effects integrated into the presentation of this poem-play. Much as howling winds and the sound of waves may be clichés, they—if discreetly placed—do fit the rhythm of this piece. The type of music that seems to me to best suit this play is what I call ‘sparse music’; I think of William’s *Antarctica*, Varese’s *Deserts*, and Ligeti’s *Atmospheres* as being ‘sparse music.’

Author's Note

Literature like science is a way of exploring different perspectives. The results of these literary explorations, like the results of science, are always inherently tentative. It is for this reason that I choose to call my books *hypotheses*. ***Colonization Of A Cold Planet***, completed September 27, 1980, is *Hypothesis 8*.

"The wilderness and the idea of wilderness is one
of the permanent homes of the human spirit."

~Joseph Wood Krutch

"Nature is neither benign nor malevolent:
what makes nature so sublime is her
beautiful, transcendent indifference."

~Hippokrites

"Death is a word for beauty not in use."

~Irving Layton