

Christopher Stephen Soden

Original Sin & Other Poems

↳Original Sin↵

I couldn't say no when Trevor smiled
and turned our storage shed into his
altar. Where he moved things and ignited
the Coleman lantern, never letting
the light come up too high. There were

French playing cards and Viceroys
at the start. After awhile we played
poker for clothes when I still
understood nothing of the world,
unable to imagine what two naked boys
could do together but chuckle and fart.

Trevor would think of stupid games
like "Report Card" or "Dad's Lesson"
or "Kept After School." Tell me to watch
Jesus, His heart wrapped in garlands of thorn
and flame or Our Blessed Virgin Mother
(images taped to the wall, looking back)

while I bent across his lap or clutched
my ankles or crossed one wrist under
the other. It was astonishing, the way
he said things: melodically, spontaneously,
like casting a spell. I tried to disengage

(even as blows returned me to my bone
cage) noticing details that never caught
my attention before, the rich magnificent
layers of refuse that turned our clubhouse
into a kingdom of spider nest and ghost

eggs. Clusters of slick shining hatchlings
that could fill your body in a day. Spit-paper
dwellings for wasp and hornet, shriveled
purple cadaver of what might have been
a rabbit or possum before it lost

to teeth or time. It's too easy to say
it was not so bad. The electrical tingle I felt
or wisdom I bring with me now to the bed,
the bar, the alley, the warm wet dock houses
with jewel-eyed invisible witnesses. Hushed

comfort of surf. You never felt the cold
dread in your gut when Trev showed up
ringing your doorbell, over and over,
determined to deliver the beating
you always knew was coming.

↳TANTALIZING↳

If I tell you sometimes bisexual guys are worse (perhaps because it's easier for them to walk away) I'm not sure it explains anything but I will say it just the same. Before I met Tim I believed my attraction to other men was a symptom or stage. Perhaps a way to secure the intense love I craved from other guys, or a safe step in an odyssey that would ultimately end in my consummating with women. It was only after a long summer evening of sipping Stoli and lime, listening to 50's radio, relaxing with a slow progression of smokes, when he suggested we jack off together that my blood began to steep like Vesuvius. I finally understood something crucial about myself. I didn't grasp at the time Tim's penchant for finding pleasure in fomenting damage or watching while you suffered like a thrush caught banging in some endless black flue. But he did have other gifts. One evening in the windy, desolate shrubby college town of Lubbock, Texas we were dining in a small restaurant specializing in steaks. He had an idea and we visited the Men's Room. Not unusual considering the establishment it had one toilet, one urinal, no partition

and a lock on the door. It was smaller
than many closets. He wanted to swap
underwear. Nothing else. The intimacy
of it was brilliant. Just a glimpse
of his pale ass, the moist warmth
of his boxers, the faint odor of piss.
Shared experience of peters
made us virtual twins. Doppelgangers
one to another. It was dangerous
and careless and creepy
and brotherly and it blew off
the back of my skull.

✂NOBODY WANTS TO BE FRIENDS WITH JAKEY✂

He might phone around two
in the morning or drink until
you get kicked out for brawling
or puking or singing too loud.
Jakey is sloppy and his manners
aren't for shit. He'll piss right next to you
in the alley, farting without apology
or flip off a cop who wants to pull
you over. If someone insults you,
he won't stop pummeling till he
tastes blood and if they threaten,
Jakey will be grabbing the shovel
he keeps in the trunk of a vintage black
Mustang convertible. If you're hungry
he'll lift a skewered steak from somebody
else's plate or show you how to walk
the check like a pro. He's not ashamed
when you catch him snoring during

The Magic Flute or a revival of Warhol's
early underground films. Downing absinthe
or chasing the dragon's tale at Camille's
he grabs you when a tango commences,
dropping into a dangerous and delectable
dip. When he seals his agonized confession
with a blazing, toxic, reptilian kiss, laughter
explodes from your lungs like nuclear fission.
You bite his shoulder hard, your left hand
gripping his ribcage, the right one
reaching for his fly.

GHOST FATHER

for dj

i was certain he was channeling
my dead father jim though half
my age he was sharp and ragged
with black hair formidable glasses
and skin like milk
from a star cluster he was
one of those canny males always
stifling the impulse to snap
you like brittle kindling
keen pugnacious never looking
beyond the literal substance
of a word or a glance or a hand
fluttering and flittering
for connection i fell far and fast
ridiculous as a bottle rocket
igniting its entire payload
for a glimpse of illumination
only to end up a husk
in tall summer grass i carried

a sticky history he would neither
identify nor honor for one cold
season after another misconstruing
a token or portent or signal
as if using a compass from another
galaxy or perhaps mine was the one
with the floating dizzy needle
spinning beyond comprehension
the emails i sent never answered
yet each new residency he seemed
different the anger that drew me
less toxic and clarified i remember
waving to him across campus
gleaning a lapse in understanding
greeting mistaken for resignation
as if the loneliness i yearned to shatter
only spread like a cultivated virus
the last semester we spoke
on a terrace snow scattering
delicate exquisite nets woven
from icy breath and tears he was
there for my lecture and reading first
in line to embrace and tell me how
proud he was though i never told
him knowing he was listening
made it possible to break open
like a deep purple zinnia spilling
rage and regret i never told him
sex is easy to forfeit like poison
you can no longer trace i cannot
bear to look at the last

and only snap we took together
or sop the grief endlessly pouring
when i divulged to myself
the unsecret secret that he was
now and finally gone

Author Bio

Christopher Stephen Soden received his MFA in Poetry from Vermont College in January 2005. He teaches craft, theory, genre, literature and publication. He currently writes critique for numerous venues. His collection, *Closer*, was released by Rebel Satori/Queer Mojo : June 14th, 2011. Honors include: Yaddo Residency 2013, Pushcart Prize Nomination 2012, Full Fellowship :Lambda Literary Retreat: Emerging LGBT Voices August 2010. Distinguished Poets of Dallas, Poetry Society of America's Poetry in Motion Series, Founding Member, President and President Emeritus of The Dallas Poets Community. His work has appeared in : Reckless Writing, Polari Journal, Resilience, Assaracus, The Q Review, A Face to Meet the Faces, Ganymede Poets : One, Gay City 2, The Café Review, The Texas Observer, Sentence, Borderlands, Off the Rocks, The James White Review, The New Writer, Velvet Mafia, Poetry Super Highway, Gertrude, Touch of Eros, Gents, Bad Boys and Barbarians, Windy City Times, ArLiJo, Best Texas Writing 2.

Citation: Soden, C. 2012. 'Original Sin & Other Poems'. *Polari Journal*, 6 (October 2012), www.polarijournal.com/resources/Soden-Sin.pdf (accessed <insert date>).