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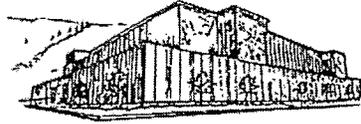
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# Brood Emergence 1984

by

Alexander Alviar

B.A. English Michigan State University, 1999

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

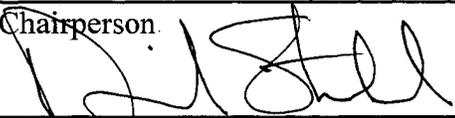
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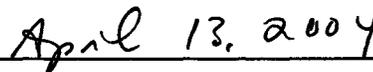
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## Featherweight

*Aquí*, he says, here where the blades bit through,  
pink kisses of scar tissue pucker the skin  
serrated on his back; long trains of stitches  
railroad his spine. *Aquí*, this corner store  
that's stacked with crates of empty cokes, he put  
seven in surgery with his bare hands  
before they stabbed him. *Cuidaté*, he says,  
take care of yourself, and he crosses through  
the evening rage of cars and traffic lights.  
Beyond the gym, the strikes and body blows  
on heavy bags and gloves still pounds in ears  
like blood and fading muscle memory.  
What the body can know of tenderness  
and blows wounds you. It enters. And wounds you.

*In poetry's hunting,  
both the fugitive prey  
and the arrow are  
double in nature—Jane Hirshfield*

### **the eyes, a passage**

to the soul, yes, but  
not Augustine's window in,  
more so a way out . . .

more so a kind of vision that is  
my eye roaming over you, is  
a drawing back

of the bowstring,  
aligning the fletched feathers,  
the shaft, the flint-napped point

and letting fly—*sweet target*— my desire,

pared down and fire-hardened  
for cleaner entry, straight,  
and quivering slender  
through the air.

Bull's eye.  
I have you now  
in my sights.

—as we had  
the bull elk  
stepping hornless out of  
the antlered branches, out  
into October river and dipping in

to Mission Mountains inverted,  
far borders of the bison range mirrored,  
and the elk touching his twin's snout.

If seeing is believing the  
lense and light of the world come in  
that the mind must turn  
over and over

and as for Beauty, always-already we  
want its focus, its capture, and ask for  
the zeroing in of the cross-hairs,  
the aperture's speed, the narrow scope,  
shall I take him? Yes,

but gently.

Steady. Exhale  
as you take the shot—

## Reading Plotinus

Still we take  
so much as given:  
this body, autumn trembling  
in the blood, and trees—  
                                  look up  
into these inversions of lungs exhaling  
leaves, the orange palpitations red-veined  
nervous like anemones, the sky swaying  
so much blue riffled light.

And saying *palmate* does not  
make the alien shapes less unearthly  
Given that air is a fluid current, wind  
exfoliating my face, and the foliage—  
                                  so many constituent parts  
                                  unstitching apart—  
how many leaves torn  
before there ceases to be tree  
so much flesh taken as given?

Darling,  
Even our bodies cannot be taken as given.  
Cells of our scalps building, dying upward into hair  
while the branches arrive  
                                  and arrive  
                                  in the wind  
only to end at leaves and begin  
so many fluttering points  
of departure  
  
we all want  
all we let go

to go on, branch out beyond us  
as the hair grows after the body  
dying and dying  
long into the afterlife—

still the pods in a riot of wings  
let go themselves into shadows  
of shade intolerant trees, so many  
windshields, squirrels, or lack of light. What persists

of all these aggregates building into wholes?

Given, that every cell wants to be more  
a body  
constitutes so much desire,  
and getting what we want  
is getting more want,

can we ask for nothing?

These nights the swinging doors  
of breath in and out—

through the trees  
moonlight opening  
then closing on the far wall  
the carpet the comforter

if even this house ticks and contracts  
in the wind, nothing remains unmoving

in the wash  
of so many flown things  
cycloned and letting go themselves

is this release?

We are here.  
Outside: any given leaf;  
the moment  
a given leaf

drops

## Brood Emergence 1984

The year grandfather fell out of his skin,  
I found a thorax, head, and flightless abdomen  
molted under the winged seeds of the maple trunk;  
an opaque presence standing-in  
where something left, departed, went out—

transparence marking where eyes  
had been eyes, where the molded  
body and wings left  
this cast of itself—casting off  
    the husks holding the shape  
    of what emptied.

The ecstatic stands briefly outside itself.

Standing-in, could self be a hollow  
space filling in the contours of my body,  
a cavity moving through the fluid air,  
while the atmospheric pressures so contain my skin  
that even the mares tales uphold me?

Sun pressed against the pavement.  
Grandfather gone.  
'84 and the maple stood still.  
Forsythias, trimmed, occupied their shapes.  
Patio furniture, while clematis scribbled up the climb  
and the incantations of wings shivered in the leaves.

I held what's left  
of an emergence,  
a mass leaving—  
    this delicate ghost  
    emptied of the years  
        it took  
        to arrive.

## Maitreya

There: just a little to the right, the rib I crawl under, a white elephant seeping into your side. Slow upside down tumble of a fetal tuck. Waiting. As you would have me wait. The stuff of cosmogonic myth: *the* cause behind the off-axle spin of dung carts, pottery wheels, cigarette butts on the fire escape above the rage of traffic stopped. Admit it, you want me. You want me like a wish unspeakably said beneath your breath— the stuff of legend: *as soon as I was born, it's said, I took seven steps, a non-returner*. But all that is simply cause and effect. Without our storylines we evaporate, mere intentions moving toward plots. And so for now there is only waiting. Waiting for unrealized pots to be pulled from actual clay. Waiting. Cart wheels slipping in and out of ruts. Waiting. Dung and traffic down to a single axle coming to a halt. Wait. And the seed upwards into the many branches of its harbored plot. You want me. And not your stories of me. And so I am becoming. The wish of vapor that exits your mouth.

## Alba

First light, and the re-beginnings of beauty  
rise in exhalations from manholes smoking the streets. This city  
gives off its scent, damp like fur, a splayed animal on all fours  
rump pressed up, position of longing.

Too bright for stars,  
blindness and hunger drive us,  
to grasp each other and grasp each other  
in the exhausted air escaping as we try  
to name what we want.

Desire,  
how a single note can open the mouth. Otherwise  
we grieve. Otherwise the stacked metals  
the kicked in glass teeth of the city-scape outlast us,  
as we outlast short tastes of pleasure. What a small faith.  
What a small syllable we swallow, our private consolation.

That is why the head of Orpheus still sings of love  
That is why Gloucester  
leads us, smelling our way to Dover.

We grasp at anything to account  
why in the beginning there was a word that ever spoke of us.  
We are lost children, a falling off from some prior light  
a blue emanation hardened into matter, muscle, calcified bone.  
It is not the pillars of fire and cloud  
we hunger for in the book. It is the bird come down  
its gift of tongues, windows  
bright and silhouetted with foreign mouths  
the room full of speakings.



Yellows explode.  
Nylon reds blow  
out the large mind of the chute  
flowering open overhead

*So quiet,  
You just hang there.  
And still the world glistens.  
The toggles you pull  
pull back: action, reaction.  
Tension. And release.  
It's called flaring. Your speed  
translates into lift.*

feet dangling  
over silos dipped into ground tilled like waves,  
brown and green plots combed into patch-worked grids of ploughed land  
and stitches of country roads holding their pattern together.

the highway with its far stars of windshields and chrome flashes on and off  
into the diminished city, the radio antennas blinking

And from here, the lake stares  
back up at you in full relief,  
an unblinking eye ever widening  
into green lilies, marshes edging blond,  
dogwoods and maples spreading further out  
until the foliage lifts into evergreens.

--whose aperture is this?--

look down,  
into the kayak coming into shore  
over the rush of lily pads, marsh reeds brushing against the hull,  
the smooth wake opening behind the plunge  
and rinse of oars pulling water. Dragonflies clinging to each other  
touch and go lightly on the water's surface—

## Goiter Removal, Photo of

not a person  
under ether and lamplight, but

blue paper framing this  
square of iodined . . . skin? Or

a detached yellow  
window of abstract art?

But hard, isn't it,  
to see swabbed strokes as

mere strokes and  
not attach from elsewhere

terms like *flesh*, *sterility*,  
someone's about to be  
corrupted  
*body*.

So stay back.

The paper masks over mouths, alcohol rubs,  
the white latex gloves say: this close we need  
layers of distance.

So take pictures.

Clogged arteries are  
symptoms of excess. But this—

the dashed line demarcating  
cuts to be made, a line

that could say: *your name*,  
*sign here*—this is  
impoverishment.

You  
will never see this in  
your country. So  
write something.

About the scalpel. About clean  
incisions made in yellow canvas.

Clamps. Packs of gauze, white  
no longer white. The trachea.

We're (going in?)  
cutting open  
a voice.

## River

Were I to wade further in,  
what would it signify to cross over, maybe lose my footing,  
surrender face down in a deadman's float,  
this act of being so wholly taken—could it be  
a kind of rescue?

As a boy I'd hunt fossils strewn  
in the ruins of dry creek beds behind the house  
not for shells but the impressions shells left  
preserved. intact. untouched.

But, the smooth surface of river stone  
coveted for all its remakings: the river's action revising,  
wearing down all semblance of relief.

Is it effacement (our own) we secretly long to touch? Here.  
Hold one. A solid moment of erasure being re-written in your hand.

Where the stones tear glass quicknesses of current  
ripped and thrown to white surf surfing back on itself—such fluid  
damage,  
disruptures, and flashes streaming, discontinuous, but making of their  
breaks continuous current of upheaval—I stick my hand in; a retrieval of  
what?

the marriage and moment  
between extinctions  
and starts.

And being pulled,  
I pull back gripping with my other hand  
the emerged half of this half-submerged trunk, a resistance,  
and challenge to the agitated river and air: to let go is to be  
afloat

## Sleepwalking

Weightless as the current moves invisibly through them,  
    carp white gowns at the edge of sight

    fish dream with their eyes open.  
        sequin scales, clear as cartilage, they glow

    aquatic angels come leaking in with the starfish under  
    the door

    the walls and ceiling waver. when lost, it's good to know oxygen  
    rises to the surface it's good to know  
    which way is up?

where are we if the wreckage of light  
bends every distance every surface in refractions?

    barnacles open on the wall sconce  
wrought iron candelabras oxidize slick with algae, sea cucumbers,  
and particles of rust. the carpet sways and the curtains  
    billow in time with the clown fish poking in  
    and out the anemones reaching from the  
    floor.

Animalcule build a fire corral reef,  
    the smoke detector alarms on the ceiling.

    All surfaces burn to the touch

Don't touch the soft tentacled float  
    of invertebrates through the chandelier,  
    their bodies filling with  
    light.

tetras, schools of them in clouds

of eyes holding their idea together, constellations  
of darting thoughts hovering  
just out of reach

to grasp them

the small net only scatters a frenzy of movements,  
cancels their collected body of sleep.  
And where does consciousness go without  
cohesion?

tiny vertebrates evade and adjust,

the way sleepwalkers gently brush the long corridors and  
stairwells, eyes wide

open in the night, all surfaces  
blindly navigated by touch

## Alba

Here, as the moon, one  
by one, unhooks the  
tangles of the trees  
shadow is more  
indicative than shape as

this line I follow is  
down the v-neck  
of your shirt where

the more the light  
pauses, and the eye  
can rest, the fuller  
the relief.

Here, where my fingers, one  
by one, over clasps  
and tight buttons  
undone, release

—outside the last leaves falling—

the seams of dawn  
light have yet to  
break us into  
our bodies.

For you and the  
tracings of you  
marbled lunar by  
failed streetlight  
come in, I leave

the door cracked just so  
our shapes eliding

as you lean forward, the small  
star of scalp in black  
hair falling over me, and rock.

## Pure Land

But we *are* tied to the road, a cord of pavement  
looped and running just beyond the nose  
of the hood. Everywhere steel dinosaurs.  
Ghost towns of selling post cards of Poncho  
Villa and Medicine Wheels. We strung Tibetan  
flags at Devil's Tower, made bows  
from the Badlands toward Oglala, said prayers  
to free Leonard Peltier. We've come far west.  
Beyond this: the great faults, scooped glacier cold lakes,  
and sea beds folded into Rocky Mountains. But for now,  
this ghost town has a dusty road, a painted jail and saloon  
doors that don't swing, an epoxy cowboy, his arm  
slung over the backrest of a bench, still waiting for someone  
to sit down, grope him, and snap a shot.  
South Dakota kitsch?

Maybe.

But what is a town to do after years of drought,  
the collapsed mill and elevator lifting no grain;  
because here even the railroad tracks stop  
and the one gas pump is always out of order.  
*And where is not the Pureland?* he says,  
pissing on the sagebrush and tall weeds.

Not knowing how many miles  
off course from targets  
circled on the map, we know  
ahead there's more Lewis and Clark,

more billboards, more Corn Palaces,  
more free coffees from Wall Drugs.

And from the Ten Directions leading  
to these weeds, the painted  
bank robber and sheriff peeling under sun,  
destinations arrive before us.

## Alba

Humming birds still gone,  
their plastic flower feeder thaws  
the red sugars iced and dripping  
into pock-marked ground.  
The pendulant sound of water ticking  
the eaves, ice dams relieved and flowing  
in showers of light pouring down  
combs of toothed ice hanging  
jawless before the window.

I could be Jonah looking out this cabin,  
its rafters the ribs of a wooden whale  
opening its square mouth,  
swallowing the blue that fills  
theses empty branches, traceless flights  
of returning geese, thawing marsh  
grasses, larva and grubs rioting into wings,  
the green hum of things unfurling;  
And farther still,  
toward the distant sun-struck shallows  
lake ice dives into blue, the retreating white  
opens an iris of water looking upward blue  
into wider blue. The fish are there  
as they've always been, but rising now  
out of the algaed murk where light slides,  
whole columns of it refracted,  
bending as the crenellating weeds bend.

Throw the window open—  
startled crows lift to every branch  
everywhere the sap rising into blue.

## From Yucatan

*Mi amor,*

I disagree with you: the mind suffers, the body cries out.  
That's why I've come back to this small pueblo, Acanceh,  
where I boxed for the first time. There's a plaza, a few  
Mayan  
ruins, and an *ojo de agua*, around which a cistern is built.  
For just twenty pesos, you say the rosary and wade in  
to where it's said the Virgin Mary had appeared twice  
and the Mayan priests and virgins dove down into the spirit  
world, origin of all this water. Some say it's blessed.  
Others say the sulfur and minerals heal deep within.

But I'm not interested in that.

I see the lame come out lame. The man limp in and limp  
back out. No apparitions of the blessed Mary. I just pay  
the last of my pesos and walk in, let the water fill the space  
of my back.

For the first time in years I can float.

But I wait to sink in this eye of water,  
wait for the hairline fractures of the mind to mend.  
And if one morning I don't float, so be it.  
Let me go down like those virgins with their heart  
cut out, my bruised rib cage gasping. Let me drop  
penniless among the coins and baubles, the obsidian  
jewels and flint daggers of bone. They're still down there,  
you know, far deeper than any man can dive. Whole  
kingdoms of it, and the virgin harems, they're there too. So  
don't worry, Love, all is forgiven and let go. Some days I  
drift face down in  
a dead man's

float and the water is so blue I can feel them: the jades,  
the young women below looking back up at me afloat.  
It is enough now for the mind to mend,  
enough to let the body go unswollen.  
I rise no cleaner. *Con un brazo,*  
*un beso, y mucho amor*

## **First Prayers**

Miles from the lighting, the crash  
still rolling over us , the whip and lash  
of the power lines has stopped. The backslash

spattered with grease, the pilots  
sputter, simmer blue on the range, silent.  
Outside, palm trees fan the husks of coconuts

not downed by the wind. Mangoes drip  
in the breeze as chickens cluck and grip  
the wired coop flipped, nesting on its side.

Two men have died. Four missing, and powerless  
the barrio hangs oil lamps in the windows.  
Six weeks without lights or radio

bathing with buckets under hand pumps,  
spigots gone dry, the stumps  
of candles illuminate the steps;

there, where the rosaries are said  
and the prayers count-off like wax

dropping in syncopated beads,  
the bible read aloud, the needs  
of the hungry, sick, or dead—the pleas

for forgiveness, for the bread, the body  
everlasting *Amen Amen*.

First Homily

in a foreign tongue,  
over candles and vigil sung  
in the language of the Absolute, the One

voice begotten and not made  
by voices chanting from the farther room  
lifts beyond them: out the terrace into the typhoon

falling on the bolo knives,  
macheteed cane fields,

sheets of rain combed down  
corrugated steel roofs,  
two-track and no truck, worn hoofs

clomping through manure,  
as the barrio floods without sewers  
and the mangoes sour.

## **Bearings**

Out on the north shore  
white capped and crashing,  
Lake Superior  
rolls black against  
glaciated rock,  
the reach, grab, and stop  
of water over stone,  
the foam breakers snap  
and lash, snap, gather  
again, and lash at the calves  
and pant legs hitched  
above the knees, the gulls'  
screams drown out  
like the drowned weeds  
crenellating their fans  
and always reaching,  
pulling back, and reaching  
over the driftwood  
debris slimed in greens  
and sanded in the grit of soft  
water. There are comings  
and going lost on a map  
that the compass simply  
won't point to,  
because the pull of True  
North is never true;  
and Dead Reckoning needs  
distance, speeds, time,

and a faintly vectored course  
aligned to some vague  
imaginary destination.  
The Pole Star is no point  
of reference turning behind  
a slate noon sky,  
nor the Southern Cross,  
hunter or great bear,  
and aware that Vega  
is redshifting light  
years away while plate  
tectonics seismically  
drift north,  
relatively off-course,  
welcome to the floating world.

## Repair

A lot has fallen these days, she says. Yellow emanations of leaves  
flourishings of a prior light, dropped sweetness  
down into the rhisomatic undercreepings of roots.

Says here, these are tamaracks, western larch.  
Same tree so many trunks. You can't tell where? At what point does one  
body begin or end?

here, look. this cross-section, epicentered like an old pond.  
a frog jumps in, echoes of rings—deep resonance encircling the pith.  
how the pattern affirms its completions,  
even a tree wills upwards outwards  
towards its own perfections. And, yet  
the signs of so much error:

the amiss the hole of mechanical tissues gone awry  
the black rupture the bull's-eye the marksman hit  
off mark how do you tear through so many zeroes?  
And yet it is there, the scar torn through centuries of  
tree rings left open, left unwhole

mistakes, she says,  
leave us exposed

damage everywhere the nib  
bit through the paper's skin. a wound tearing wide open  
I'm angry says sheet after sheet slashed with marker:  
like small earthquakes on a Richter, electrocardiograms spiked  
with tantrums of the heart. where the sayings ripped through the whole

they say it's chemical, she says,  
some imbalance of his brain salts  
--but on good days the page *is* snow: three rings stacked in black,  
carrot this time and no button nose, eyes colored in coal.  
Small in the corner of the page,  
the far village steeped red, relaxed  
under loop de loops of chimney smoke

In the sky: Bird tracks or  
the encircling letters of a name

even injury seeks closure. look here, she says  
where the trauma mends itself: the scar tying into a hardened knot  
you can tell by the saw burns how much harder it gets

**Of distance and stars—**

what we can see might  
already have perished: never-again bodies

and their bright tracings of being, long  
red shifting light of remembrances.

Were the world empirically clean,  
I could reach out, as I do now,

anyway, unnoticed, and affirm  
the fact of another's length and touch.

**you asleep and**  
all that is not you: the bedside glass  
sipped almost empty by the night air the night stand  
standing up under the lamp the lampshade  
unburdened by light

**Dawn. And the crows unvoice**  
themselves in the stammering leaves,

their unvoicing, itself, in my ears,  
a transference, a kind of touch.

Where do lines around the body  
delineate its being, if even though

empirically not seen, we know  
around your arm the tattooed braid

of wiccan roses bleeds beyond  
the borders of where the needles touched?

**Contact: how the body liminal**  
distinguishes its being from what it  
grasps, holds desperately, at times,  
onto: you asleep

and I who am not you rise  
from the nightly extinguishments

of dream, get dressed, zipping up,  
buttoning in, all surfaces  
of my exposure.

## Vehicles to the Absolute

Lost: the car full of Fleetwood Mac,  
windows down, the sun's lancing heat  
tattooing the skin. Yesterday's gone. No looks back:  
coconut, aloe, faded denims on cracked vinyl seats,

hair and wind snared in rearview.  
Tomorrow's a point somewhere off map—  
So floor it. Ten Directions, the dashes  
one undulant yellow line

that flashes just beyond the hood. Her lashes  
blink against his cheek, reclined

her foot on the dash, her foot out the window.  
"Where to" he'd ask. *Baby, just go.*

Twenty degrees and partly cloudy.  
A wind blows at eight miles per hour east  
across your city in Spain. Donostia.  
San Cristobal. La Valle de Nuria.

*Todavía Te quiero*, I write,  
unsure if I mean it,  
though my hand knows  
the curve of each letter by

muscle memory. Each hour,  
my hand grows still,  
halts at the end of a line like the farmer  
stopped alone in the field beyond my window.

The plowman at furrow's end who turns back to begin again.  
Nudging into the left lane, around flashlights  
frantic in the rain and no cry of sirens,  
the hands grasp at pavements slick

between his shoes, a body snapped off its bones—  
what are you slowing down for, compassion?  
You and your little weekend serving soup kitchens.  
What can you know? Those hands, I saw them.

As if they're still clawing out the poncho  
and floor mats he's covered in . . .  
They won't let go. Someone  
should tell them. *Don't*

*stop.* To the far mountains up into cloud  
happy, settled with the snow  
on douglas fir, coming and going  
with the footfalls, the heel

strikes far and faint as the lone  
scrape of a shovel grows  
louder, vanished into day.  
It is quiet now. The weight

of its hilt resting beside the house.  
But these unbearable tulips sip lightly  
from their vase, beyond the window  
douglas rock in the wind. The color

of absence falls on everything  
and the lake, its blues travel  
so wide and deep where the turquoise  
begins or ends simply does not

matter. Yes, I see you now, housebuilder,  
your scaffolds and ramparts in siege.  
Possessing nothing I could lose,  
happy as news of cumulus arrives

six weeks, and were the world green, I might  
flower white into frost on the window pane,  
faceless, without a name,  
as if this bone were a portal to

some other life, the eyeless sockets  
not staring, nasal cavity inhaling sand.  
In order to begin to see shape  
as shape and not skull propped

against backdrops of buttes and desert land—  
By crafted hand the form empties its death,  
not redrawn, but depicted in wider breadth:  
out of context, the bones open

into measureless depths of desert light.  
The eye scanning across the wall drifts  
and halts on the hallowed-out forms divorced  
from any reference of meaning  
or memory—only shape, only form.  
The delicate curves and suggestion of horns lost  
do not betray the once-living. The beholder  
given wholly to the shapes of art

cannot tell where the vision of the dead  
ends and her own starts. Blink:  
shudders of light pass through  
as if a door opens, and whole regions

behind the eyes shift as the body enters  
space into more space. Brave new world!  
World that has somehow changed with the turning  
the floor, far walls, windowless squares of light—

unblinking flutters of startled moths lift  
and alight: too bright for them the flash  
of opening.

One discolored brick in the wall once  
clung with morning glory and creepers.

Burdock and dandelions push out the cracks,  
going where the wind takes them  
over graffiti scribbles of blossom trumpet and bloom  
as encores of purple climb the downspouts.

It is June, and June choirs to this man  
letting his night drink fall on its sway; the petals  
fill, bend, and fill again giving among  
the molotov bits of glass burned and scattering the alley—

That everything wills its own perfection.  
That the cork of flaming rag is gone,  
That filigreed purples press  
into pigeon colored air over lawns arousing grass—

You wingless street angels  
curled with the pigeons under I-beams  
You antennas of this city ever erecting through your nights  
flightless housebuilders nesting in dream

You migrants, abodeless homes,  
ever wanderers—go forth into the boundless country  
where stalks of corn bow their heads and chant  
as wind sighs through the open mouth

of a tired barn, stunned and leaning into sunset;  
the door hangs like a loose tooth on one hinge.  
No. It was dark between the furrows,  
where the stalks were so tall

only a faint sunlight let in  
and the hush of corn leaf touching wind—  
That was '93 when your body  
bloomed with patchouli on your neck and wrists.

*Look straight ahead, you told me,*  
as you pushed below the barbwire and in,  
*far enough, until you can't tell where you are*  
*until it feels like you're going under.*

*And keep going—*  
The dry earth opening into loam beneath our steps,  
and somewhere, crows cawed around our heads,  
the feathers of night, and I looked back

and watched *Ah mi sol, mi sol*  
out beyond the wheat and cornfields into the west out into  
the wide measureless light of an October dusk falling  
far off and out beyond the edge of the furrows and fields,  
out on the north shore white capped

and crashing, Lake Superior rolls black  
against glaciated rock, the reach, grab, and stop  
of water over stone, foam and breakers snap  
and lash, gather again, and lash at the calves

and pant legs hitched above the knees,  
the gulls' screams drown out like the weeds  
crenellating their fans and always reaching,  
pulling back, and reaching over the driftwood

debris slimed in greens and sanded  
in the grit of soft water. There are comings  
and goings lost on a map  
that the compass simply won't point to,

the pull of True North is never true—  
and dead reckoning needs  
distance, speeds, time,  
and a faintly vectored course

aligned to some vague  
imaginary destination.  
The pole star is no point  
of reference turning behind

a slate noon sky, nor the Southern Cross,  
hunter or great bear; and aware that Vega  
is redshifting light years away while plate  
tectonics seismically drift north,

relatively off-course—  
welcome to the floating world. Sink  
in this eye of water, its aperture  
opening like a portal into the underworld.

I wait for the hairline fractures of the mind to mend.  
And if one morning I no longer float,  
let me go down like those virgins with their heart  
cut out, my bruised ribcage gasping. Let me drop

penniless among the coins and baubles, the obsidian  
jewels and flint daggers of bone. It is enough now  
for the mind to mend, enough to let the body go  
unswollen sinking into its afterlife—

we might feel what the dead feel.  
The Floating World? Not here under sight  
and scope of cross hairs that could snipe  
a bullet between our eyes. Not here where clangs

of machetes ring in the resistance camp hidden  
in cane fields, and all the men in our village are  
there, not heaven, under a trail of cigarette smoke, plotting  
their words: *revolución y libertad!* against

the men who own them in this life, who  
own the plots of land our men will die on  
and be buried, owning everyone  
even into the afterlife—

here is where my *abuela* points a finger North  
And says *There!* We can make it, snipping  
the barb wire and in, playing dead under a canopy of dust  
rumbling down two-tracks in back a flat bed truck.

We'll jump a box car rail  
to the city to the airport and leave  
everything behind us, pared down  
to essential splinters of flesh in baggy clothes.

We will leave everything, enter our plane,  
and rise into cloud cover blue, a thread of contrail  
behind us stitching the split hemispheres North.  
Not born nor annihilated not defiled

nor immaculate no increase nor decrease  
emptiness of no suffering, no cause  
of suffering, no path to lead out of suffering,  
take care of yourself no attainment,

no realization, nothing to attain, and keep going  
no ear, nose, tongue or form,  
no touch or objects, no realm of sight:  
too bright for them the flash of opening.

*Aquí*, he says, here where the blades bit through,

pink kisses of scar tissue pucker the skin  
serrated on his back; long trains of stitches  
railroad his spine. *Aquí*, this corner store  
that's stacked with crates of empty cokes,

he put seven in surgery with his bare hands  
before they stabbed him. *Cuidate*,  
take care of yourself, and he crosses through  
the evening rage of cars and traffic lights.

Beyond the gym, the strikes and body blows  
on heavy bags and gloves still pound in ears  
like blood and fading muscle memories—  
. . . so lovely . . . so gracious  
we hardly feel it . . .