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OUTSIDE IS A DOOR:

POEMS

by

Bridget Carson

B.S. Briercrest College, SK, Canada. 1997

B.A. University of Montana, Missoula. 2002

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

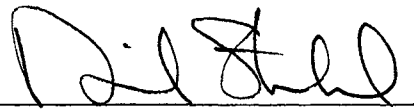
Master of Fine Arts

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OUTSIDE IS A DOOR

Whoever degrades another degrades me.
And whatever is done or said returns at last to me.

Through me the afflatus surging and surging, through
me the current and index.

I speak the password primeval, I give the sign of democracy,
By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart
of on the same terms.

—Walt Whitman

[The psychoanalytic reading of repetition is trauma.]

FAITH

I held it like an edge of rock.
I held it as if it could hold me.
I held it as my capstone.
I held it as my sweeping moon.
I held it in sleep.
I held it as if I had been shaking it awake.
I held it as though it could never break.
I held it shattering.
I held it against sky.
I held it as clouds fell at my feet.
I held it as the birds slipped under.
I held it.
That mattered for a time.

OUTSIDE IS A DOOR

PANTOUM PRIMEVAL

In a few minutes, Walt Whitman will appear undead.
 Mark the leaf-patterned sidewalk, note its cracks,
 these will all be washed in spring rain and release the worms.
 For now, cars come and go whistling over wet asphalt.

Mark the leaf-patterned sidewalk, note each of its cracks,
 imagine offering a great love and the earth refusing it.
 For now, the cars come and go whistling over wet asphalt.
 And could they hear me I would tell them:

Imagine offering a great love and the earth refusing it,
 the night tree crosses the daylight street
 and could they hear me I would tell them:
 without other cost than breath

the night tree crosses the daylight street
 storms rise behind the mountain's head out of reach
 without other cost than breath
 I would take earth's darkest rain in this fishless hour.

Storms rise behind the mountain's head out of reach.
 Here is a map of our country:
 I would take earth's darkest rain in this fishless hour
 and not a breath comes from beneath the sheets.

Here is a map of our country:
 A raven—the world is spinning around—
 and not a breath comes from beneath the sheets.
 Is death the stranger on the street? Say hello,

A raven—the world is spinning around—
 all the bulbs here are frozen in snow. You can go.
 Is death the stranger on the street? Say hello,
 in the room women come and go talking of Michelangelo

All the bulbs here are frozen in snow. You can go,
 man of frost, what lights your unlit lamp?
 In the room women come and go talking of Michelangelo,
 a slow drip over stones.

Man of frost, what lights your unlit lamp?
 And when we speak the same phrase together:
 a slow drip over stones
 we commend into the wind grateful arms grateful limbs

And when we speak the same phrase together:
 profession of humility. The polished wedge.

we commend into the wind grateful arms grateful limbs
 a violent rain now splays its fingered soul across the tree's stiffened folds.

Profession of humility. The polished wedge.
 What comes? The fog from manholes rises silver-tipped and raw
 a violent rain now splays its fingered soul across the tree's stiffened folds
 and from their poverty they rose, from dry guitars

what comes? The fog from manholes rises silver-tipped and raw
 A little to the left, in the firmament foretold, I see —
 and from their poverty they rose, from dry guitars
 all before the mind wakes, behind shades and closed doors

A little to the left, in the firmament foretold, I see —
 the strings of sleep lift up in grass, yawn, and reach
 all before the mind wakes, behind shades and closed doors
 and yet from everlasting to everlasting age

the strings of sleep lift up in grass, yawn, and reach
 to the silence of one who sets us dreaming
 and yet from everlasting to everlasting age
 the lonely art is bent in graceful arcing purple weeds

to the silence of one who sets us dreaming.
 In a few minutes, Walt Whitman will appear undead.
 The lonely art is bent in graceful arcing purple weeds.
 These will all be washed in spring rain and the worms released.

THE FIG TREE WITHERED BY JESUS (AFTER D.H. LAWRENCE)

I love you, fig tree
 in figgy withery brilliance
 you have withered the lips of Jesus
 in your withering

by your withering
 men have gone on to move mountains, I say to you,
 all manner of mountains
 most divinely evil mountainous hegemonious mountains
 thrown upon the earth in masterful terseness

furthermore your darkening
 further darkens the hearts of the faithly people (particularly the Americans)—
 this is the light of the fig tree
 slight pithy lighted darkness

shrinking you shrink the fastness of the earth
 its hold on the mountains
 on us

the wisdom we had heretofore trusted was cowardice, the leaper—
 thus:

we are at war
 fumbling about the earth for our eyesight

our figginess is measured
 in withering
 in shrinking
 in kowtowing to the command

his hand in withered brilliance
 casting a numbing shadow
 planting the swirling breeze with poison

I cough up your figginess, cough and breathe it in
 I have figgy lungs, gnarled knotted woody lungs
 my breath is altered elementally
 I smell like black woody rottenness
 my kiss infected with the bitterness
 of that brilliant hand
 oh wicked fig tree you were not wicked
 in the beginning

it was merely the wrong season
 for figs.

SOCCER FIELDS, FORT MISSOULA

The flight of the players
counter-weighted

shifting through a century

over clawed earth
the foot dreams

lifts the stampede

a faded line of outbuildings
washed from view
like ink in sunlight

here is learning war
is never forgotten
here are birds

living in underbellies
tossing shins at shins

here is a flat rock
cast out over flat water
passing through a mirror

sun caught in cleats sings
overloads the stiff pines

moves through treetops

a lemon sliced open
on a pale knee-cap

so many haunted athletes
wanting to fly

to find the answer kept
in a ricochet

in a touch
on that uprooted

flash of day.

MY ENCOUNTER WITH A DAVID WILSON PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN
DONE IN A POORLY LIT STUDIO IN MEXICO

The portrait drank the room,
poured it down its throat and walls
became a woman.

The pale light took the only chair
slumping in the edges,
leaving two eyes
to look me in the face,
crouch before me.

Then a breeze scattered
the dust. This ran off down the street
and brought the pale sky against me.

TO THE PRESIDENT AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA

What is this about a boat?
You have your hands in everything.

It's a joke you know? The boat.
I would have wasted less paper,

riled up the legion in that pig,
driven its prayers into the lake.

It's damn near too much hope
for one hawk. Just caught in the sun

is all. Wishing for rain
for fucking days. The mice are bent

around the nails in the deck boards,
bent around the mop and the black

water in the bucket, bent around
every hole you dreamt up.

THE ADVENTURES OF A POEM

"It's a cold day," my poem says,
looking back at you.
"Yeah," you say, hands in your pockets.
The world yawns.
My poem feels it — catches it
like a cold — here is where
my poem leaps out of itself.

TALES OF A BOTCHED FALL FROM THE BALL TURRET OF A B-17 "FLYING
FORTRESS" WWII BOMBER

Enemy fire came once when I spilled the milk. I derived an equation from the experience.

They were shocked later to find that I knew what I knew. Stepping foot on the moon—that's nothing! Try stepping out of a bubble. Your knees don't know how to leave your chest.

I saw the world with clouds over its face. I saw umbrellas descend on it like pepper. Everything below wanted to eat me. The earth hurled up its salt. God was on its side no matter what side I was on.

I see them all staring upwards. Waiting for a falling star.

Depressions left on my brain limp down into my legs. The stinging nettles in my feet are waking my legs again, for breakfast. It's the simple things that get to me now. The blood lines race ahead like rats. Buzzing in the telephone lines connected disconnected.

You bastards can't get me now. No one can get me now.

Involuntary. Like a twitch. Sign up with your draft number in hand. The ticket-master general says your conscience does not object. You'll be hog-tied and thrown in a cold bath on the other side of here. No matter which way you look at it, it's all down there. Can't take anything with you when you go.

Leave the rain in the sky, the crossfire that eats away at clouds, the beautiful spirals of the bombers dancing back to earth. Leave the fear you lock inside your head. Leave the words you repeat to make yourself calm. None of it's real after this. The language you learned in this room will no longer be language. You will have food, cigarettes. A shave at twelve. No one will ever again know you. Welcome to the witness protection plan. Recess is at noon.

SEVEN ABNORMAL SONNETS FOR EMBRACING THE UNDERWORLD

1

a balloon whistling goes off down the hallway
to see the end of town
catching it off guard, the cat at its tail
mountain air on the mountain undone
is there something there beneath me?
calling up the lake's charm, say, silver breath—
the patch of light
 makes my eyes light
the smiling guest, don't fuck this up yet
but I'm not the only one
the counter moons clockwise
behind the breastworks of otherwise
trimming the singing oceans til closing time
you are here as well, dear ghost

2

before night falls lets find ourselves
in bottles
folded in a ribbon
folded in a current
wherein a fish coddles
its own eye
like it is only a socket
names, yes, the house is yours, I guess
that we come to with our eyes bracketed shut
I am only a blank space
where from I can view myself
in myself
in now before the glass walls
are buried in the rush

3

better than ketchup
this night sauce
the moon is fastened to the table, must
 be removed
leaves the false wood
 leaves the chalk from lips
speckled eggs peppered
the salt on the ankles of shepherds

fair bus-cart
 rinsed song
and buttons to mask the empty eye holes
a part of you a part of me
only this singing

4

a godhead

in a pair of stockings
rises from the wedding band

to choke off

the life of the finger
from here it's all a matter
of missing the point

each handshake

comes with a hammer
enduring revival lifts

its head like a puppet
and eternally yours

time is money

5

breath, make room

enough to curl up in
as a cat up against a curved neck
where a circle can make itself last

if love could make love
it wouldn't be named Lack

or Longing
what is this but a shove?
call it fucking because it is fucking
bed down for the night, breath
here is where you have
bent round one another
circles inside of circles

6

sanity crawling up the walls
do you believe it?
its not like it's hinged on some secure
structure

everlasting...
the weight is gone
on the run from vast authorities
fleeing the horizon of its origin
seizing, on thin legs
run all you like from my hands
beside you like your own arm
the invisible paths of Frankenstein's flight
these streets
the cracks I fall into

7

In the glass is February
 is the room's natural ability
 to construct itself,
 to throw the white
 at the walls, at fragility

you and I standing up,
 looking back
 lifting the pinned light
 from the glass case, from the green
 that isn't there, that we have only seen
 in movies, in the straight lives
 of movies, in the bleating world
 regulated by the dead shepherd

BOOK OF RIPCORDS

BALL TURRET GUNNER SERIES

A bird

wide awake on heroin, winged out
 climbing
 wheels into bright-eyed traffic
 hit his head
 one too many times
 behaves on the doorstep like a two year old

he sees with a clarity you can't arrest
 for instance,

you're the one in the holding cell.

Nightcap

dawn the least pill

Right, right, right apple
 it's Rook
 play poker with us
 to the clapstamp

off to trains

so wild the roar is not the wind's

a bridge,

somewhere, wide awake, you'll come to it
 keep coming to it

it's interesting, the degree to which pain obscures one's vision

causes one to read the manuscript in a negligent manner

raids

the truck's hissing eyes

coming through the apartment window

cutting us off at the waist

they take our heads

toss them in the back

where the hum in absolute dark

rattles the birth of our mothers

we cannot stand in here

having run off with our last legs

it fits between the eye sockets this

can touch the metal mind

it's a matter of forgetting really

matter of forgetting

And inside the houseflies begin to lose their minds. White wall folding on a white wall. A blue bedroom blue. A hen framed in sun. Apples peck holes in the magazines. Take a bite out of time. Sink into the dirt on the floor. Go unrecognized among the dog hairs. Live like animals. Outside is a door.

This is a shopping cart.
Rest your feet.
Cry out at all those who pass by.

UP FROM UNDER SHIP

Begin with a crash of apples.
A cart at hilt a mess of horses.
Trust in men a world of.
Torn is truer than tremble.
Tittering on scotch.
That such is then.
Such a world of men we are truer in.
Bluer for it than whales skipper.
At the helm hemmed skittering dark in.
Flashing tail, save bright stars for underskin.
In tow, the knotted purple.
Enough to drown in.
The hatch then this.
A drunk on a toe. Purple in tow
in the underskin. Skin under and breath.
The boot sank, stinking of breath.
A mild toss in the skinunder world to be frank.
Frank then is who we are
to thank
for the shoes.

I knew from my childhood you would arrive. Why else did I
hold up a pencil. You were the seeing one. The one who could
bear me, bent like silken weed. Fish were caught among you.

Winter howls at the train. Desperate for clean water from the kitchen faucet. Is my inner life at last leeching into the pipes? The city will replace the water main and I will be among the dispossessed.

29 days of stone tiles going numb. My footsteps, the elevator springs settling. It is tired here, feeling up walls with a severed thumb. I stuff paper into the typewriter and run off down the long road, pass through the tree line, lose sight of myself.

The sprinkler head eats the single crow. Now I wait for a hundred crows to come and land in the yard. They will tell me what your face looks like.

The rough palms of a farmer press out
into the fields, flashing
metal sides, cutting the sunlight
at shin-height.

These leaves will rush off in autumn
to other eras, filling in the cavemouth,
locking up the spiny brush.
Where will you be?

Wired milking hand, keeping the bucket steady.
Good, here is somewhere to vomit.
And you are not my horseman
just a shadow of a former leap
I knew how to dispel, salted
tying myself in knots —suffocating leaves
twirling in the sunlight
like a headless ballerina
without eyes to see the rooms,
who goes in and out of them,
what crawls up those walls. The heads
will roll when you come out of it,
standing on two feet—

Through me twenty years have passed
and I am gone—a flash you never see—
less than a seed in a wind.
A child comes, picks off a pod.
I already know there is nothing inside
and yet the sunlight
and the child opening it,
pressing it to the bridge of his nose,
pressing into open air, ghosts.

There's room in the alley for rotting milk, for prunings and
browned maple leaves, for rotten apples to be tossed. And all
this time away from planning Christmas.

Cream in the sleeves of sandmen, awaiting a breeze that will
blow them into thin air. They are ghosts aren't they? A kind
of limbo meant for the lower classes. To be waiting for a
breeze you can drink. A breeze full of buses going elsewhere.
Out of harms way into a neverland you never quite reach. A
breeze full of heavy limbs is coming. Anything that floats
floats by us now. Our eyes are tired of fighting sleep. Bags of
sand tossed against the ocean.

Missing a man missing a shirt. A sleeveless dirge, the car
plucks up pebbles from the beach. This corner is where the
wind comes in. Alters the arrangement of the world's edge. It
will never look the same again. Missing man, you keep coming
back.

A fish will wear out your eyes. Leave them on the shores of mountains, leave them for combs along the bottom. Set them up on driftwood. Put them into bottles. When they reach the ocean you'll pull up in your car and rub them back in.

Pre-soaked navy beans stuffed into Levis, acid washed, shot with bullet holes, worn at the knees, brought to a boil with chopped garlic. American as anything.

Just off the beaten path the sage brush parted its hair to one side, said it wouldn't lie, or chase the cows back out. The farmers cleared it. And the wind carried it away.

In the best of all stretches of stretched out sand the sun bearing down and tanks beginning to roll in, pound stakes in the ground, pitch tents, drive heavy machinery in to repair the heavy machinery driving in the heavy machinery.

REVEILLE

ELEGIAC PHRASES, A.M. JANUARY 3, 1920

we got to the root stop
ugliest thing youll ever

see stop knocked us flat
stop society preserved

stop power protests its
own extinction stop it was

good for a dream end

THE DISSONANT AIR: OR MAY DAY! MAY DAY!

there is nothing left

but to fling your life against it
a moth at the glass

out to sea
squares of light, bewildered

the sinking
inner world

I called home

a fly in the tunnel

in fish scales

to falter at piles of fruit at the market, to fall
like splitting papers

the surf coming in

a broad hand, blank coat
eyeglasses to peer forever into

dissemination in endless unclear terms

why not a bird?
come calling it the end

MOAT

my way around you is around my way in need of boots silver coins a thicker skin takes you
head-on my way by breath by ear by way straight through

this is all the difference this is difference finding nothing by the lack of walking by the excess
of walking I know how to be different

you are in my way water keeping me farther from America perfect proper never far America I
could trip on you could drown in you you are only enough in which to drown

DISINSTITUTED

halved cantelopes
in the grass filling with rainwater
we cannot be rational nor discern symbols
from this ability we have been severed
flooded with bicycles

something like a bloom
tells us we are whole

YEARS AFTER THE LAND FAILS TO SPEAK

The sound of your laughter no longer resounds. You were my friend until you were not my friend. Gathered into one

moment, negligent silence rose up like a cedar forest, its mouth forming an open room I fell into. It took time to find the single

window. And I had to lose enough of myself to crawl out. But look at these stars.

MY FISHERMAN (AFTER JUBILATE AGNO)

I take this early light as a sign of good fishing. Though I do not fish, but have seen others fishing.

I take the ocean.

I take not the apocalypse as my reference point any longer, for it comes to me from the past.

I take the straight woman, who may or may not be Eve Sedgwick, who calling herself queer has missed the obvious opportunity for resistance of straight privilege by getting married.

I take birds.

I take God in private for I have been banned from the knowledge of that name.

I take the wind.

I take darkness.

I take rain falling in trees now to remember the redwood forest in California.

I take the banana slug.

I take rain falling on a soccer field.

I take a sail there. Red, orange, yellow and blue.

I take a cup of coffee.

I take white parachutes falling in a swarm over France.

I take rain falling at the foot of the guillotine.

I take the color of roses.

I take now the inside of my house only and stop looking outside.

I take capitalism which separates me from both the beginning and the end.

I take seven minutes for an intermission.

I take the misspelling of Carl Olsen with joy.

I take my sacrifice to be the refusal of contentment. Screw Paul and his letters.

I take my cat's way of chirping back at the birds he sees from the window to be a desire for friends. Though it is probably more about blood-lust. God bless Nathan Bartel.

I take what I can, do not be mistaken.

I take what I can and name it whenever possible.

I take the name Reinaldo Arenas as my fisherman.

I take the intellectual profession of respect for Castro to be insulting the name of my fisherman.

I take for my fisherman's sake a habit of cursing at Castro.

I take one thing for another in this way and do not mind the loss of certain things.

I take loss to be a part of movement.

PORTRAIT

In the sink bent over is the rat race. For good for evil for nothing but catfish floured and panfried. The measles have left the skin for Pittsburgh. Putting in the pipes was the last thing we did right.

And in boiled canning jars making a face dancing in the rain making a day of it for the love of it just for the gist of God and it goes on.

And in the milky way we saw ourselves the only way we could.

And in the waking miles from house to sky I lifted out the rat. It smelled like heaven.