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Brood Emergence 1984

by

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Date
I would like to thank the AWP for selecting my poem, *Reading Plotinus*, for the 2003 Intro Journal Award as well as *The Journal* in which the poem will appear in the spring 2004 issue. I would also like to thank Joanna Klink, Greg Pape, Patricia Goedicke, Stephanie Strickland, Malena Morling, Paul Deitrich, and Robert Baker for all their academic help and poetic guidance during my years at the University of Montana. Lastly, I would like to thank my lovely wife, Nina, to whom I dedicate this book. *May all beings be at ease...*
Table of Contents

Featherweight 3
the eyes, a passage 4
Reading Plotinus 6
Brood Emergence 1984 9
Maitreya 11
Alba 12
Footage 13
Goiter removal, photo of River 16
Sleepwalking 19
Alba 21
Pure Land 23
Alba 25
From Yucatan 26
First Prayers 28
Bearings 30
Repair 32
Of distance and stars-- 34
Vehicles to the Absolute 39
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—

transparency 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.
Footage

Tecumseh '96. No sound of engines humming. No sound of cabin pressure exploding as the hatch opens to daylight, blue sky, the view zooms out the drop zone over far edges of atmosphere. Then zooms in: The jumpsuit. Tight packages of gear rigged to his torso and upper back. No one talks.

This high, this fast, language rips past the ears. Speed builds a barrier to the spoken. He signs us: Peace, the middle finger, thumbs up, Hang Loose.

A green light above the door says Go. The camera jostles.

steps out with him,
out the hull into the relief
of a map tumbling brown, blue,
brown again, then blue

—look away—

till the eye fixes,
and the landscape holds
frayed under a thin haze of oxygen. And see,
how the screen floats with us: rotations. barrel rolls. tracking moves. the suit dragging upwards off our limbs.

Facedown,
It is the force of friction that slows us, faith in the resistance of air. This is extreme: (that’s why we’re watching)
held to nothing, dislodged
the way the mind lets go behind its lids, flits into rapid eye movements some people just freeze
the altimeter still counting. But quick, hurry
pull the ripcord—
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
covered 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,
disruptions, 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 icicled and dripping
into pock-marked ground.
The pendent 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,
it’s 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 backsplash
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
clopping 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 steepled 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.

Todavia 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: revolucion 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. _Aqui_, 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 ...