Dissembly | [poems]

Catherine A. Meng

The University of Montana

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DISSEMBLY

by

Catherine A. Meng

B.A. The College of Santa Fe, 1997

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

2000

Approved by:

Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

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Host

Rung from slow cadence. Steel struck
from the furnace. Glass blown like the bird
took to its form. Flares up, takes rot, goes hard at the core.
Stifled crust in the throat, in the catch
where tendon is caught by the ball, by the pin, by the only equation
agitating orchard leaves in a wind absent of end.
Busy counting strengths, nations crouch in the nightblades.
Hear the abacus clicking with skulls?

Or could it be eiderdown ruffling or undersides of girl feet
crossing the dark like a floor?
Matchstick hymns fall from the bracken.
Nests are nick-knacks arranging the loft into sound:
*choir us, choir us, times us just once by the square root of stone.*
This next one's for the rook keeping score on his talons, then dead
as broke fruit in the dust. Shadows slink out from under the ranges.
A sparrow takes to its company as a man takes to his army,
& a multitude of parasites weep thanks like shorn glades
over the plates of their food. Ahem.
Don't choke on the sacrifice or you'll displace the lamb.
Messengers are looming something—
something even the holy don't know of yet.
I don’t know why I told this story. I could just as well have told another. Perhaps some other time I’ll be able to tell another. Living souls, you will see how alike they are.

—Beckett
June Extraction

As if a starling, its scent was one concocted:
this, opened into many rooms.
We chased ourselves as lacquer,
spun sights from the slide of passage,
thumped deep into the lake of it—

you couldn't name the time of day to save your dog.

Reasons for anything will swarm.
Thus, I pile our underthings into the icebox,
we dress & gush all season
erect & rushing to our cubicles
just in the nick of deadline.
A stream of rice ticks multitudes into formica.
I rubble to find the consequence

the downbeat

the chink of artifice in our brief flight.
The Sum of All Parts Equals
The Sum of All Parts

I sell the last of my uniform to a crooked fork of a woman
who deals leopard print & faux-like things to college kids.
We replace the other half of light by pointing out faces in the imitation wood,
our pillows smelling like our heads, respectively.
I am overrun by ampersand
& you are done by dusk & sore in the feet.
For "happiness" we long-divide our time by car rides & catechism,
looping the slow letters over themselves:

lace in triplicate

until we are both made bleary by absorption.
The Odds

Cold-clanged & separated by the manifest destitute
you wake the dead to find you are among them.
From a fire escape you count regrets on the skyline’s abacus
& salt your hand to smooth the swill & gulped ignite.

I spend my sentence as a mistress.
I spin my words into a ruse of unstressed.
Stressed, I dress-rehearse the johns & janes
until we’ve memorized how to forget our lines.

Love has gone electronic, but ours has always been tectonic.
I reread your letters, especially those that say
I’ll win a million dollars if I buy three magazines.
Prayer for Deliverance from Doubt

She can taste those wings of eiderdown, the lacquered tears flaked from your face, the scent of chrysalis shattered into bloom.

My days vanish in brushfires. Emptiness abhors me. Switch of tail, I bore. I bore.

If only to show which clasp to release which latch she'd be through.

Light each feather on these atrophied wings, light the grid as it should be, each to each the sum of our parts defining our parts—

it caught an edge & rode the draft, took to it like a house—
touch down, on the cloud of a cataract eye.

The chafe of street sign steel in updraft, her rawness an audible backlash against your (made-up) ocean's foam. Where those the waves rilling which made her hang up her harp?

The gift you bestowed upon the wasps shall be returned. She will bring you those concentrical hollows & crown you. She will weep black like the poppy, spilling night at your feet. She will recognize you! She will serve you! She will cash in creeks full of fish for the hymn that you choose.

My arms are full with weathered branches, cracked & bundled to my chest for burning. Even coals will sight the ashes for your warmth.

Trick & flit. Align your frame behind the gloaming. Maim the whores & knaves, render me barren.

I am like the owl of the ruins & I have nowhere to go but the gully of her (reported) wake.
Direct Address

The absence from the sky illuminates this glass
full of roses. Outside, weeds erupt beneath the hanging wash
hammocking in the half-breeze & this unfastening light.
Breakfast is cheese rinds & tea.
Today it is brie & earl gray.
When the spine of the book cracks she decides it sacred
& slips, twists, so I am scared which is sacred
looking back at itself through a surface of glass.
And in the mirrors, we watch for gray.
We watch for elevators, their jealous tides washing
the surface into new heights of sea. She was high on the tea,
steeped too long on the light,
steeped on contingency, which is light
& its unnerving absence, because what we cannot see is sacred.
How steam rises, gracing the roses with the breath & the scent of tea
fogging into existence, distance decided by glass.
Even the floorboards go quietly, asleep in the wash
of an echo, its returns going gray
at the edges, like her hair at the temples, gradually gray.
When there was no light,
when the dishes had been washed
& stacked into the darkness, the sacred
pressed themselves to the mirror’s cold glass.
She turns the leaves of tea

with my fingers I turn the leaves of tea
& in that blindness we decide to lay.
She imagines the library’s floors into frosted glass
so we watch the feet cross above us, down aisles of light
we measure the pace of the sacred,
how it slows & then stills to a silence, we wash

this sky & its patterned evasions washing
over the silence, through the steam from the tea
to the other side of sacred
where we gather lilies & assign every sound a shade of gray.
Shade talking darkly to its light,
whose breath is that, fogging the glass?

From the glass her glance travels over watercolors washed
& strung like light across lawn, like steam churned up from tea
into the white sky, depending on asphalt to determine us sacred.
Home Repair

Found myself bent, church-like before the brickwork examining mortar faults in the half-light. Geese had done things to the sky that day so it was muddled, as if a rain had fallen but creased because it hadn't. My neighbor

was sawing something like decision on the other side of the fence. We exchanged recycled facts, they flew from our lips erratically questioning their own credibility.

My knees were deep in the sludge of a rain that didn't happen.

Bill returned to sawing through the evening & I continued patching cracks, both of us focused, folding the dusk into origami cranes, careful to decide which end should be bent to represent the head of a bird.
Ode to One In One Thousand

How you are prayerful
from conception.
How your coat
is chosen: red
poppy of wedding day,
white as fine
china at a wake,
blue as both
directionless extremes,
a green wheel turning.
Your perfect square
slid from the rice paper stack
belly exposed.
You are not folded
but measured & creased,
triangle, triangle, open mouth
diamond same
to each side,
thin kite ribbing
the shape of the sky.
I love you when
you are pronged
& prone as if
to expose
your quick needle wit
before your neck
is chosen,
before your wings
are turned down
like banana skin
& arched against the brace
of the index finger
& the flat pressure of thumb.
I love you best
when you are two
erect tails with
two broad wings,
two ends to the same story
both ready to take flight,
when you are about to be
bird, self
before it is I,
slender sadness,
the tears of things going on
without pause,
the moment
before you
are inevitable!
A thought becomes prayer
only when released
from the mind.
The head is a tail
unbent until
the tail is recognized.
This is your one decision:
how one end
is always perfect
by comparison,
your one flaw
tucked into your sturdy neck
& pinched
into your frontlet,
you've known
from the first alignment
the first horizon
dividing earth from sky
that holiness is
folded into
you, the shape of it
alighting in the hand.
Counter-Clockwork Elegy

I.

All afternoon ice has been unfusing in the mild & algae
fastening its new scent to the occasional wind, so when she slips
near the edge weakened further by cattail razors we hear what gives,

but find a mouth. The echoed crack dissolved
in the pond's green-edged back lap becoming
where she once was. Then the absence of geese

V-ing the overcast, their honk & response pocks divots
in the atmosphere, where we want dusk-calls to decide
the depth of the sky. She was sure she'd heard the sun

before it lit the panes of oak, she turned
toward the rushing where new flies wrung their hands with prayer.
That was before they discovered

their wings, & turned minor lassos in the coolness. Like sinners
unsure of our legs we test how close we can get, drop
to our bellies & worm toward the core. Dusk is a cargo train

rung through husks of ribbongrass & a dog bark—
how it disappears & leaves a fossil in the air. The water there was deep.
The water there was shallow.

She skidded out on her face
trailed by black weeds wound round her ankles. And toward it
we drag our dripping forms.

II.

There are no myths left to pillage but the one
which you are reading. It begins with a sweater frozen
in snow & ends with a plea. It is dense enough

to locate a range of desires, but also accessible
like a snow bank on the corner of Mass. Ave. & _______ St.
Because the human heart trained on Hollywood

will find an over-bred dog endearing & inevitably melt
into high octane puddles hued by the spectrum.
Contemporary man, I love you like my own.
The snapping turtle was practically dead center
in the road, something to get beyond, a barely living obstacle
foreign so far from the pond. Clefts of shell
missing & one eye-socket buried in multiples of atrophy.
It was a day for saviors & we were willing to decide this
a half-blind mistake
like asking a namelessness forming in a doorknob to please,
come back to bed. We haul her out with a hockey stick,
steaming & spitting lungfuls of pond at our feet. We shut him up
in the darkness of the car trunk with a bag of fertilizer & a rake,
we start with the sleeve & dig it out, petrified cable nit
excavated from a snowbank, rigid as the dead are blue.

In the clot colored overgrowth of upstate New York an albino frog
springs to the dark pond at the sound of footfalls. This is more
than a rotting dog body by the tracks, this is something more
than rust-sonorous oil barrels shocking autumn
with their botched interpretations. This is misplaced brilliance
alive in the ribbongrass, speaking to the others from the mud shoals,
hatched like a holy thing in a den of leech-eaten shades. A flaw
scissor-kicking the surface toward a center
where fear stops even the free & the brave knee-deep.

Tonight like all the others, important men will toss through dreams
of what they could not destroy Ceiling fans
turn above their pale bodies repeating the inaudible refrain of failure: silence,
& wives medicated to sleep soundlessly beside them. Dawn
assembling regrets on the windowglass yet to happen. Again, the drain
defies itself, rushing counter-clockwork to the end of its own eye.

There is no starting point on the table before you.
In the garden defrosting, there is a dime from last fall,
a question unmasking
its currency of misdemeanors, flashing in the weedgrowth.
Coyotes disorient the dog, their wails
methodically herd him to the ditch where they feast on his last breath.

Above this the sky opens where stars displace each other
with their brightness, calling blindly across the collapsed night.
Dogs these days are over-bred
to be dumb & loveable, much as the human heart
chasing the sound of train selfishly convinces itself
I live. I live. I live. If you read the pond like artifact, read the glyphs
left in ice, you would see we search this long
to save ourselves. We search all the empty spaces
& eventually we are deceived.
Doing Time At The Space & Time Laundromat

Something helioscopic, undoubtedly.
The under-erotic plunge into the incessant.
Stationary rote on a linoleum basis.

Spin three nickels, & watch which odds leave the tabletop. Indecision is like a Laundromat on a cold morning, minus the two extremes.
The sensory emulsion in the doorway is the true self saying its goodbyes before it is born.

Something bass-heavy & barely airtight.
A gravity of sound, replenishing doubt with more heart,
more dog song,
more far-spangled hammer to the tune of harpsichord.

This is religion, revealing recklessness to a thirsty lot of thieves.
This in un-oiled oven hinges, singing above the surfer shouting "blasphemy!" & standard grays of blame.

Our imperfectitude, is our craving for something unsymmetrical, is reason beyond this phonetic cleansing & venetian blind.
Perception’s Fauna and 

A kingdom spies you from the reeds & waits the day you’ll claim them. 
Routine has fed your atrophy & cataracted your horizon. 
This think, as they say, is for the birds.

[&]

These parapets stake where our blowzy ends. 
Each surrogate on ask of which edge
you wish most to explore. 
From the first we’ve known which hammer should break which glass from your paraffin. 
How you move to wet your tail, & the young who blindly come to nurse

we are wide & thwacking. 
Trafficking untracked paths through sluice & snow.

Feeble witness, coward’s crag of butter 
stenchy conductor to the misappropriate you’ve over threw your due & overdraft your ass. 
The road ends at the valley of the broken ear. 
Each buck has stopped to gnaw your easy walls to sod.

[&]

You tire from watching the walking. The bowling green. 
Iridescence clipped close to the chaffed stubble of regeneration. You wish yourself a sickle, 
a gleamy arc to thrash this yonder for your own.

See how quickly we mate, multiply & show signs of mutation? 
Arrested, you sweat. 
Exhausted, you toss deluded & dissuaded by the face of your own ruse. 
These species are yours to chart, yet you contort like kindling wrung before the canon.

We shed & shed. 
This cantaloupe of Sunday will only wait so long. 
Stop or be swallowed by the double-takes & recurring Thursdays.

[&]

Embraced in our spindle, you haggle extremities with a sailor’s virtue,
see how gracefully you dissipate into the ebb

Nothing could be rendered as nothing as this:

fallacies, a motley recipe of sight displaced & rectified
skitter with their kin.

[&]

The sardonic locksmith works like a moth on this night.
A primed assembly of guilt & flit
he casts his fortune——-

bellowed by the destinationless drift & gaggled in peripheral alertness

a rice grain waits to be perceived.
Windshields are tin work in street lamp glaze.
Linearism is in remission & he is gripped tight to its short straw.

[&]

Our bother, hollow be thy name.
What is now immaculate
is one truism among the visions.
The roped striation of anti-scape

separates into a chutney, staticed milk-cold & cataracted home.

Wade through nickel glare & refraction's bleating,
Pitch a red-winged blackbird onto the empty staff.
Slurp sacrament from this chipped echo:
I am thirsty & I thirst.

[&]

A solemn task invents itself between us.
We find it beautiful, mis-figured & arrayed with quietude.

Hadn't there had been a valley of grain,
miles to toil
& all the directions hanging a likeness?
Three cottonwoods horizontal their branches

alongside a dry bed of perception.
We welcomed the search.
In the cups of our hands we catch this quick like fleeting.
Botched Translation

I must winter my need to translate the lime growth
fizzling the shapes of trees.
Exposure through pried blinds.
Or how the alley transforms, puddled night-like and gravel gagged.
Once more longing has gone to the jump of each clasp come undone,
as I jimmy the words from their recesses.
I'm still wondering
on how the boy swung the golf club.
Because it's more angled and Chinese than
I'd ever imagined a stroke could be.
I've diagnosed these eyes broke,
so I maim the tongue to fit the sight.
We are all aslink and wanting from our windows,
kaleidoscope passed rigid in a failed attempt to share design.

I think if the wind has a voice, it doesn't sound like wind chimes.
A Song for Lost Bones

His sour whisper fogs your ear
while drinking hot-lips of the new Trinity
& sucking long on the ghost.
You'd prostrate before that smoke-stank beard.
To be sleepless in his stench, you would give up all your sheafs
of crudely rendered symphony.

Lillian, Jean, Imogene & Pidge,
a soulless lot of sluts they were
prudes in sweater sets.
--See, the man's true love was loss & them girls just filler,
some form to want at, in a dark theater.
I'd guess they were brunette.

He would drink his mind to sauce with you.
& you would scale trees & recite Yeats at the same time.
Henry, which graveyard claims your marker?
'Cause it's all been forest since you've been found.
I Nervous Twitch To Find Out What I Know

A pintle for your thoughts?

A circle for the feminine.
A rabble of arrows for thine own aggression.
Whose hinge holds the two?
I'm diagnosed by what the penstrokes show.
Some whimsy for your time? Shall I shame
to say I read pollenwog in awe?
I may.
I stumble across the mothed smell of certain men
left on the skin long after right.
The culch of circles undulate their own divide.
And the arrows?
Of course they direct their gaze.
A nickel for your tocks?
A sickle for your flocks?
And the de-clawed cat I've watched

sharpen absence on a deadened log?
He belongs to the kids who grow marijuana in clay pots
all along the sill that gets the sun.

I'll discuss my need for the Byronic Man to be my savior.
I'll admit each cell's ease into erase.
And the arrows?
Like the rest they exist to multiply.
Or did I mean to say defy?
Improbable Gift

I wish to portioned you
a piece of this night
a piece of these hours by the window
a piece of my own dusk perception
& hold it here in my hands
for your eyes,

your hands.
By the open window
I think if I could show you something simple
you would breathe better
you would fidget less
you would stop drinking your work away
you would want more
than revenge to wrinkle your face

and need more than want.
If I could give you something simple,
still and tenderly mundane,
like boys stripping shirts for basketball games,
or that syncopated moment when drivers know to use headlights
that moment when the mind
gives up will

I would give you
my shoulders when they were still bony beneath your hands
my feet pedaling asphalt alongside your skateboard
my hair full with sweat.
I would lift you, mid-stride,
would suspend you
above the black passing speed

would hold you
how you once held me, firmly by the armpits
for that slim moment
when helplessness is disbanded by trust.

If I could, I would give you that moment,
before touching down.
Revised Perception

Underfed scrawl sputtering his palpable distortion. It seems the floor in his apartment is warped. He's lost appetite and sleep. He stays away, but for no more than two days. Something calls him back. He claims it breathes. Some documents have the color to verify, others are left to read. Who will speak for the cowboy buying milk at the Quik Mart? Or the stretch of years marked only by the number of gift umbrellas she received?

There was little light. It was far past late. This was before I knew what not to believe & the living room was strung with bulbs of light. Her hands were veined & wanting at my neck, smoothing hair, abrupt hold of my face. We tried to catch the speech that dallied through her drunk. No one ever left, but we all said our good-byes.

From an anchored boat girls dive & swim their lopsided strokes to the Vineyard's rocky shore. Should I say he dug a hole in the yard so deep & wide or should I say she was afraid? I could only ride in the elevator for two floors at a time. The closet door cracked. What dedication to your deed. One decision led to many revisions, she wove salamander skin into her side of her cheek & later tasted the same in his panting. We are all amazed at your mid-life whimsy. No one even guessed you had a plan, but you've been painting it all the while.
Take A Day

Dusk stumbles, unobtrusive as Chad Dean
nicotine stunk, & purpled by late placed wagers at the bar.
Moonblind. Equal parts shell magic & zauberkraft.
A sake gulp, both hyacinth & static.
How a tree full of crow purifies the Quik-mart

suggests some trilling for the clairaudient
a symphony arresting itself in the dumpster shadows,
while the florescent light blathers its own cure for noise.
Powerlines map a staff across the street,
swallows begin their calligraphy notation, alighting like punctuation
on a page of graphite words.
Somewhere plagued by fears unfounded & primarily Occidental,

a drunk makes his way like a backslash
a woman hears the ocean in the traffic

religions are being tested in the crucible of doubt.

Take a day & starch it. Peel away the hemisphere as if preparing a shallot for mincing.
Reserve all liquids. Discard the cusp & freeze the leftover dapple for stock.
Simmer uncovered
until all that remains is a hawk. An elm. The moonburn after clouds.

Nothing is speaking so loudly now.
Saying most reckless things are cobalt.
Saying fill your nose with air crossed by birdwing.
Saying lake supersedes all desires to be great.
Then saying itself into existence,
as headlights find themselves turned on.
Misled by me
the critics assert that my "tu"
is an institution, that were it not
for this fault of mine, they'd have known
that the many in me are one,
even though multiplied by the mirrors.
The trouble is that once caught in the net
the bird doesn't know if he is himself
or one of his too many duplicates.

— Eugenio Montale
A Plume. A Burr. A Sine In Search Of

Among these sheafs of well-versed moonless
as rigid-shaft as exclamation, how could I
not uncurl from the railing & aflight?

All things were divisible by 1,000:
ice edges sliding into drink,
pacing a trapezoid of bathroom light
the two-step of your gait,
your gait.

Held by the cured insistence from jet creeks & stratosphered run-off
I keep your globe to factor distance.
I leave the night as my erase.

You mistook the half-zipper of crows,
a train running deadhead,
neighbor mutts who sacked your lawn that morning,
all the earth's birds calling see-saw, see-saw—

in every triviality you saw my smudge.

There was word of your unsteady
from the off-putting curdle of clapboard
& the way each nail bent in the direction of the sun.
Once you were right.

I was the fat horsefly blinding the black-eye susan by your sill.

You rattled division across solutions' gessoed reams

I went away to choir your world into notation.

0/20

1/20
Debts are as dirty & ripe as their possessors.
So I gave you the mud shoals of the drained lake
to calculate losses on the markers of trees.

Remember me as the holly staff
& the minor afternoons of thistle scratch & lettings.
In this gymnasium turned by ampersand
I honor the treaty & you bless the air
turned from the gills of each dying fish.

Only in absence do I breathe.
But I earmarked the Jack,
beat you blind at solitaire
& wilted the wild flower by returning its gaze.

You left your station,
wandered beyond the garden's edge,
interrogated your flock about my motivation
until cities erupted like bank holidays across the sky.

The trains continued their arrivals:
   delivering endless possibilities to the answer of my face.

You've made me what I was.
Silence is only this theater for screening,
& the deck you devised is fixed.
I can't tell you how it will end,
but it is not as you think. I'm tethered
to the dis-scape you created, aligned with refractions'
bleating & the empty staff waiting for its birds.

Before me came a void,
& after---------------------------------

the dash should be as long as my flight.

Light a window so I may descend ap on your moment,
come down from the volcano
& pin the lintels to the valley of the broken ear.

*  4/20

Because of the bind that ties your searching to my lift-off
I am only one part firefly(flickering) & six parts smog.

How can I console the static globe lit in solitary,
or rinse your soil in this wake of ice-born distance
when you doubt the very sights I've given?

I assume your limitations like translation—
I only read the right hand side.

There will be calculations in skylines,
crabapples rotting on the questionable sum,
my hair aswarm & swarming at the window dark with night.

*  5/20
Am I a dove to your despair?
You must think me untied to the boys
lofting rocks at the cripple foraging for cans.
Among tinder I shift & wait for an ignite.
I've glimmed every cattail razor & flanked
the knobby bows with moss.
Matching contours to shadows I coffin in peripheral alertness,
dislodging solar systems from beneath my nails.

I was erected as the question
  given beauty to taunt the answer
  & benevolence to chide your guilt.

I wish you to be a sickle,
& I will never be the end, only the catalyst for your transgression.

Tomorrow those who die will be received, those who rake
will reveal a most familiar underside & again
I will take my post in the trellis
flowering with ampersands & bees flying
drunk from the blooms.
How will you make me today?

Widow-pacing dock planks
whipped by wave spew & sun-soaked scarves.
Fisherman return at dusk to unload crates of ice-stilled catch,
the simon-pure grit & salt of it tatters me mistakenly alive.

Unseen among their coiling ropes & seaweed strung nets
I pick my way among the gutted—

was it your cruelty or your decency
which has neglected me revenge?

8/20

Was it the freezing upstart of rain
or all the ranges hanging a likeness
which called me into form?
You dissemble the stucco, the stucco
pocked by its own shadow
& trust distrust as evidence.
Again you fail to turn the leaf of coincidence
to find consequence untouched.

9/20
For a time I kept your questions in an aquarium
hung from a powerline I wore round my neck.
Before it was Saturn's ring
strung with panther fang & a clatter of tide-born baubles.
Once it was a noose

an itchy weave & scratch affair—

the steady clench,

but the sea took it back. An inhale. I am still the answer
breathless & blue in the fold of your undertow.

* 10/20

I leave my tissued dress.
A bureau drawer of snail shells.
Lip prints revealed in light.
One fire starts in a city of thousands.

You draw the window lace
to let the overcast & ambulances round the walls,
displace the decimal.

In eight deft moves, you arrange another still life with my remainder.

* 11/20
Like gutter confections the clot colored leaves
shrouded in frost——

{staccato jab of the envisioned on an untrekked roadway}

something is completed, sent in spokes.
Now the sifting sounds from a steel factory

chorus the ranges & address the You.
Yes, there is a third,
a demarcation
shattered into——

gain the pen identifies the page.

* 12/20

I awake to you broken, sacrifice soaked & clenching the infinite directions of rice
in these awkward appendages where wings once were.

Midnight: the sodium glow from streetlights
grid the alley wake with rhombus reminders of what is divisible——

if my gift is but an omen
allow me once to wear it like an exquisite dress of sight.

* 13/20
Factor rescue into the greater hope of hope.
A possibility hollows out, where the uncharted ends of the radius meet.
A second ascent is another farewell to bird carcasses & the eloquence of ice.

I would give my only fraction for one powerline gilded licorice,
once trampled patch of ampersand or mint,
one solitary call from the cat, the alleytrash waking.

* 14/20

I no longer check the weather against your almanac.
I look to the greater prophecies of woodsmoke
muting the valley & an autumn extending into a fifth season's birth.
Because my conception is lost
to the muddled confines you write me from,
because our cross purposes sporadically cross paths,
there must be points marked on the grid

connecting our arc,
deciding us side by side
each, brilliantly victim.

* 15/20
The anti-dapple of apricot tree against November's slate cough could never rise its chiseled music to this height. A cat revolves one ear toward the needling sitar & its refractions. The distinction of brick from branch mutates into the lonely hope dusklamps reveal to the leaf choked street.

Which shade descends from the lit doorway to begin gathering these foretold notes?

—Cat mewl like rusty lighthouse joints & unoiled hinges

The night will go unmelodious because notes will only dismantle the sound architecture of the unmarred staff.

—or is that the reminder, turning through its own remains? From the sloughed off leaves, going burnt ocher to sienna on the lawn a dime signals, sweeping its beam through the season. Caught in the quick of its own currency.
Ice-edged rain breaks its formal attempts
against the slate path weaving toward the directionless envelope.
Eyes are lost on these sensory equations, on this night,
stitched by absence & these drops
fractioning surface into multiples empty from reflection.
Woke into this loom, I transmute again
& the release is as stinging as the catc h pulled from the sea,
bowing & unbowing last rites at the end of a line.

---

—a vacant chattering of limb to limb
where mystery & its stillborn solutions reed wind through the trees.
Whirlpools caught as souvenirs in water
descend on our separate cites.
Deliverance is the echo from our shoddy costumes
swirled in the palm
swirled & setdown on this paperwork, this debt.
Then the opalescence, taking its quizzical
meandering to the idea of sky, finds
unknown chinks in the mantle,
tears the certain wove,
asks itself into an arc of question—
too contorted now to recall
the numerous past-lives of exclamation &
the easy substitution of semi-colon for ampersand.
A welling, & definition is marked:
the valley reveals itself to the place it has always been.
—Oh! the banner of bloody meat over the silk of the seas and the arctic flowers; (they do not exist.)

—Rimbaud
Dissemble

The unfolding. First wings.
Origami crane on a red cast tabletop.
What light makes cardhouse of surroundings.
The bird is slowly dissembled.
Shadowed caverns take place of eyes.
This morning the mountain was the awareness of cold—
so many names unfastening themselves

& not enough rhyme. Militant rows
pin whisper-calls & average pitched promises to this structure:
bracken reaching coral in the streetlight.
Could we be made to prove we are capable?
To prove we prove nothing in all of its forms.
Tricks of the Trade

Night comes in spades. Lethal
followed by liquid, followed by the overcast reeling back
moisture dropped early in the day.
And what of Dostoevsky's father?
A block of charcoal new from the press

—yes, we could make our own charcoal.

Suddenly the bones of a cuttlefish

—so we made spectacular inks too.

Then you could feel mistakes,
palpable as the pilot gone out.
During this time we nailed a lot of things together.
We made firm decisions about recycling,

so we recycled nails. Somewhere it is written
that Dostoevsky's father never saw a dandelion.
The man that wrote it knew the mailman's uncle.
Could it be foreseeable? Night

never misses an appointment. Kids like to roller skate through it,
others walk the dog in it, confess in it, work
in it. Many sleep in it. Many do not
sleep.
Ode to Rice

Counting
counting yourself
yourself into rice.
You seem to be always counting yourself
ticking split seconds
spilt on formica
[the music there]
elephant tusk
splintering in a well-
fractionated wind,
night plush
with revolutionaries
plotting coups in the nettles.
Then an ashtray filled
with spent matches becomes
a liberating thing.
Heads charred & cardboard
bodies align like
salted fish like
cold horses
like strange pieces
to a strange game forgotten,
a game that rhymes
with mah-jongg
but derives from Viking origin.
Geishas
geishas fanning
fanning rice
[the purpose there]
where an earplug
in one ear will stop
the schizophrenic's voices
[the dedication]
will stop
the negative voices,
but the janitor hears
water dropping
only for itself.
You seem to be always counting
be always counting yourself
ticking split minutes
spilt by telemarketing
fingers tapping into lacquer
& a household
is just a good amount of things
precariously perched
perched on top of each other.
You are always
counting yourself
ticking split hours
split on a chessboard
checked marble
[the mathematics there]
Einstein’s mind counting
Einstein’s mind counting itself
ticking split atoms
split in some recess
of the mind,
The janitor can hear it
dripping, can find
some sorrow there.
The Bevelled Strangers Ring

I.

Gabriel is on the road again. — A passing car re-routes snow mid-fall, & what is milked into existence by this unlacing is inkable. Couldn’t those shrouded boughs be headlight divining windowpane? Because the absence at her nape(could it be ocean?) is as turned, as pulled, as a new sundering unmolding from the shape a human body makes in snow. Dishes are being re-stacked in 2-B & porno moans from downstairs ride the drafts & pour from the vents like heat. Surely somewhere half-blooded prophets are dealing silver. Somewhere, destination is an idea repeating in every passing eye. So she assigns expectation a universal color, experience its most elaborate contradiction. To a brief silence she assigns everything is fine. China. China. China. the schizophrenic says, through the widening crack in the wall.

II.

Woken into after-midnight. The blubbery tv glow is audibly in color, spilling through the open door slammed. Eugene yelling the entrance hallway into echo, somewhere sobbing & the hot water-heater clicking on. They are saying fuck & bitch & cunt more frequently now, testing acoustics, like unseen flocks eclipsing some level of depth with the sound of their wings. More sobs, more tv seeping the door, cleaved to & wrenched from its frame. Lightning thunders through the schizophrenic’s dream.

Voice prints collide against the sky, saying: you are kin to the sculptor whose name has been erased. You are water on asphalt reflecting traffic light— spilt blood flashing gutters into gutters. The schizophrenic knots. Gabriel’s cat, washing herself in Gabriel’s darkened apartment, pauses, allows her ears to adjust, then resumes her washing.
III.

The architecture groans to the promise of a possible warmth.

Stray shots of sun fall on the snow-choked lawn. Likewise,
a rash of nightmares is interrupted by a room

containing everything you didn't know you'd lost.

Landfill-size heaps. No sound. The color of calculators & plastic
dolls sheathed in hot pink, bedsheets, shoelaces, pens, bills & pencils

riding a double-decker train across the sierras.

The connection is lost when he enters a tunnel, relaying
vivid descriptions of trees. Outside,
a pack of men are running in this momentary ellipsis.

IV

The man who reads the meter comes to read the meter.

On seeing Beatrice jump from a window he states:
plastercast your virgin-ness at the height of its most luminary!

She considers spitting at his feet.

The man who reads the meter comes to read the meter.

On seeing Eugene pace the balcony he calls: it could be worse,
try playing a game of hangman when your opponent's never there.

Eugene sips his beer & regards some passing geese.

The man who reads the meter comes to read the meter.

He hears the schizophrenic typing & he thinks:
why did I quit smoking?
The schizophrenic's typings cease—

        return to the wall where the mirror broke
        & try to remember the wall before the mirror was there.

V.

Two days of this mercury-dense rain. Leaks pour into buckets behind the counter
at the bookstore. Not enough—
a steely wind that tears ten shingles from the roof.

The cat dashes her whiskers against his trumpet, re-scenting her property.
[door slam, fly buzz & fidget on the widow jamb]

Paperclip batted beneath the futon where his wings are stashed.
She sleeps in the down.

Soon the smells of garage sales will dictate traffic patterns
& the sockets that bodies once filled will melt into sound.
In the blanks between sidewalk walkers & where sunlight is stopped by skyscraping barricades, Gabriel meets the billboard models' gaze. Vacation eyes horizon over ivory smiles & wait for his to adjust. Serene above the angled rush-&-sift hour. Satisfied never having anything beyond that modest landscape perpetual in its bands of blue & green. One is caught in laughter, head cast back against what must be ocean, the way it hazes undefined & certain. He is in mid-air, the kilt a billow, legs bracing for some surface Gabriel will never see him land. Suspended in his drop or jump to grace? His friend is the one who alters time, the way his eyes appear cut-out against the sea, his stare a tunnel & Gabriel is in it or going through——

(the subway screeching)
(the bob & weaving)
(the back drop)
(his kilted friend)
(the billboard which supports him)

falls away. When sunshafts stop behind structures maroon-cold & unending Gabriel sees five o'clock as the living might & notes its most brilliant reflections in his exercise book:

Windshield glass, flesh, broken gutter trash & the edges of gravel.

On a pictureless postcard he writes:
everything's a rhyme I wish you could hear.

If the great war was waged we would not be exceptional for our poise.
We would crack ourselves wildly from the shapes of our faces.
The cat would continue napping.
We would stagger like drunks blindly stabbing & stand palsied before the gaze of our own sight.
Turn to a burr & clasp to the mind like a bell.
We whirl back & forth, unsure who is entering & who is exiting the hive.
Gabriel would write postcards from Aruba: everything is wine, except for my beer.
We would decide who to rape & we would rape them.
On viewing the map it was obviously blue
& even after the fact, the postcards show the same.
But he claims it was green & full of slot machines,
cherries flambe & tvs playing Scarface in Dutch dub.
Surf-turned air on the other side of air conditioning,
the scrub of sand in the spray, clattering against the rocks
& the chainy indigestion of an anchor dropped—

Gulls browse on the updrafts, cutting left & gyrating down to the pier.
The mysterious density of the blackjack dealer's cologne—
sticky roe of passion fruit fermented in murr, but elliptical

the way Beatrice would appear for a weekend
—(sprung from the harp to rattle the weary into flight)
& then disappear for a month. Eugene, washed in the tv's blue drone
or stalking the balcony like a widow walking the widow-walk,
eyes turned to the back rilling sea, salt
in the emptiness where engine was.
Direct Address

Then the lonely went sleepwalking into the streets
& houseplants wept at their reflections in the glass.
No, the day did not begin.
No cobblestone. No clatter of hooves crossing stupidity.
Marbled-over goat udder

milk pizzling in the mottle of aluminum pale. Hoop-la or happenstance?
Silver made comfortable
here, where black & white are lit
to the same pitch & blue fades
into its original idea. Raccoons tip trashcans
well past what should be noon, & the crucifix
moves from the jet plane trails
widening into starkest plumes
bumped against what is stratified. Charcoal smudge slows
to extinguished. Crocuses are hope for the naive,
depth trying new levels of itself as eyes become abrupt.
Is that my brother or a toothache

making alley shadows' slink? Surf as traffic tide
rushing hours swallow & ebb—
tinny spokes of cyclists passings & gear chimes righting extremes
in the turning grease, chinks throttled forward by well-oiled teeth—
who taught me to count & why did I listen?
Crossing the overcast, peals madden the symphony, sounds

of starving cannot feed—
half the world goes on sleeping.
Porchlights burn out.
Playing fields turn to rats & an overgrowth of weed—
dropped sheafs from an anonymous tree curl to fractions
----dividing what exists by what remains
vision shipwrecks
victim to dimes landing on chance, how all the browns are edged with red—

Night, you are a wonderful excuse for what we cannot see.
Reportedly you are walking & singing the cemetery into rounds,

flowers wilting replace the many-mouthed
while monks continue sitting & moles begin scampering among the newly blind.
Which of us but the fisher king spoke long enough to be refrained?
In Disrespect

I will remain my command as it all goes liquid & unspooling.
In these swarthy drafts, whose hour puddles in the ranges?
Kin to hydrant paint & street cleaners I can gauge which
will loosen, but not when or on what.

Stanch purveyor of the infinite your promise weighs
stale against my fence's picket.
Garbardined girls, smit-filled for tulip boys
rot roadside to your procession.

(Once there glimmed something I'd forge perilous to obtain:
veins, arroyo glass, men peering from pick-up beds)

Which one calls attention to the chime of arcs,
the multi-chasmed chest, the revolution of water descending on an empty lot of weeds?

Savvy to your wash n' wear illusion I dilute your ruses
to the dominoes they are:
black backs, on black backs on black backs.
The Poetics of the Poet
_In Pencil Versions For Piano_

Static, out of a shipwrecked distance
crushes the radio symphony between its pinchers.
What is beyond the frame of this house
is a night, full & asking.

Something was first, & then there were many.

_Petal_ times thirty, is too obviously pink & fragrant. Shall I say aromatic
or shall I say doom?
Let a reordering, reorder the ebb into a waking.
I take a pencil to the staff, & translate a grocery list into notation.
What is still: ice crush of night ink on snow,
the four a.m. gas station

my only metronome—

swinging its diamond notes over a worldful of open-mouthed mothers.

I am friend to every type of ant: red, black & winged!
Crossing Through Surface

The moment is this symphonied language.
See how glass bruises the evening to lake?
Geese trundle away bills on the matted grass by the shore
or disappear on wings where dusk has begun
dashing its shuttle through the chaparral.

Dock lights or channel buoys?
The many eyes of a skyscraped city.
A tiki-lit log cabin among evergreens.
Slipping in at ten minutes before
the newspaper’s appointed dawn,
however gently, even the body makes a wake.
Now bare of lust, or its sound
vision dense with secrets trips to shadow
and finds the wet decompose like rust
dreaming the thousand hairs of a peach.

Iron recall has been fiddled undone by colors
over the brick bunker’s elementary
so eyes ache to differentiate calloused hands from
a canvas
from the leaden rime on distrust.

Wood whittled to a naked slip of embarrassment,
shavings curled and retching.
Many deaths, one regret.
The green-ivory angles where the knife
sliced back bark to sliver each new surface.
An Attempt to Convince the Self

Sacrifice & redemption are simple
when you have nothing to taste
with the atrophied buds of your tongue.

But when were you last tasted?
Made rigid beneath rough hands of this season?

Your senses have been neglected.
When did you last have spring
in the saturated body of a bitter-skinned night?

Peel back your clothes.
I want to watch you chill stiff
before the screen.

Look, you are just a snarl of smoke,
an idea, wafted through the window.

Your susceptibility to thick texts
will only wither the texture of your flesh.
Was it God or Eliot who shaped your April?

If you will abandon the model
I am willing, I think, to rehydrate your soul.
La Somnambule

Das Leben or what a tulip may aspire to be like before it buds——

either, will describe the definer better than the defined.

Repeat the part about blackmagic & its most colorful underpinnings.

I will now tell you what I saw.
Defamer, come close.
Sit here beside me on the floor.
I saw beautiful notations of musical arrangement
refashioned into saltbox churches, erratic mosques, & cities like hives on fire.
But how can you prepare yourself for an orchard empty of its leaves?

vexatious adj. 1. causing vexation; troublesome;
annoying: a vexatious situation.

I write him into every landscape, but he’s always never there.
The Baron defined rhapsody
but he didn’t tell me that to understand it,
means to understand how stalagmite illuminations deciding their background,
are like shy insistence with its mouth brimming.
Or maybe I’m just stubborn.
Is that what is meant by saying, "gin will do that to you",
or what is meant by saying nothing at all?

To tell if something is really black watch if it reaches into where it has already pooled.

Bookmark this page, & flip to the appendix in the back where you’ll find a bunch
of people speculating on what the speaker "means" & also an environmentalist, who
has some pretty interesting things to say about the ecological economy of braille.

Open the chest. Inhale the song.
What reaches back——

How a skunked-dog backs away from himself,
he had to have so many beads,
so many smoke-filtered, motel room evenings, aglow in the tv blue surf,
so he would be able to "see".
To be able to recollect is to be nectar-blind
as a dog

to be able to see phr. Bibl? obs.—— 1. to bargain
both anti-scape & the voluminous possibilities
of its opposite. 2. to be an active spectator 3. to
put this thought into the world: I think maybe,
curtains could look like brides.
Possible Perceptions

Perchance
Landmarked

The bedsheets earmarked, belly from the linepins holding a wind.  
A day of crow & picket mewls in the breath of it.  
A warble of lime cold, caught in the throat.  
Matches struck & stacked by the stove  
soot tip to tip,  
a strike of passion left on the sill.  
Respire.  
Lungs dapple for some tinwork left to stucco  
as arms approach, align & pass.  
The bedsheets are thatched & chafe with hoops of bat.  
The evening has unspooled its kite.  
Can you hear it taut?  Can you hear it ribbing the sky?
The Fall-Out From Departure

has made these storefronts silly reminders of our addictions.
And this sky, poured salt-heavy is as radial
as the many-surfaced ocean. The snow catches
recall like fleeting ash, adrift in the widening flue.
An uneven song has moused between the walls of this house,
eroding their idea into something skeletal,
something shoddily made of sticks & weak angles.
Why do I still fish, expecting to surface with a mouth full of coins?
I have only one wild turn left,

just enough exhale for a sob like a hinge
gracious to find its own collapse.
It should be simple to suggest possibility to whomever is waking.
But my disordering of these trestles has made them born
for the involuntary hawk & the uncomfortable spaces the sky makes.

I poured every naked maniac the imagination made into the foundation.
Only my angry hair finds itself again in the woodstove light.
This morning is like damage sprinting on weak ankles,
& somewhere, cattle are lowering their beautifully stupid heads to drink.
The Publishing House Employee Speaks

Aphids drain the last living plant on the sill.
Carcasses hardened in the honk riddled halflight.
Glinting generously, subway tokens grace the stubbed out cigarettes
bent & retching in their bowl.
I am exhaust, am full of disperse
contained. Rot grinds the idea of bones into its own absence.
Beans stewed for days on the stove will no longer stand
between hunger & need, but rust out the bottom & eat grout from the tiles.
A crippled cat limps but travels through
with no resistance to dispel her scent.
From the dictionaries
words, copied in palsied graphite no longer seem relevent,
hebe & volar.
No one wakes to scrape ashy food from the tin.
Which one of these equations could it possibly solve?
On Travel

It has a surface marred by willow boughs.
In their dank possession
felled shadows seek to consume immediacy—

fresh cut. A twist takes back its previous doubt
& granite marks choice with sooty hands, sooty hands.
Iron struck like a gavelled promise chattering salvation.
Then from the cracked car window
a handkerchief catches black upwind, asphalt-hot

& finds a river or a tabernacle

--some safe shore lit by torches.

Nettles diffuse our scent in the overgrowth, sunder the lake

which cools regardless of our centrifugal sight.
Water will wake to mirror a constellationless sky.
Water will ripple the chainsaw divorcing the boughs from their rings.
Water will know only itself—

But this is how we chant:
    we are human. we are human.
This is how we remind ourselves we are human.
Ode to &

Arrestive gesture,  
uncloaking sly shoulders  
but extending  
extending arms.  
Always something more.  
Like sand  
& sand grown damper  
by moon-pulled waves  
approaching  
lamp light in the ribbon grass  
kerosene & glass held  
to the night by one  
solitary hand.  
Lantern & a flock  
of weed-nesting birds  
scared up in tidal wind  
& we hold bread to their sounds  
spit out our hair  
& toss hunks  
of well-bleached bread  
into the many-mouthed night.  
But you are closer  
to infinity.  
Closer to the intertwine  
of surf crash  
& birdflight—  
arrestive pivot,  
the line gone slack.  
You find more land  
to trample,  
stir the foam-choked  
strand into marvelous  
additions of invisible creatures  
testing height.  
Testing the interlace  
of extension  
& ascension,  
you swivel gypsy taunts  
& flash glimpses  
of the slender  
where you intercross,  
where you mobius  
two-sides of instance  
& tack the moment  
to your trance.  
How your depths
endlessly unfurl!
Both unabashed
& punctual,
you discharge minstrels
with your oboe shape
& the breadth
of your crescendo.
Like sound you know
no gravity
yet you fly to your end
& return like a scythe
carving yourself
in bas-relief.
Reverse-curves & sine waves
sideways, house martins diving
diving & soaring from the eaves
of your trestled sentence
to gather more
sea-turned souvenirs
from the wake
of your previous intention.