Winter 2006

This Nest, Swift Passerine: 3rd Movement

Dan Beachy-Quick
This Nest, Swift *Passerine*: 3rd Movement

Dan Beachy-Quick
the command grows loud
my heart anxious with a heart
spell the incomprehensible
the grackle and nothing perched
in the pine every word
pulses with error but error is true
the grackle with the infant heart’s
chaos in his mouth
patience akin to wonder
patience finds a way in
the heart astray in chaos and wonder

Falling into the earth but by the earth embraced
The world ensnares, even bare, even divorced
Of green, of ivy bright, of midnight in the oak,
Of light beneath the wave in waves
As the lake shallows to nothing, as the lake
Shallows to a stone it swallowed, and the stone
Swallows itself in dust, and I am this dust,
And my wife is this dust, enchained to dust
We love. The earth falling at equal speed
Into the sun. The sun plunging into absence
At the galaxy’s core. The compass point
On which the needle spins is soldered
To abyss. The jailer’s keys float beyond
Us on an orbit’s ring. None beg mercy
But mercy abounds. Mercy bounds, binds.
This grave falling drones beneath our song.
The lock turned echoes through the prison’s hall
Forever . . . Do you hear it? That droning note
Whose sound is Nothing? Against it we speak
Such words, against nothing our melody is heard.
Wistful and wondering, she would sit in summer weather by the high fender in the Lodge, looking up at the sky through the barred window, until bars of light would arise, when she turned her eyes away, between her and her friend, and she would see him through a grating, too.

"Thinking of the fields," the turnkey said once, after watching her, "ain't you?"

"Where are they?" she enquired.

"Why they're—over there, my dear," said the turnkey, with a vague flourish of his key. "Just about there."

"Does anybody open them, and shut them? Are they locked?"

these bars of green wheat
will be golden in a month
the bars will brittle
our mouths full with nothing
questions us the questioners
under oath the oats claim bliss
the husk abyss
to lengthen the verdict
we plead innocence
Two prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by knocking on the wall. The wall is the thing which separates them but it is also their means of communication. Every separation is a link.

a key turning in the fields turns
a key wild in the wild rose a child
in the rose every thought is morning
red through the prison bars all noon
a grave gathers in the opening dew

debt in prison
as I myself was born every Heaven is also
through the window’s bars the field
and the field-sparrow is a prison in flight

two white bars on each wing my mind
is a little key in a child’s hand turning
the rose to tune the rose West
a single petal at day’s end is the whole
sky this dying bloom the barred clouds

bruised white when the moon rises the moon
is not light but seems made of light
the moon is a prison floating in the night
a key is bloody in shadow but also bright
in orbit turning pointing vaguely on the field it shines
I find myself, when I leave my basement office in the museum at which I work, wandering longer through galleries few visit. I stare at object in glass cases—removed from time for being touched so long by time. Chinese _Tomb-Figurines_. A pair of ceramic dancing women whose wooden hands, keeping delicate time to the music none hear, are decayed and gone. A juggler balances an absent globe on his nose; now he laughing stares up into the stars, his mouth agape, and where the globe attached by a wooden peg, a hole deep in his forehead. His belly is filled with ash or nothing. Coil pots I’ve held—built and fired 3000 years ago. I’ve put my hand into the mouth and felt the coil wall smoothed by the potter’s hand, put my fingers in the fingerprints left by him now gone, pressing against the wall to make it sound. _Every separation is a link_. The celadon vases a small green lake in my eye; but nearing, the curves are cracked, the glaze a broken network, as of veins, across the surface. My eye draws lines along those lines. And last, the pillows—each ceramic—called _Bean-Shaped Pillow, Tiger-Shaped Pillow, Cloud-Shaped Pillow_. . .

I think in bed, staring up into the whole night balanced on my head, my mouth open, my mouth agape

I’ve laid my head down on Tiger
and I’ve laid my head on Cloud

and both were hard as stone
and both were _Tiger_ and _Cloud_
mortal June minds June wild
to humble my I double my
eye note the water strider's orb
this sphere sings that I must sing
each leg on tense water stands
on each leg to draw its circle just
a single stone is saintly study
circular & small note in hand
it skips across the same river
it sinks when thrown
the firefly above the river at night
glows bright twice note I see
stars on still water dim when struck
substellar light beacons as precise
in air above mirrored in water below
I double vision to see this world
but more seen this world is less known

A stone presses downward and manifests its heaviness. But
while this heaviness exerts an opposing pressure upon us
it denies us any penetration into it. If we attempt such a
penetration by breaking open the rock, it still does not display
in its fragments anything inward that has been opened up.
Color shines and wants only to shine. When we analyze
it in rational terms it is gone. It shows itself only when it
remains undisclosed and unexplained.
Resolves to write nothing
but "what I see"

I see noon on the blank page
noon whitens the water the water beetle
scripts in wakes
the page by its own current will erase
draw nearer to read but cannot read
the sentence sounds
like doom soft in the reeds
while the lilypad blooms
two darning needles smooth in blue
shadow with wings
each precisely aligned with each
this mirror hovers in the air

Resolved to write nothing
but "what I know"

The reed exactly doubles humility
    Speaking twice in water
    Once by wind and once
    By mirror adds itself to itself
To make its true length known

It required some rudeness to disturb with our boat the mirror-like surface of the water, in which every twig and blade of grass was so faithfully reflected; too faithfully indeed for art to imitate, for only Nature may exaggerate herself. The shallowest still water is unfathomable. Wherever the trees and skies are reflected, there is more than Atlantic depth, and no danger of fancy running aground. We noticed that it required a separate intention of the eye, a more free and abstracted vision, to see the
river bottom merely; and so there are manifold visions in the direction of every object, and even the most opaque reflect the heavens from their surface.

Bend down my head to look up.
Bend closed my hands to make a cup.
Bend myself to the river.
In shallows there the cranes are flying.
Those ripples are not their wings.
Those ripples are my hands put through the birds

To drink. Be quiet, be still. Those are the cranes
Flying across the sky cupped in my hands.
Those ripples are not their pulsing wings.

Those ripples blurring the birds are the bird’s
Wings in my wrist, in my breast, that river
In which the ruddy duck rests, the tanager rests,

And the house-finch’s red song
Sings from the ventricle it roosts in for nest.
There are the cranes flying in my hands

Before I drink. And then I drink. And then
The mourning dove coos. And then the cranes
Solve the parch. Their throats cool

In my throat. I cannot sing their song for you.
Here it was, in my hands—these hands are yours
—Empty as the air those wings strove through.
resolved nothing but to
pray how not to
darken shadow with thought
resolved to nothing but
what upon us denies us
entrance pray open the
river first open the rock

Nine months now nesting in these pages. Blank days mirror me. I went to the river to escape. I saw the darning needles flying. They mate in the air. The male clasping the female by her neck with a pincer on his tail. I heard their wings beat against each other beating against the pine tree to fly up over the water. They were a circle in the air. I bent my head to the water. I could see on the surface, above the riverweed flagging forward with the current, my own face in echo. *When I seek you out, where do you go?* So easy to betray what it is I think I see. Name the stone and like a white flower on the riverbank the stone will wither. Name the crane and the crane will sink like stone. But some other grace bridges both worlds—I can see it when I look backward at myself, bent to the river those weeks ago, even now, with my pen on the page. My head bent down to my own head on the water, and in the dark space, the negative space between my profile and my profile’s reflection, there is the chalice if one can see it, air soldered to water, into which the whole world pours its prayer, pours its presence, and once full, out the mouth runneth over.
shadow motion all

*the unbribable charity*

who puts his wrist in water

begs water take his pulse

the darning needles fly

in perfect attention to

the other's wings I'll illustrate

all old wives tell this tale

the darning needles sew up the ears

of truant schoolboys

so they could not hear the Bells

can you hear the Bells

ringing behind a door
Imagine thus the pond: a bell filled with water. Heaven first walked upon by water-striders. Where their legs touch the water a cloud is dimpled. Paperwhites lean into vision. Echo is a figure round; her wilderness is a greenwood. Echo enlarged is ecstasy. The music in the leaves is first found below the mirror on the pond. A leaf is slow in the air as it falls. Then heaven trembles. This is not terror—words. Then the paperwhites cannot see. To dip a pen in cloud undoes the cloud. Strike the bell with and heaven flees. Or love-cracked, bending over the still water, peering through my own gaze peering back at me, I see. To sing undoes the balance by which the world was seen. Erasure ecstatic. Bells in circles ring and so their sound. Imagine thus the pond: There is a tongue under the water.

my facts shall be falsehoods

my sparrows shall brood
in rose my pine shall be
a stem (as hers) a thorn shall hold
in thrall the sky my ivy twined
around my wrists my pulse
an arbor over me my spider
shall walk upon the echo caught
a bell-tone blown vibrant on breeze
my wasp shall be honey’s viceroy
in me her wildness shall deny
as greenwood does flame
my star shall be bright to shatter
my song in tendrils grows
woods deep in the dictionary where the aster
springs rootless upward into bliss
my music shall bewilder my own
heart shall be falsehood

to common sense
I saw a snake by the roadside and touched him with my foot to see if he were alive. He had a toad in his jaws, which he was preparing to swallow with his jaws distended to three times his width, but he relinquished his prey in haste and fled; and I thought, as the toad jumped leisurely away with his slime-covered hind-quarters glistening in the sun, as if I, his deliverer, wished to interrupt his meditations—without a shriek or fainting—I thought what a healthy indifference he manifested. Is not the broad earth still? he said.

what I have been doing is trying to listen by opening my mouth
this year in these pages
found the slough of the snake on the road-side and only then the snake
Echo, I pine.

Looking up. Over the water. My voice has no edge. I am the edge. I pin my voice to a leaf. The water is not thin. Light betrays the surface. Will you be seen? Over the water. A wave is thin. The shore is no sound. Pine bough the empty sleeve. I am looking up. My voice. If I am alone.

I pine, Return.

The night star-filled; the day filled with a star. Deeper in the page the word multiplies. Star: to crack, to break. The day filled with a fracture; the night . . . The night, when most I mean to lift my words back into the ecstatic thought they fell from, is dark ink dried in a glass bowl. Constellations grace us an awful clue. Night's is but an ink-pot bouyed in a greater blank—some Author writes nothing deeper on nothing, at the nib's tip, some Light breaks through.
The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second. Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn. There is always another dawn risen on mid-noon. Under every deep a lower deep opens.
clamor at ecstasy but ecstasy
sings the blank
space on the page between each
word is Lethe
exquisite when spoken true

First I learned to forget how the clouds billowing into storm took other shapes—the thunderhead as the sparrow's wing, the tulip wilting, the toad with bulbous eyes—and see only the cloud itself. Noted in my journal how the wind in upper atmosphere can bend a wisp into a circle. Noted the Spring congests into storms, the clouds progressing by circular upwellings, as of a liquid boiling, and the underedge of each node a darker gray limned in blue, the shadow by which the cloud grows in definition.

exquisite when spoken each word
rings with one note
Orion plucks on his shimmering
bow vibrates also in the bough
of the pine and the worm
which feasts in the pine as it grows

Then forgot the words to the clear tone. Then forgot to speak. Then my blood vibrated with the working of the tree. Then a book was leaves on water, spread out, so the water couldn't be seen. Then ecstasy rippled. Then the stars were on the water. Then I looked up. Then I forgot the constellations—Orion, Hydra, Dipper, Bear—and only saw the light piercing through the dark. Then I had no story but this poem.
All I can say is that I live and breathe and have my thoughts.

we are this still earth a dark toad in the mouth of a snake and the snake's mouth upon us is light
Twining of 3rd Themes

dawn clangs shut another day
keyhole rising to noon
our sentence is to be without shadow
a minute each day light shackles
claims the judge
you'll see and you will be seen
*
the wild and the tame are one
*
my thoughts pacing behind bars
a mortal blossom and a blossom untold
pointing vaguely at the fields with a key
here are the fetters, the lock & spring
never asked but granted release
so I asked myself to roam
cuffed in song, bars in my eyes
from being behind bars so long
a convict walking to find a wall
the pine tree solid but I could see
times along which it could fold
and folding be a paper pine to delight
a child rooted in a child’s hand
but nearing the hidden sparrows sang
the crow echoed unseen
and walking beneath the tree I found
the warden’s lullaby cooing
the pine dropped down its scent
upon me the whole wonder entraps
so I ceased and my mind ceased
and my mind’s method, self-cruel,
self-vaulting, and prayed my sentence
longer: bewilderment & patience
I hear faintly the cawing of a crow far, far away, echoing from unseen wood-side. It mingles with the slight murmur of the village, the sound of children at play, as one stream empties gently into another, and the wild and the tame are one. It is not merely crow calling to crow, for it speaks to me too. I am part of one great creature with him; if he has voice, I have ears. On the one hand, it may be, is the sound of children at school saying their a, b, ab's, on the other, far in the wood-fringed horizon, the cawing of the crows out at their long recess, children who have got dismissed.
a) bee in the snapdragon
b) train distant on the tracks
c) train inside the blossom hums &
d) bee transports Echo's tune

Unless the humming of a gnat is as the music of the spheres, and the music of the spheres as the humming of a gnat, they are naught to me.
Narcissus, the flower, also called the *Paperwhite*. And myself, holding the petals. The blank page reflects. The pond could not hold Echo's voice, but ink does. Every word that is mine is equally yours. Nothing here has not been spoken before. But peering through the deepening pages, I think I see my own reflection, if patience lets the dark mud settle. Each word says: You are seeking me. Narcissus could not speak—breath would blow the image away into ripples. Echo is only breath. Words threaten what we see. What we love to see we think we love to see. We think it. There on the pond, the sparrows in the pine unseen, the pine unseen, the surface filled with sky, my head the forefront of heaven, and the paperwhites leaning in behind me, until breath echoes louder, *seek me out where I go*, and the wind through the petals is the rustling of pages written onto stems, and when louder echo blows, volumes break and suddenly blank, with the breeze make away. And one decides, I decide, whether or not to look up, whether to stand, whether to seek (myself who once was sought), to find Echo clothed in pages, to kiss Echo in her vellum robes.
night not the night / echoes / these words
not words / turnkey / echoes / dark ink

on page / this legible / prison a book
isn't night / but night's color / this ink

shackles sense to sense / listen to
my hand / this prionyard / full of song

the pond enchained / heaven / in echo
but heaven broke / free

not this / not this word / these words / no
book can / as nothing from nothing / flee

I have no defense / but one plea
a wild innocence not ease / must sing

the sparrow / a convict / in my throat
no torn page will / release

to tear the page / is perjury
and perjured song / will cease

every separation / echo / is a link
every book a prison / turnkey

every prison / a nest
Lying on his back, he gazed up now into the high, cloudless sky. "Do I not know that that is infinite space, and that it is not a rounded vault? But, however I screw up my eyes and strain my sight, I cannot see it but as round and finite, and in spite of my knowing about infinite space, I am incontestably right when I see a firm blue vault, far more right than when I strain my eyes to see beyond it."

ceased thinking, and only, as it were, listened to mysterious voices that seemed talking joyfully and earnestly within him.

"Can this be faith?" he thought, afraid to believe and with both hands brushing away the tears that filled his eyes.
ceased thinking / my sweete delight / and only listened
*

sparrow's / tremblestar / song
*

Lett me but kisse thyne eyes  My sparrow
*

cannot faith be broken and still be
*

harm be harmony