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## *Library Journal*

28 May '91  
Grosse Isle, MI  
10:30 PM

I have spent eleven nights here, though it seems fewer, for the days have been so long, so active, and so much of a piece.

Now, reading the superb first chapter of Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* after work, I remark on one's natural preference for the right hand ("recto"?) pages of books, how the mechanics of reading ennoble them in relation to their counterparts on the left, how this very moment, for example, Bowles' right pages serve as a handy lap-table for my notebook while the flimsy few left pages bend away ineffectually, though complaisantly, as I write my first entry since moving here, the late-evening train whistles from Trenton across the nearby channel waters having subsided.

I would like to compose a defense of left pages, including documented, though absurd, proof that left pages provide the best reading, as well as the most propitious frame for the reader's mind. Truly, my opinions do naturally run to the insular, the transient.

LEFT: "He did not think of himself as a tourist; he was a traveler."

The trains resume. The freighters chime in. I am in North Africa.

RIGHT: "It's as if either he or they did not exist."

## *All Things Must Come to Pass*

the something after of what already was prepared  
is my song.  
the had been which is the future-looking toward  
finally.

the coming to be not of what is  
unexpected but what was held in abeyance. Ready, set

from reservoir from years quieted  
at the beginning of life, resurrected.—

At its end there always was more  
on which to build a method to look back.  
where music mediated desire.  
and hope apparitioned what would be yesterday.

This, of course, is the story of:  
What is the stretching of the in-between  
in our making backways to what had been found  
initially heartwarming and breaking—  
To discover again what it was like  
the future.

'nuff said our mild faces  
are made of a dragon stuff.

I've held images of—it can't be?—  
the breath not from yours, or yours,  
but from a constellation of our sighs.

'nuff said the face escapes—  
that a break in it casts it from itself  
into a whirlwind of nuances.

Eyes for hearts and hearts for eyes—  
'nuff urged a face of blood  
'nuff urged a vein of sight.

We've collapsed our looking—  
mobs of eyes are faces—  
and at day's end visible evidence,  
vestiges, reclaim us to a  
buoyancy.

The not yet  
that can't have  
tooth or hand  
set to or over,  
passes sense of no life;  
And the light of day is half-light  
over the body's outer part,  
uncalled and awkward;  
and the so-called depths of time are statements of fact I apply  
my imagination to.

The in front of, in the middle of, behind  
and removed into wings none deserve  
of too much being in,  
naturally defy through force of  
surfeit/loss, the spectacular  
turn on the point of a pin.

Left, right on this peak, deliberate  
turning down, retreat, danger,  
love twice, disaster of the same  
ground again.

Our future after the H-bomb,  
haunted from the start  
by a vibrating meaning  
asynchronous.

Dear themes are everywhere  
in the air and  
terrible and separate hearts  
are knotted on the floor.

By obligation we are infinite  
or replaceable; or underearth.

I had forgotten ^ the charms of  
[your speech to me]  
remembering \* what seemed  
[a presentation of complexity]

Knowing just that,  
having prepared my leaving;  
again, not going-a-dying but  
onward my-way, good-bye  
caught in catastrophe.

Take a body within a body,  
and an ensorcelling circle around its proper paradise:  
and death will be the veil the living call life.

As Hugh Walker would have it,  
the barbaric world is greater than its creators;  
and a cosmic law disallows  
stopping what is started;  
and monster monarchs will establish  
fearful religions.

But take another name  
and place yourself in the middle of an unknown wood  
and follow the river into town:  
and the bizarre at every turn will lead to wisdom.

As Andre Norton has it,  
there is one fabric of magic and mystery;  
and eldritch powers will reveal  
ancient truths;  
and things stranger still will provide  
an unhoped for and happy.

*Christmas Toy Game 1998*

*(for Reginald)*

Innocent blood E-mailed  
last night in cryptic  
genocidal scripts:

my country is at war a  
gain for pro  
fits mar  
gins of cotton  
mouth hisses of **I'm**  
**peach** traitors of  
democratic tic tac toe  
jams in the right wing's  
flight patterns  
I wonder if any  
one cares about the body count  
down to zero  
morality Or whether  
there is a standing eight  
count for "smart bombs"  
Is this a game of pool  
Of "I  
raq and people  
break" Are there side  
pockets on battle  
field hollers's pleas

Can I play eight ball  
point pens and get  
a melody

## *I Remember Riffs*

*(for Howard Reich)*

I remember Before I am born  
I am The batter of pan  
cakes Fufu dough black  
women beat in  
to songs Before I am born  
where Max Roach talks  
epics with his hands and  
God's unchanging hand  
shakes Before  
I am born When drum is a priest in work  
clothes I remember dance  
washes In Mahalia's  
blueing apertures of light  
brigades marching Hallelujahs in  
to grand **Upper**  
**room** mates of Gabriel  
on that **great getting**  
**up morning** glory King  
plants on a mountain top of  
vision Coltrane and the night  
train climb **Just for a**  
**thrill** where Miles sketches  
montages of wings A **yard**  
**bird** evicts in its flights Before  
I am born I remember riffs

My father plays on his eye  
lids Before his father is born Before  
I am born I remember Mary on the road  
My mother Beating fufu  
til it gits big In orbits  
**round midnight** of The just grew memory  
Mister Jelly Roll butters Before  
I am born I remember rag  
time and rags burning To **scat**  
mosquitoes From chords of **summer**  
**time when the living**  
is evening When **the night**  
**time is the Wright time**  
to be in Bigger's shoe  
laces binding his future to an electric chair  
man of his fears Before  
I am born I remember some  
time I feel like an eagle The great Bald  
win Sits where visions **go tell it**  
**on the mountain** and **autumn leaves** fall  
yellow on palms of a Count Who bases  
his theory of head  
nods and foot  
pats on foot  
steps of a wind Crying  
cause it stomps its toe  
jam on Caldonia's head  
rag Before I am born

I remember Before I am born  
My daddy gets caught in a **Hully**  
**Gully** And Junior for  
gets his **shot**  
**gun** So he **hitch**  
**hikes Mustang**  
**Sally** over a bridge of rivers  
I cry Before I am born I remember  
thunder putting on his pants And  
lightning knitting her skirts  
from light squeezed from dark  
plums **Ogun** gets mad  
dogs Sicks them but thunder  
and lightning Shango down  
a hollow log  
cabin **muddy waters** Rinse  
with moans A **howlin wolf**  
uses to soothe the **smoke**  
**stack lightning** pills  
he takes for **three hundred**  
**pounds of heavenly joy**  
I remember Before I am born

## *Years*

*(for Murry DePillars)*

I dialogue with silences empty  
spots on the road  
maps of improvisation. Riffed  
through a Cannonball  
point pen. I blow.

Knowing

this black  
thing I ride, these  
lyrical waves of sounds  
I am, this ever elusive  
embouchure I invent,  
is a montage of laughter. I

weave

from Julius Cæsar  
salads. I consume.  
Or from images reflected in Miro's  
rites in shapes. Or from Odysseus's  
ramblings around seas  
twenty years. Or from Christ's cross  
cut saw. Or from Picasso/weto  
clippings of innocence.

This black  
thing is a collage.  
I invent. Roma  
Re Bear  
dens. I use  
as my summer time  
homes. Char  
less White paintings  
I imagine when I  
get too much week  
end in my blood.

Three decades is a longing  
time to hold Rose  
veldt memories of youth.  
The incredible Jar  
man  
digo at Phamous lounge  
chairs. Or at white elephant  
trunks. Trying to grab ivory  
coast from French  
fried epidemics of  
colonial trigger finger  
tip off tournaments of blood  
rivers.

Aunt Jemima

Rainey still waits in stormy weather  
reports of the soul. The super fly  
swatter, cocked ala a Joe Louis right  
cross over invitation from a chin. Still wears her head  
rag  
dolls from Haiti. She sits in the back  
water blues crying: Loa,  
Loa, Loa have mercy on me.

Nearly sixty.

I inherit acres of silences.  
Where I erect a hoop  
and glide over the Rim  
brandt to slam  
dunk my song.

## *marbles*

Weighed down by a deep deep blue. In the corner, just waiting. Something must begin, I think, something has to begin sometime. But, in the corner, underneath a web of spider charms, nothing threatens to happen. 2 a.m. and he tells me that he cannot remember my name and that I should take care not to let this happen. But, I say, perhaps if we were to remember what touch is... to touch in spite of.

It's the rain, dripping and dropping, the sound that enters my skin. He erases me because he can. Only she, stroking the insides of my arms, puts me to sleep. To sit, sleep, be squeezed of all rhythms till there is no other life but the rain.

My mother sits across from me. She is sad. Confused. You are not one of them, she says. You must never forget you are not one... I am not.

She played marbles. She would sneak out of the house and play marbles. She would play marbles and win. If she hadn't been so good at what she did, the boys wouldn't have lost all their marbles. They wouldn't have told my grandmother who wouldn't have locked her up in a room.

My mother's marbles spun, shot across dirt and struck the others. She would strike and conquer, sneak home and hide. When I was little, she bought me a jar. Periodically, she would drop a marble in, ones that she would find, on the sidewalk, behind the stove. She never bought them, always picked them up from somewhere.

I dream about her at times, wearing a sari and a big buttoo. She stands on a lawn with sarees laid out to dry. Bridges of color between her and the camera. She stares straight at the camera, not smiling. And I always hope it's because she's not supposed to not because she can't.

As I grow older, my dream begins to change. She stops looking at the camera, rushes through it. And on the other side of the camera is a mirror and on the other side of the mirror is me. And I don't keep myself from staring at her staring at herself. She sinks deep into this looking. I think how unfair it is for me to do this, dream about her without her knowing.

Once, crouched on a sidewalk, I began to pick weeds out between the cracks. One weed, almost a tree, I thought, would not come out like the rest. I, tug pull sweat swear, dropped it. I stared at this weed until I heard my mother's voice call for me. I wanted to say to her this weed, see, I've pulled and pulled all afternoon, I want to put in a vase for you for your dresser. And I wanted her to reach down over my shoulder, yank it once and find a vase for me.

It was not her fault, but I felt unborn. It was as though time had stopped, set me spinning at a ferocious velocity. A wicked carnival ride that makes you vomit all the evil from your belly till you are left with no character. And fall like a lump of sugar into scalding coffee, dissolving into nothing but a familiar taste.

Like this moment, this one moment:  
I sit on the verandah, the sun setting over the village. Where  
my grandmother was once born twice born and will soon die.  
My grandmother says keep writing it is getting dark each time  
I stop writing to look at her looking at me keep writing.  
To the east, her neighbors are building a new wall with strong  
poles of found wood and banana tree leaves a mile long.  
From the west, an old man comes to share our stoop, smoking  
a cigar. And she is right. It does not stop getting darker.

She is shrinking. Her breasts sag like lame arms that have been  
forgotten. Her eyes are like an ancient dog's, cloudy blue. But  
her hair, her hair is silver and yellow coiled at the base of her  
head, thick enough to hold water. Enough water to flood the  
streets.

I come from this woman. And she remembers me. I come  
from her and can go back to her.

My grandmother lies on her cot most of the day, closing her  
eyes and rubbing the tips of her toes together. We rarely talk,  
only listen to the sound of our breathing.

She teases me, my grandmother, choking me. When she reads  
aloud from the gita, I have no choice but to hear her cry in  
prayer as He would have had He the voice to deny all the  
beginnings of the word 'sacrifice' which means damn little  
today in aching circumstances of hearts and attitudes of life  
and death and I feel like I'm dying.

Beneath my grandmother's cot sleeps a frog. She says he sleeps there almost every night. And she is convinced he is He her god, making her acquaintance so He is no stranger when He takes her, as His bride, home. Home: by the side of the house into the tall dry grass deep inside the well where there is a second pocket of air where he grows a jasmine bush so she will have fresh flowers for her hair.

And I realize I am falling from the sky once more, into a new body that is my own body, like all the times before. Except once, when it was my mother's.

My mother once told me that if I were to bleed for more than six days, I should walk into the river and soak myself until the water around me stained with my breath. My mother has not stopped bleeding for three months. On her back, she watches the ceiling fan move tediously through its revolutions. Not making air, not making sound, moving too slowly to make much of anything.

She cannot walk anymore. She crawls, and that, only to the bathroom. She's stopped speaking, convinced she's spilling what's left of her. She does not know how to stop bleeding.

I see how we are connected, amma, how I can fill you with water from the flood in my palms. And I say *drink* though knowing it's too late.

My mother tells me that it is because of me that she had not tried to kill herself earlier. And that it was remembering me that had caused her to hesitate the last time. Hesitate just long enough for me to appear, I think. And I want to ask her if my being born was a curse. Had she wanted to stop breathing, and I kept her from it. I think it a strange love to love enough to think it a curse.

In the summers here, my mother tells me, you find coolness in the motion of a fan. In Hyderabad, which is there, it is in the stillness of dark rooms and cement floors. She remembers these rooms, various rooms from various lifetimes. And maybe that is why she waited until summer to hang herself from the fan. So she could remember the familiar before forgetting everything.

All of this . . . and my heart feeling broken. My grandmother mother and me flowing deadlike in water. What carries us is the current, in a river that flows through willows. I flow with them will die with them. But I will not remain dead. I will rise before the current becomes too strong. I will walk away.

All that they are in my being, that will remain in the water, heading for greater water. Big seas. Big stars of seas. A planet of sea. And I wonder why I have been given this life, to be the birth of someone times two. And what is it that remains of those two should I choose to have birth? To fall from the sky into the throat of a woman, unsuspecting?

Who am I when I paste myself to a naked wall trying, unsuccessfully, to look beautiful? He takes notes. He

processes my existence. And I forget all else, forget that beyond touch there is always more.

I am intimate with circles, woven into my grandmother mother and nothing outside of this. My grandmother and I, old coughing, saying everything in the past tense. I squint close one eye close both eyes but she has been a part of me for thousands of years. Following me molding me, showing me my shape.

To deny that shape is impossible. But to know it, how possible is that? I have been sculpted with the same materials, feel the same pain in my legs at night, terrified of our death. Nothing is raw anymore. There has been no one raw for centuries.

But to hear the rain, one would think the world was just born. My body sympathizes with each new breath, even more my last. And I begin to be born.

*from* “the *WORLD*”

“the *WORLD*” open  
sundays nine-to-five & afterall  
counts on your—images & “objects” (e.g. a woman & a flower) — limits

---

in  
“the *WORLD*” & my headaches up here  
reading too much probably too much reading  
or jarred waking in a jaw ossified dreaming  
pollution in that world too

“the *WORLD*” offers

space to walk round in  
2 foot snowdrift  
3 ibuprofen caplet  
lavender water  
faceful of nectar

simply listing relieves



how is  
it  
worlding  
over there

*Stone Poems*

StonePoemMethod

a collection of quotations, annually compiled from readings  
language catching attention  
joining all writing together, withdrawing names  
lines separated through boldness of print  
quotations braided, words from quotations, interlaced  
a disjuncting of language, thoughts deliberately disrupted  
moving through the pages of mixed messages  
cutting and dividing, separating and transforming  
a breaking down of fragments into smaller fragments  
a delineation of degrees of non-sense  
standing at attention before the inadvertently enigmatic  
a patience with lines lightly tugging  
locating pattern, suggestions of pattern  
retrieving that which lies mixed among the lines  
a search for subtle cohesions  
a collaboration with language, the language of others  
not a single word my own  
a moment's attention, a brief reflection, a passing insight  
an abbreviated constellation of thought  
intimations, suggestions, provocations  
stones gathered from the shores of Lake Michigan  
printing onto paper, the paper pasted onto stone  
gathering and arranging, shoring fragments  
paper and stone, stone and paper

## *The Navigator*

Each trying to prevent the other

The gangway between the pier and the ship  
falling off into the water  
She's hollering and running around  
Buster is asleep in bed with a photograph of her  
his beloved above him  
She falls

'The Next Morning Found The Navigator  
Drifting Hopelessly At Sea.'

Buster comes down some steps, she goes down some others  
Buster's on the top deck, hears something  
She hears something, starts running  
goes up stairs He's walking down other stairs  
He's walking off She's running  
They're going in circles Going the same way around  
Can't see each other  
She's running along the side of the ship  
And he's running He sights the corner right after  
she's turned it They're running faster and faster  
Trying to catch each other  
She goes down a staircase He walks through a doorway  
She's down below Comes up to the middle deck  
He's on the top deck He's on the middle deck She's on the top deck  
He's on the lower deck She's on the middle deck He's on the middle  
deck She's on the lower deck He's on the top deck  
She's down below

Pulling on rope

They're both pulling on rope  
Pulling Pulling up the little rowboat  
They drop the boat over the side of the ship

He's in the little boat  
He's rowing and rowing  
Rowing and rowing  
She's yelling to him from the side of the ship  
His little boat is sinking  
The boat goes down He goes down  
He comes up He's holding an oar  
She's running along the top deck  
She's got a life preserver  
Throws it down to him It hits him on the head  
He sinks

Blankets on the open deck

He puts a blanket over her They go to sleep  
Lightning strikes Pouring rain  
Buster's soaked  
Tries to wake her up She's asleep  
He picks her up in the blanket  
Carries her off Carries her down the steps  
He's holding her by the blanket  
Now he's just holding the blanket

'LAND!'

They run out on deck  
She's jumping up and down  
the sea the land an island palm trees  
people in canoes  
She's overwrought She grabs the binoculars  
He looks at her  
'Cannibals,' she says  
He nods  
'We're Safer On The Boat.'

In winter. All things continue but in a different manner.  
Movement of all types sounds different. Sounds move  
differently.

Time passes on cold air, on frozen earth, hard snowpacked  
sidewalks and streets.

Our smallest everyday joys are pressed smaller; they do not  
linger on the warm outdoor air.

Small agonies and irritations grow larger.

Winter. Enclosurement. Encasement. Shell. Winter coat.

Pyjama. Blanket. Womb. Aging.

Angry. White.

Cat wrapped bodily against heat register.

Hide away.

Dying in the middle of a severe winter is much akin to dying absolutely alone. No matter how many people surround you in those last days, the birds have abandoned you for sunny climates, and the summer's lush lusty trees are now thin black skeletons stooped under a lowering sky.

The expectation of a soft warm earth awaiting you is replaced by the prospect of a deep dark shaft hacked out of half-frozen clay.

When that time is very near, I should like to be close to one summer tree teeming with birdlife.

“Please. Teach me just one more new song.”

## *Christ In Crystal*

The Son of God in his infinite resourcefulness could have devised something more convincing, more elevated in the idea of unimaginable agony than merely dangling a handful of hours on a March afternoon.

Had Christ really known something about suffering, had he wanted to go out in a truly unforgettable and inimitable manner—at the top of his class, so to speak—he'd have had himself crucified on a blistering January day, with blinding shafts of snow driven in every direction across an open plain in any one of the planet's more frigid regions.

His cross would have awaited him lying half-covered in snow. He'd have lain upon it, given himself over to the fastening of his limbs, and woolen soldiers would have struggled to plant the foot of his cross aground, then pushed him upright—higher than any man before—the new standard of supreme earthly torment.

Every minute an hour, every hour a day as the blue bruise of the cold spreads across exposed flesh, threatens to snap the marrow in the chilled bone, or freeze the slow-moving life's blood.

A crystalline cover builds on the man and his cross. He bristles white.

Had Jesus known how to impress through physical discomfort, how to set his example of unbearable distress, he'd have chosen January or February in the bleakest reaches of Siberia, Canada, or even Northern Wisconsin on a twisting whistling white plain of sub-zero temperature, surrounded by wool-bundled fanatics placing bets on the endurance of his blue flesh.

Blue. Or white.

He'd have assumed, head to foot, a sparkling shroud of  
clinging ice and snow.

Oh shivering Christ cloaked in frigid crystal.

What effect, now, your ache, your anguish, your final  
white cry that blows heavenward like a frosty geyser?

## *The Cardinal*

Quickly I had moved the rigid red body of the cardinal.  
I placed it out of the weak sunlight, under our back door step.  
I knew the sight would break your heart.

But you found him anyway.  
And you said they mate for life.  
And you gave him burial under the dull white snow.  
And you said now she will be looking for her life mate,  
her winter mate,  
and will not find him.

In January. Imagine a thousand hopeful cries unanswered.

## *Trees In Winter*

Gone the rich green gown of summer. Wind, sharptoothed  
frost, and eternal night have  
worked their bitter attrition for months.  
No strong soughing of summer's robust green branches now,  
but the low groan of nude  
trunks pushed and molested by freezing winds.  
Majesty is reduced to complete undress.  
The soul swells with that lifesick feeling that nothing is  
intended for eternity.  
Nothing should survive such whiteblack ruin.

*104*

they are dancing

I am sitting

they come up to me

and ask me if I want a dance

I say no thanks

and they go try another sucker

*just this*

getting tired want a break from this but why bother I am just this  
thing goes around town like this in my mind but I don't want to  
bother with walks along the riverbank and shit like that to stay in  
this room is enough for me and to be with her when I'm not and we're  
fucking in the bed and all is good and I am this madman just typing  
but scores of plenty more mustard where that came from

*pictures of women who don't exist*

I linger on that thought for a moment of bliss inside out cause this  
insight to flicker on and off this plastic mess this mashed potato  
these insights furrowed beneath my sanku lost in parades of nonsense  
I shadow and am so intimidated by time and what to do with it all  
I can think to do is fill it with writing and I am a madman

CHRIS TYSH

*Tombeau I*

*for Sarah Kofman (1935-1994)*

to inherit the vanished  
you hear the shofar's sorrow

roundup volume  
at the Vel d'Hiv

wearing the star  
for the charnel house

terror o lullaby  
in someone else's hand

that lists all six of us

## *Tombeau II*

*for Paul Celan (1920-1970)*

to enter Hades do not go near the smokestacks  
stammer far apart trauma's other name  
saving yourself the cost of missing tongue  
where every appearance of forgiving is washed  
clean, cast to the winds, an amulet  
strapped to the left arm

memory's glove has brought you here  
to this cul-de-sac most likely to collapse  
at the faultline irreproachable prayers  
narrow your eyes, invert letters  
all is well for the deaf and dumb  
death sends her regards

CHRIS TYSH

*Tombeau III*

*for Bruno Schulz (1898-1942)*

to have done with  
the day's account

do not shower just yet  
in tomorrow's lap

where the street ends  
someone has drawn

would-be stumps deeply cut  
golem said to rewrite

history's slogan, if only  
you could read the wretched

meaning of the eternal, beat him  
to the punch, this fata morgana

this lurid self-parody  
in the cinammon shop

would surrender its rotten spread

## *Necessary Errand*

After quiz shows fade  
and the mind is silent,  
after neutral acts

obscure yet fatal,  
the blunt trauma object  
shakes with pleasure.

The dream story's  
violence has its own  
faithless heroes,

rapid eye movements,  
but nothing called  
thought even as

procedure, just the rich  
spasmodic gestures  
of life on the run.

Thin as a threshold,  
oblique as an act,  
nobody fucking gets it

or gets it in the neck.  
The allegorical weather,  
with its aging rains

and latinate diction,  
struggles to exist.  
In the house of words,

the color of the yeti  
against blown snow  
is all that matters.

We are always clear  
but rarely transparent.  
The wedding cake bride

lives on sugar  
in trailer park heaven.  
A perilous journey

in quarter-note bursts.  
A soft and serious father  
gazing over water.

I think you get  
my drift. The sharper  
the errand, the more

your rhetoric fails,  
“another spoiled quest”  
for the grail to remainder.

Discovered in his attic  
by a real estate agent,  
mummified and

leaning in his chair,  
an East German man,  
dead for four years,

seems to watch  
the ripe television,

*Denken ist Schwer*

cafe au lait  
auto-da-fe

bourgeois  
casbah

aubade  
jihad

jail break  
snowflake

overboard  
broadsword

hairshirt  
miniskirt

sophomore  
troubador

agitprop  
sock hop

guignol  
blow hole

beatitude  
Quaalude

thumbscrew  
night dew

undersong  
Viet Cong

thereupon  
woebegone

windblown  
sandstone

pheromone  
saxophone

icon's  
lexicon

salutary  
stationary

hieroglyph  
handkerchief

afterlife  
bowie knife

backstair  
millionaire

north star  
commissar

polyseme  
ex-marine

fellatio  
imbroglio

sweet briar  
forest fire

red shift  
forklift

last gasp  
polygraph

*A Minor Forest*

*for N.P.*

*was this the honest  
injury*

*the pieces in us straining  
to be seen*

A minor forest my voice looks thrown

the fate of the mouth  
is precisely the surface

of music to be in a movie to

---

My own note sounded near it

and suddenly the city won't  
pertain per se

to sleep as a fragrance and shards of aspirin

With this the day's injury's beauty's report

a name stays the waking stays  
put but to fade

where sun confronts tunnel and altitude ear

---

With this the forest folding and in me the city

a bird or a lung tuned  
up to become

a light in the light of a choir's decay

If fiction-to-be is but the weather in the way

the bright disguising  
of money to break

the sky from the land as experience drags

---

Hum of the story is the blood gone song

its seeds garbed for battery  
paper and grammar

the meat from the fruit of the clean

No dreams and up early to instinct's stitch

I'm all aboard  
the body as cocktail

the facts as crammed inside the citrus of the brain

---

To focus the throat (to focus the throat

on backward knee  
unfixed in the glass

empty afternoon I hear mostly the flag

On stupid new and wounded hands

a failing winter  
is walked out into

but what would I go and do

---

My unarrived hidings remind me quiet

my stutter over urban my  
wrist across writing this

fixing to ready my banner(ing) ballad it

## *Delphine*

*November 1932*

The boy leapt from the boat's prow and retrieved the tow rope from the lapping current. He hauled the dugout from the belly-high water up to the muddy embankment. A rowboat sat half sunken in the mud of the riverbank, its sea green hull stained by idleness. A bird had made a nest on the V of its prow. The boy pulled the dugout out onto the mud and put the tow rope in and walked through the screen of foliage that separated the edge of Mr. Dunbar's land from the river's edge. The rains had come early this year and with them a morning mist that hung suspended beneath the canopy as dense as the smoke from the pipes of the old wood carvers who sold their wares in the night streets of Monrovia. He walked quickly.

Dunbar lived at the bend of the river. The boy's father said that Dunbar's land was cursed, for although another American who lived two miles downriver, and Schweiger who lived three miles upriver, grew and harvested profitable crops, Dunbar's fields yielded nothing but rotting bananas.

Dunbar's tin and wood shack stood at the edge of the swidden. There were many biting flies and mosquitoes here and a bad odor that made the boy twist up his nose as he swatted the air beside his ear. His father had helped Dunbar clear the swidden with machetes and fire four years before. The jungle was hungry for this clearing. The boy could feel it. The loping branches of calamus palms and kola trees and creeping liana vines that surrounded the clearing and the muted but dense hum of creatures hidden by the thick vegetation threatened to consume the swidden in less time than it had taken to clear it. The swidden itself was half occupied by Dunbar's banana crop and half by the clearing at

the edge of which sat the porched shack. Rusted and discarded farm equipment littered the small yard in front of the shack. Two dogs were chained to a curved iron bar sunk into the ground. In visits past, with his father, the boy had seen the dogs war perpetually against each other, barking and baiting in a constant melee. But now they lay in the moist dirt, emaciated and sloe-eyed. A wooden pole with crossarms stood planted in the yard beside them. From the crossarms hung, like a totem, a large and rusted Roy trap and beside it an assortment of equally rusted and disused traps for rats, moles, monkeys, and mice. At the base of the pole sat four dented red cans each bearing a stenciled black death's head. The boy called out. After awhile Dunbar walked out of the frame of darkness through the shack's doorway and stopped at the edge of the porch. He was carrying something. He looked across the clearing at the boy, called out hello, and stepped off the porch.

Even from yards away the boy could see that something was wrong with Dunbar. He carried a worn, brown leather suitcase in his right hand, his gait stooped and slow. As he approached he switched the suitcase from his right to his left hand.

The boy remembered when the somber and kind young man first arrived. Dunbar now smiled again and extended his hand. But he was not that same man anymore. A fine crust like dried salt pasted the corners of his eyes and he smelled sweet. The boy thought of his father's wrath should they be late and miss the ship at Monrovia. He shook Dunbar's hand.

Dunbar asked the boy for news. The boy said that his father was well and wished him a safe journey home and greater prosperity at home than he had found here. Dunbar

laughed with a wheezing exhalation. He looked over the boy's shoulder at the expanse of banana palms, green now, growing toward their devastation by blight of animals and insects. The boy, looking up into Dunbar's eyes, saw there something that reminded him of fish in their last throes after being taken into the boat.

Dunbar asked the boy to follow him for he still had some things to attend to before they could go. The boy followed him to the cabin. Sunlight had bleached to silver the wooden slats of the brief and dusty porch. The boy was reluctant to pass through the cloth hanging in the doorway into that darkness beyond but he followed after Dunbar entered. The room smelled of Dunbar's sickness. Flies sprang from the floor like heavy steam as he stepped into the room. Two high windows in the opposite wall provided a slanting clerestory light. Except for the glimmer that entered through the doorway, it was the only light.

A cot lay below a tent of mosquito netting in a far corner, its stained canvas sling sunk to inches above the wooden floor. Half-filled brown and green glass bottles of quinine and iodine and tins of Epsom salts, their labels peeling from age, stood on the floor beside it. Two tables piled high with books stood at both its head and foot. The boy recognized many of the books from the colors of their covers. He had delivered many of them, carrying them in his dugout from Monrovia. Though he spoke little English he remembered each distinctly—a book of blue the color of the sky, the color of the cross on the flags of many of the ships that anchored at the coast. A book of green like unripened bananas. The bare wooden floor of the little shack's interior felt smooth and clean beneath his bare feet. A washing bowl stood on a dresser

against the far wall, beside it a straight razor, a wooden box. Dunbar walked toward the cot and asked the boy to help him. He followed Dunbar's example and took three or four books in hand and followed him out into the clearing. After awhile the two had made a small tower of books stacked neatly side by side. The dogs stood and watched them. Flies swarmed at their open mouths and blinking eyes.

When all of the books had been removed from the shack Dunbar told the boy to wait. He went back into the cabin. He came out with a pea-green greatcoat wrapped over one arm, walked to where he'd left his suitcase and put the greatcoat on top of it. Then he went around to the rear of the cabin and returned with a red metal petrol canister. The boy followed Dunbar to the doorway of the shack. Dunbar went inside. The boy stood in the doorway. Dunbar's hands shook as he unscrewed the cap and poured the petrol over the cot and tables. Flies that had settled on every surface of the shack's interior leapt frenziedly into the air and the boy smelled the fuel wafting in the shack's interior. When he had emptied the canister Dunbar set it down and took a silver lighter from his pants pocket. He walked toward the boy and put his hand on his shoulder.

— Stand over there.

The boy walked to where the books were stacked in the clearing. Dunbar stood at the doorway of the shack. He looked at the boy. He flicked the flint of the lighter and bent down. From where he stood the boy saw the dark interior of the shack flare up with the light of the flames. Dunbar stood at the doorway. The orange flames cast him in silhouette. Smoke began to billow from the gap between the shack's tin walls and the corrugated roof. Dunbar turned and walked

toward the boy and stood beside him.

The boy watched as Dunbar picked his way among the strewn farm equipment that lay about the clearing. He bent and picked up a rusted machete and he walked toward the dogs. The boy thought No. He thought No. The dogs whimpered and bent their mouths shyly as Dunbar approached and the one that was nearest yelped and turned on its heels as he swung the machete down. The chain must have been very weak from rust—the dull blade of the machete shattered it. He swung the machete through the chain that shackled the second dog and stepped back. The boy watched the dogs. Black smoke rose from the now blackened mound of books. The boy smelled the thick smell of burning paper and above it, acrid and unsettling, the smell of burnt leather like an offering of flesh.

The dogs sat beside their metal posts and watched Dunbar. Years at their tethers had made freedom inconceivable. Dunbar stood over the dogs for a few minutes. He made a sudden garbled sound, a hea, and feebly kicked the dog nearest him in the chest. The dog yowled and spun on its rear and the other dog stood up. Dunbar advanced on the dogs and the boy watched.

Mr. Dunbar, he decided, was crazy.

After the dogs had retreated a few yards Dunbar again kicked the one that stood nearest him. The dogs spun and ran a little distance and turned and stood watching him. Dunbar ran toward them—not so much a run as a stiff ambling shuffle. When he was near the dogs he lifted his right leg to strike again and wrapped his foot around the ankle of his opposite leg. He fell hard and dust billowed up into the air around where he lay flat on his face. The dogs padded toward

him and whimpered and nuzzled at his face and neck as the boy ran to where he lay.

The boy helped Dunbar sit up and he saw that his nose was bleeding. He helped Dunbar to his feet and he told him that they should go now or they would miss the ship from Monrovia. Dunbar murmured yes as he wrapped his arm around the boy's shoulder and hobbled with the boy's help to where his suitcase and greatcoat lay in the dust.

Dunbar hobbled at the boy's side. He was a heavy burden, but the boy supported him across the clearing and through the pathless stand of bush that bordered the river. Dunbar gasped and his face was crumpled into an expression the boy could not interpret. He helped Dunbar step into the dugout. The small craft wobbled on its hull in the mud of the riverbank and Dunbar sat uneasily on the cross bench before hunching over and putting his face in his hands.

The boy walked back through the brush into the swidden. The dogs stood at the further side of the clearing and watched him as he bent to pick up Dunbar's suitcase and greatcoat. Smoke billowed from the doorway and roof of the shack and the smell of burning wood permeated the air. Perhaps the fire and smoke had frightened the animals of the surrounding bush because there was no sound now as he turned to go back with Dunbar's belongings in hand.

When he was halfway to the river and could hear its lapping current he was surprised by a muffled growl and it took a moment before he realized that the dogs had followed him. He picked up the greatcoat from where he had dropped it and turned and watched warily as the dogs, standing side by side, eyed him through their slanted, fly-pestered eyes and growled. He walked very slowly sideways and the dogs

advanced with each step he took.

When he reached the dugout the dogs stood growling at the edge of the bush. Dunbar sat on the bench of the dugout with his face still in his hands. The boy put the suitcase and the greatcoat in the very back of the boat and pushed the dugout along the muddy riverbank into the water. He turned and the dogs padded out of the bush toward him. They made feral, desperate sounds and their eyes seemed intent on his legs. When he was in the water up to his thighs he climbed over the prow and after pulling in the tow rope climbed over Dunbar, who sat in the back of the dugout. He took up the paddle and stroked against the current and the dugout slowly turned. There was very little sound now as the boat curved in the water to southward. The sickening sweet smell of the swidden was displaced now by the smells of the river with their briny intimation of the sea. He turned and the dogs stood silently at the edge of the river. They stood side by side and as the dugout gained distance the perspective shifted and the body of the dog closest overlapped the other so that they merged into a being of one body with two heads. He watched them standing there and he looked at Dunbar's back. Dunbar made no sound as he hunched forward in the prow.

When the boat hit the seaward current he dipped the paddle in and began to stroke more deliberately. He looked back over his shoulder and the dogs stood silent and inquisitive in the shadowline of the bush. He turned and looked at Dunbar's hunched back. Dunbar made no sound as he bent forward in the prow. The boy took strong strokes into the heavy water and felt a great urgency.

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The boy and the man swept southward on the current of the Saint Paul. The boy at the paddle watched the shadowed treeline of the river's eastern bank along which he guided the dugout. The sun rose high above the Bong Range inland and to the east the sky was blue and cloudless and limitless above the range and the thick canopy of black forest that stood along each side of the river's course. At intervals along the river they passed sprawling rubber plantations, the trunks of the evenly rowed palms scored in spirals along their lengths by tappers' knives.

Dunbar sat hunched forward in the dugout. The boy watched his back as it swelled and receded with each gasping breath beneath his soiled white shirt. Dunbar's brown skin was wet and his hair had grown in the three or four months since the boy had last seen him into an unruly woolen mass. After a long time on the river Dunbar sat upright but did not turn.

As they approached Monrovia the traffic on the river grew. Other dugouts, tugs, and the larger riverboats of the rubber plantations plied side by side along the calm gray current. On the decks of the bigger boats shirtless men walked or stood idly looking at the passing boats or talking among themselves as they made their way toward the harbor. At one point the boy heard shots, and as they advanced he saw a commotion among ships that lay some distance ahead.

Two ships stood at anchor along the western bank. A pale, shirtless man with a black cap stood balanced delicately on the railing at the prow of the nearer ship. Two shirtless ship hands stood below him, supporting his legs like porters as the white man brought a shotgun to his shoulder and aimed above and beyond the steel rigging of the farther ship into the foliage of the bordering jungle. When he pulled the trigger, the river

seemed to explode. A burst storm of shrieking birds shot out of the jungle into the blue sky. One among them—a heavy white and broken thing—fell into the current at the river's edge. The men on both ships cheered, and as the boy resumed his paddling, a man dove from the boat nearest the shore to retrieve the delicate prey.

As the traffic on the river grew denser the boy was more watchful and deftly steered the small dugout along the river edge through the maze of steel ships' hulls. When they reached the sea mouth of the river the current grew stronger but he plied the boat southward along the coast, slowly making his way toward Mamba Point which although now visible lay far distant. Dunbar sat crouched before him still in the front of the dugout and the boy was afraid to interrupt his reverie and in fleeting moments feared he might have died sitting there so still. Vessels of every size choked the harbor mouth as they made their way toward the closed crescent of Monrovia. By late afternoon the dugout had reached the northern mouth of the bay. The boy was tired.

The boy steered the dugout to landfall, weaving past the teeming wharves and docks of Cape Mesurado. Tankers, steamers, all the vast ships of the Firestone Rubber Company swarmed along the Cape and among them, like waterbeetles teeming on bathing bush cows, the countless dugouts identical to his own.

After the boy had brought the dugout alongside the dock he climbed up onto the pilings and tied the tow rope to the dock. Dunbar sat hunched in the front of the dugout and the boy climbed down and roused him.

He helped Dunbar climb up to the dock. When Dunbar finally managed to stand upright on the wood of the dock he

looked so off balance that the boy thought he might tumble into the water. The boy retrieved the suitcase and the greatcoat from the dugout and after making sure that the boat was securely tied he took Dunbar's arm and led him from the wharves and the crowded docks into the streets of Monrovia. The lights of the city glowed amber beyond open doorways and windows. Whites—sailors from Norway, France, Denmark, elsewhere—walked the streets or stood in groups along the roadside laughing. Blacks—the native Liberians and Americans like Dunbar—stood in the doorways and looked out into the night. They walked to the American Mission. Vendors sold fruit and vegetables and the boy noted a table at which could be bought ornaments in the shapes of monkeys and locusts and fish cut from brushed tin.

~

When they returned to the docks the steamer bound for America stood at the quayside. Tendrils of rust dripped from the painted white lettering of its name high on the prow: *Delphine*. Beyond, other ships with other names—French, Greek, Dutch, English—plied the coast. The Liberian flag rippled in the wind on all their masts and rails. The last of the shirtless, barefooted men bearing burlap sacks on bent backs made their way slowly up the steep wooden cargo plank.

A high mournful whistle announced the ship's departure. Mr. Dunbar asked the boy to open the suitcase. The boy knelt on the dock and opened it. Inside were a few neatly folded articles of clothing, some books, yellow envelopes tied by a length of twine, and a shiny wooden box decorated with black and white squares ornately chased and bordered by a

fleur-de-lis pattern parallel to tiny dancing figures. Dunbar told the boy to hand him the box and the boy lifted it out of the suitcase and gave it to him.

— Do you know how to play chess?

— No, the boy said.

— Do you know anyone who can teach you?

The boy looked at the box in Dunbar's hand. The sky above the setting sun cast on its stained surface a precious glow.

— Yes, he said.

— I want you to have this and I want you to learn how to play it.

He handed the boy the clasped chess box. The stained and glossy object felt warm in his hand and exceedingly precious.

— Give me the papers there.

The boy bent and took the neatly packaged envelopes from the suitcase. He handed them to Dunbar. Dunbar fumbled at the knot in the red twine of a stained yellow envelope, gradually prying it loose, and sorted through it. He removed from it a folded sheet of onionskin, studied it, and folding it again handed it to the boy.

— It's for the land.

He looked off toward the sea, the distant boats.

— Maybe your father can do better with it.

A warm wind was gathering and the white crests of waves boiled phosphorescently under the darkening sky as they hit the dockside. Above them the lights from the pilot's cabin and from the portals shone. The boy helped Dunbar climb the wooden gangway. Men standing along the railing glanced at them both before turning to their murmured conversations. Others moved about quickly on the deck. The boy turned and

watched the rising dusk hour lights of Monrovia, the distant marshes, and beyond them the immense dark jungle that spread to the north.

He felt Dunbar's hand on his shoulder. He looked up. Dunbar's eyes glistened.

— Please thank your father for me.

— Yes, Mister Dunbar.

Dunbar took his hand from the boy's shoulder. He turned and looked out at the sprawl of Monrovia laid out before them.

When the *Delphine* cut loose its moorings the cargo steamer lurched away from the dock and its prow slowly curved seaward. The boy stood below the vaulting and receding wall of the ship's hull. His hand was raised in a frozen wave. He could see Dunbar's silhouette looking down at him from the ship's railing, a shadowed figure receding slowly into the coastal night. Beyond the *Delphine* false constellations formed by the lights of ships at anchor along the coast glittered against the sky. By the time the prow of the *Delphine* had swung full to sea the boy could no longer see Dunbar. He stood on the dock with his hand still raised and watched as the silver wake of the *Delphine* widened and dissipated and the ship's yellow lights converged with the row of distant constellations above the sea.

~

He watched the boy. It was getting dark and the docks were far away but it was not so hard to see him because he stood beneath a lightpost. After awhile he could not see him anymore. The city in the distance was a cluster of flickering

lights and the coast on both sides of it was dark but he could see the black silhouettes of the mountain ranges against the sky. In the distance to the left and right he saw the lights of other ships. When it got cold he went in. He had few things—the coat he wore, some shirts and books in his suitcase. He went below.

There was a man already there. A white man. He was taking things out of a large worn black locker set on the floor and placing them very neatly on the bed. The small room smelled of metal and salt. The man was knelt on the ground beside his bed. When he heard that someone had entered behind him he turned.

— Hello brother.

— Hello.

Philip put his suitcase down. He didn't think that he could stand much longer. He wanted to vomit. He sat on the edge of the lower bunk across the aisle. The man kneeling on the floor watched him.

— So you're an American?

— Yes.

The man's hair was gray and he wore a white shirt and white pants and sandals. A wooden cross hung from a leather cord around his neck. He rose and turned to Philip. He put out his hand. Philip stood and shook the man's hand. He let himself drop back onto the bed. The bunk above his bed was unoccupied. The man turned and knelt again beside his trunk and resumed taking things out of it and placing them on the bed. They were religious things—little black bibles and pamphlets in different colors, hymnals and psalms. There were also baubles, wooden crosses on leather thongs like the one he wore, and rosaries of colored beads, and cards with pictures of

the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus. The man was very attentive to these things and seemed to be making an inventory. Philip was glad to be let alone. He was so tired he stared dumbly at the bottom of the bunk above him. There was a porthole in the wall just above his head. The upper half of it was blocked by the edge of the mattress above him but by sitting up and leaning against the wall he could see out of the lower half of it. It was dark and the light from inside the room reflected against the glass, but his eyes got used to it and he could see the moon above the water and below the moon there was a path of light that narrowed in the distance like a road. The ocean was black and the slender white ripples reflected the moonlight. He lay down again. He had not taken his greatcoat off; he was too tired. He turned over and the missionary was still kneeling beside his bunk placing his things in stacks and piles on the bed. The room was so narrow that Philip could see the stubble on the back of the stranger's gray neck. He thought that although they had said hello and shaken hands he had not told the missionary his name and the missionary had not told him his.

~

He dreamt of his mother. She stood beside his bed and held his hand. Her face was thin and tired and she held his hand lightly. He could not open his mouth. He tried to grip her hand but his fingers passed through hers and when he woke his fist was clenched hard and his nails had dug into the palms of his hand and left three red crescents there. He looked at them. He turned over. The missionary was not there. His trunk and his other things were gone and his bed was neatly

made. Philip smiled and thought that if he could have shown the missionary his hand he might have thought he was Christ. If he could have shown him his three stigmata the missionary might have given him a rosary of blue glass beads to wear on his cross. The light in the little room was off but light came through the porthole above Philip's head. He tried to sit up but couldn't. He lay down. After awhile he fell asleep.

~

In that place that was Aiden but not Aiden the things looked very much as they had when he was a boy. There were elms along the road and the road was narrow enough that the branches of the elms met above it. It smelled as he remembered it, the air against his face and the shadows of the leaves playing in the dust of the road, the thin salt of quarry dust beneath it all. Though he couldn't see them from the road he knew there were fields filled with flowers and there was the smell of them high and thick in the air. He kept walking and then he heard a sound. When he turned around he saw coming up the road a boy on a horse and so he stood on the edge of the road to let the rider pass. When the rider came up beside him he saw that it was Fat Toby Tyler and he was sitting on the foal he'd stolen from Josephine's father. Toby sat on the horse barebacked and he held a tuft of the horse's mane in one hand and in the other he held his pipe. Philip couldn't see Fat Toby's eyes because they were in the shadow of his hat. Toby passed by and he did not look at Philip and all there was then in the road was the sound of the horse's hooves as Fat Toby went on into the distance and the

sound of the leaves above that sounded like water and the strong scent of flowers.

~

When he woke up a man was moving something under his nose. He thought that he would die if he had to smell that smell. He brought up his hand and pushed the man's hand away. The stranger was sitting on the edge of the bed. There were other men standing behind him. The light hurt Philip's eyes and he closed them and turned away. He heard them.

— What's wrong with him?

— Malaria for certain. Tuberculosis too I think. He's running a high fever.

— Man supposed to sleep in this bed here said the nigger screamed all night. Wouldn't have it. Said he didn't want to sleep with all that ruckus but I thought he just didn't want to share a room with no nigger. I know I wouldn't. Had to put him in with them Germans. Didn't think it was the best idea putting no Baptist in with Lutherans but didn't have no choice.

— Is there anything we can do for him?

The second voice, the closest voice, the voice that sat on the edge of the bed answered.

— I can give him something. Don't know if it'll help but I can give him something.

— All right. Give him what he needs.

There were sounds, footsteps going away. A hand was on his face. He opened his eyes. The man who sat on the edge of the bed had blue eyes set in a sunburnt face. He looked at Philip.

— Can you hear me?

— Yes.

— You're a very sick man.

— Yes, I can feel that.

The stranger smiled. The bulb in the ceiling was on and it hurt his eyes. A black bag lay open on the edge of the bed near Philip's hip and the stranger rummaged through it.

— I'm going to give you some medicine. It's for the malaria and for the pain. I have nothing for the tuberculosis.

— Thank you.

He bent down and Dunbar could hear him going through some things, the tinkling of glass bottles as he rooted through a bag. The stranger sat up and he took Dunbar's hand and he dropped two small pills into his hand.

— Take these.

Dunbar put the pills in his mouth. The stranger watched him. He bent over and he put the mouth of a kit canteen to Dunbar's lips and Dunbar drank and he could feel the pills go down, an alkaline remnant in his mouth. When he had finished drinking the stranger watched him.

— What's your name?

— Philip Dunbar.

— My name is Kitch, Kitch Green.

— Kitch? What kind of a name is that?

The stranger smiled.

— It certainly wasn't my given name.

— Are you a doctor?

— No, not by training. By experience maybe.

— Well thank you anyway.

Dunbar's voice didn't sound like it was coming from his own mouth. It sounded lower than his accustomed voice, like

something from the back of a cave. The stranger, Kitch, watched him still.

— I think you'll be all right. You should rest.

He got up from the bed and bent and picked up the bag. He went through the passageway and Dunbar listened for his footsteps until he couldn't hear them anymore. He could hear the lightbulb in the ceiling above humming a tinny electric drone. It had been a very long time since he had seen an electric light. He lay and watched the bulb for awhile. He wondered how much everything had changed in sixteen years. He fell asleep.

~

He walked along the path that led from the road to the Sever River at the spot where he used to swim with Arnold and Fat Toby and Josephine and Helene when he was a boy. He walked along the path and the sounds were all the same although he knew he was not in Aiden. The sounds of crickets and frogs and, always that sound of the wind high up above in the bright green leaves of the trees like a constant whisper. Dead leaves carpeted the path and he came to the dry gully and climbed down into it and passed through the thicket of leafless dry bramble that covered the floor and climbed up the other side. It was very still and it had been so long since he had been there last. When he reached the opposite ridge of the gully he could hear the water and he went toward it. It was warm and the branches of the trees moved with the wind. He saw the water and he ran to it. When he reached the river he saw that he stood at the edge of the swimming hole. The fallen oak that had served as bridge and diving platform still

lay across the narrow stretch that cascaded down into the hole. He knelt down. The soil along the riverbank was soft and his boots sank in. He knelt down and cupped his hands and scooped up an icy handful of the water and brought it to his mouth. It felt so good again to taste the cold water of the Sever River.

~

On the fifth day the ship arrived at port in Jamaica. His legs, when he stood, were like loose spindles jury-rigged to the rusted sockets of his hips. He took two steps and fell heavily to the floor beside his bed. He gathered himself up and made his way to the deck and stood there in the noonday sun leaning against the rail, watching men unload the ship and other ships beside. He had hoped to go ashore but it took all of his energy to stand. The rocking of the ship at its mooring made his stomach turn and he lurched back to his berth in a delirium.

~

— Drink this.

He opened his eyes. Homeward current on an endless ocean. Kitch's eyes and face were the only things he saw outside his dreams aside from the latticework of leather straps beneath the mattress in the bunk above. Kitch's eyes behind the thick lenses of his glasses watched him. His cheeks were unshaven.

— Where are you headed?

Philip drank from the canteen. He let his head fall back

against his bundled greatcoat.

— I'm going home.

— Where's home?

— Aiden, in Missouri.

— Aiden?

— You heard of it?

— No, I never heard of it. I'm from Chicago myself.

— Chicago?

— Yeah.

— I've never been to Chicago.

Philip heard the bulb buzzing in the ceiling. His head felt heavy and he couldn't keep his eyes open. His dreams beckoned.

— I'm gonna let you sleep. You look tired.

— Thank you.

~

It took three days for the *Delphine* to climb the coast. He wavered, trapped in that fatigue, but by the second day he was able to stand at the bow for an hour and look out at the afternoon sea. The ocean smelled like Aiden as he remembered it—a salt smell that reached into him and conjured there images less substantial than the ones that had wracked him in the days of the crossing. He reached for them, sought out what they suggested, but they escaped him as he leaned against the railing, the high sea wind against his face. That patch of land on which he'd subsisted for over four years also seemed remote, unreal. A week's crossing had made all of his recent past as unlikely and unfamiliar as a dream. The sky was magnanimous—a bright blue expanse above the dark sea

beneath. The wake of the ship formed an interminable V the phosphorescent arms of which extended all the way to the horizon.

When the *Delphine* reached New York Harbor Philip mustered his remaining strength to go up onto the deck and see the city and the country he had last seen eleven years before. A high wind cut the water below gray skies that drizzled. He had trouble keeping his footing on the wet deck. When finally he stood astern he peered out over the silver water but could make out nothing through a dense fog save the distant echo of harbor bells and water whispering against the hulls of nearby ships.

*The Capture*

I did not like my master,  
He did not treat me well.  
I formed a resolution  
Not long with him to dwell.  
— “The Sheffield 'Prentice”

Close to dawn I heard  
Old Buffalo come down the Hill,  
and when he neared the Bottom, give  
the awful scalp hallo.

We're sure to make a sacrifice  
I thought, and might as well submit  
to fate—*How do you do today*  
*old Captain Buffaloe?*

A three-leg stool stood not far  
from where he sat—I drew it near  
and lay my arm across his Thigh,  
gazing upon him all the while.

And when he rose to leave,  
he motioned me to take his chair,  
and rode with Starrett down  
hockhocking—Generosity

in all things he took.

\*

I had a Graver with me when Taken  
and the Indian gave it back again—  
At odd times I marked his Powderhorn  
with Birds & Stars, which seemed to please him.

And yet his Rifle issued Commandments  
against my graven thought—  
the Birds & Stars his thumb negated—  
resounding Thou Shalt Not.

\*

The Hole; or Coming Close to Things:

Niagary  
    we staid one day,  
then put aboard  
        the Line-a-bee  
to cross Ontario.  
We sacked out in the Hole  
and made our Bed  
        on Ballast Stones,  
confined with horse and cow—  
who took the Hole's best part,  
and lowed the antonyms  
        to what  
high rhetoric  
        our tongues had spoke.  
Our voyage short,  
        we soon got clear  
of Brute companions,  
        and arrived  
at Laurence River's mouth  
beneath command  
        of Captain Law—  
I ought not use his name  
because I cannot  
        to advantage.  
Did I say we was confined,  
and made to eat  
        provisions raw?

\*

For observations  
on the falls  
you have my map,

but permit me to say  
there appeared a cloud  
hanging over them

obscurity  
the same as impended  
the Israelite camp

You are so acquainted  
with how that was  
I think I need not

give description  
as inspired men  
have perfect knowledge

of inspired writings  
and cannot fail  
of being perfectly

uniform.  
Part of the fall  
is abstract,

for the knowledge  
which is fleshly  
works death.

\*

I was placed on Prison Isle  
as my strength began to fail.

Some had been before us there,  
come to atone for some

transgression—all civil tone  
uprooted & transposed.

This dank, Luxuriant sod  
lay amidst a Daingerous Flood

which British thought  
a prison in itself.

But prisoners fled in droves  
all summer long—at their ease—

rafting over rapids,  
recaptured and confined

in Irons or in Pickets.  
Those half-dead still felt fit

to Burrow under floors—  
others took a skyward course—

\*

I made a map too large  
for men to carry to the Woods.  
And whilst I was about this map  
I went to hear you preach—

I never trouble Churches,  
but contract no Burthen from your speech  
even if you discourse on  
a jargon of Absurdities.

I had for some time been Troubled  
with rheumatism, though that day  
seemed clear, and so I let my horse  
to earn his living in the fields.

But on returning found it seize  
my knee with shocking pain,  
and as a Gentleman drove by,  
a Vision struck—a horseless chair.

And though til then absorbed in talk  
with pleasant Company  
about your sermon, I refrained,  
and wished to be shut off from them.

Thus viz what cannot you do  
if you set your mind about it.

\*

- x 3 —Is there any such thing as conscience; or does not what we call Conscience arise altogether from Education
- x 4<sup>TH</sup> —Is there any Religion which can be formed useful to Society. If there is on what principles ought that Religion be founded
- 5<sup>TH</sup> —Expunged—Burch
- 7<sup>TH</sup> —Are there any Punishments or rewards after this life—unknown but believe Mr. Voigt
- x 15<sup>TH</sup> —What makes North America colder in winter than other Countries in the same degree of N. Latitude
- 17 —Have any Passions at all been given to men (Scott)
- 18<sup>TH</sup> —How comes it men are more susceptible of reason than other Animals—unknown
- x 20 —Do not all men enjoy an equal Share of happiness in this World
- x 21 —Why is the eastern part of our Continent more sandy rocky broken and Barren than it is west of the Aligany Mountain

- 22 —Would not less sanguinare Punishment than that  
of Death for capital crimes be of more extensive  
utility—unknown but believe Mr. Goodfellow
- 23 —Why are the human Race more than some others  
of the Animal Species at all seasons ready for  
Coition—Mr. Muninger
- 25 —Why are particular Species of Animals more  
Obeadient to men than to any other—unknown
- 26 —Can a man Love a Being whome he has never  
seen—unknown
- 27 —What is matter—unknown
- 28 —What is the cause of Attraction—unknown
- 29<sup>TH</sup> —expunged

---

These scenes draw on the *Autobiography of John Fitch*, ed. Frank G. Praeger (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1976). Fitch (1744-98) was an early-American clockmaker, gunsmith, frontiersman-surveyor-land-jobber, and inventor.

*LJUTY*

althoth instructive flower lustreve  
 I am a bun dance and percentage  
 organic mathorth well moths  
 Ochijcs Nas a long established  
 undisturbed benthic environment  
 broken by a broken (the tale first  
 skull in a dead fall  
 ina harbour grain elevatour  
 Har Harbard Har Harbard  
 a sacrifice of birds  
 in this meadow of bones  
 an married to no one of them Celtic fairy women  
 by the shores of GlitzEgloomy  
 Michal Rawski (accent marks robbed) left  
 Rozalia, Rosalia, Rosalee, Oh Rosy,  
 steal away, now, steal away  
 rose left ringy around a mysterious well  
 alone a crown and them they betrayed her  
 that owned it all and wanted more  
 in Buffalo d. 1898) no head stone  
 Rafsky? Howya spill it?  
 no date of birth no place of birth  
 Piz z Bogem  
 a vui inhabits  
 where space is absolutely limiting  
 as in the sponge dominated  
 habitart in caves, under Devonian stone,  
 where the space is limited  
 and the rich get richer  
 and their suns and dawnters  
 have the jobs that boss American  
 poesity  
 everydthing is war

*The Return of the Narrative*

three *hexactinellids* and *tetilla*  
*tequila Iliad leptoderma* et al  
 like dishes would dance about  
 without the predators obvious,  
 those seethed in oblivion  
 were made to lay the ghosts  
 called pelican pulegium  
 Cobain studied herbalism?  
 pennyroyal tea with tart vinegar  
 and dry fig leaves Eves tongue  
 probably a misprint for toughie  
 see also a tough humors under Pan  
 the piper and tough phlegm  
 underwear water werewolf  
 cholera choler colore color  
 take thej leaves with the flower  
 and stripe them from the shells  
 it is thust probable that *cinamachyra*  
 or civilization utilities  
 a chemical da fence hath virtue  
 of loosing against perdition

*Somewhere Running*

*(excerpt)*

She the woman is standing one woman stands and  
the other there is another a woman stands too  
in front of her each woman standing opposite the other.

This woman this one woman who catches a glimpse of  
another and she too the other woman the woman  
unseen until now becomes visible and here perhaps they  
the one woman and then the other glance briefly at one  
another only briefly one woman seeing another saying  
nothing at all waiting waiting for the woman the  
second waiting for the first or the other way around the  
one who stands this woman seen for the first time  
who doesn't speak or move but both are present  
motionless speechless,

but somewhere  
they are running toward or away from one another or  
perhaps indifferent each to the other they run they  
do not stand still they run and the way opens to them to  
their movement the speed the inflection of two women's  
bodies here standing still as if the artist could not decide

hesitated saw one woman and then another and a  
brief glance unnoticed by themselves even here right  
here in front of the eyes that watch no movement at all  
that whole moment fused to those two presences the  
presence of she the woman who stands opposite one  
woman alone and neither speaks nor moves she  
doesn't speak she the woman does not move the one  
the other two women standing not speaking.

And she either or both one woman the other  
woman or both women they the two women who  
stand standing face to face lean no longer standing  
but leaning or both standing and leaning away from the  
point of focus the angle shifts the angle of the body of  
one woman and then the other moves here there is  
movement outward away from the centre the point of  
connection of attraction the point where the view allows  
for the possibility of collusion in posture or gaze they  
lean in one body the woman's toward the other body  
of the woman who stands as they both do transfixed as  
they are by the finality which the image imposes the fixing  
in time in this one moment of two bodies both  
women together in this particular frame the one not  
the other which commands the eye to seek a line that pulls  
one toward the other the two now women in the

image in full view they do lean both and each outward.

There is dialogue the mouth moves of the woman the first woman who stands as the second listens or perhaps pretends to listen the other woman the one who stands and listens her head tilted to the side or forward depending.

A secret is being shared the one woman telling the other one thing or another in a whisper her lips barely moving the lips this way she has of speaking the first woman to the second the woman who listens intently let's say her body still they are both still except for the lips that move and the ears that listen to words that fall do they fall or do they slip out from between the lips that barely move into the ears or the hands perhaps the hands of the woman who collects the words into her pockets there are pockets in the coat she wears the second woman this one who stands and listens in her coat she is listening and gathering the secrets of the one woman this one who speaks quietly ever so quietly dropping secrets into the hands of the woman this other woman and the frame allows for this exchange this dialogue words transmitted from one

woman to another both women standing one speaking with her lips one listening with her hands the hands which collect the words of the one woman into her pockets small treasures perhaps or heavily weighted thoughts each one pressed into the other forming a hard ball of words of thoughts of ideas the thoughts and ideas of the one woman hard and heavy in the pockets of the woman there are two women this the frame allows for accidentally the second woman as an afterthought but here this is of no great concern there are two women one intended the other surfacing as if by magic magic from the lips of one woman into the hands of another woman this dialogue begun in a space reserved for silence words in the frame this is unusual the words drift out and in from and to this direction captured in a moment of distraction distraction on the part of the artist who did not intend for there to be two women but here they are speaking one to the other.

It the city the women are standing in a city forms the setting the place where the women stand and lean or stand or lean both leaning and standing two women both of them in a city this city the one that surrounds them as one speaks while the other listens and the hard ball of words forms weighing down the city from within the

coat with the secrecy the whispers too fragile for any  
city and so the city fissures a little just a little  
unnoticeably and surely no one notices not the eyes that  
watch but the artist shudders or shuddered perhaps  
the artist did shudder when choosing the image even if by  
chance and that is how the one woman went unnoticed  
as she did by the artist what some might call inspiration  
or perhaps destiny there is no room for destiny in a city  
not this city the one in which they stand the two women  
in dialogue together giving taking is it taking or  
receiving one is passive neither woman is passive this  
is clear from the image and the artist's shudder  
imprinted in the image just beyond the women the  
shudder hovers and so there is movement once again the  
lean in or out the hard ball forming and the shudder  
hovering in the still image the photograph of two  
women in a fissured city and the artist who shudders  
this is worthy of note the presence of the artist's shudder  
and the impact therefore of the dialogue words  
exchanged between two bodies the bodies of two women  
upon the image this image from which the artist retreats.

46

**O**ff to hell again  
Drank the churning sea  
Make this body wings  
To turn less than now  
For the moments spent

47

**F**or the moments spent  
Like a soft fern shoot  
Slender between thumb  
And index finger  
Waits daylight in vain

48

**W**aits daylight in vain  
To the west not there  
To the east, do not  
Find him, gone to seed  
Ashes rise to wings

49

**A**shes rise to wings  
Daisies in blossom  
Cover whole fields  
Dependent upon  
How the night beckons

50

**H**ow the night beckons  
She wanders away  
To wait on the sun  
Rise, and full of years  
Up stains hem of sky

## *Gardener*

Salt glares on Gardener's withered skin leaving a taste in her bones. Her shirt wags on either side of her in ripped shreds. M. places her soaked pants on a slab of cement, the parched and toothy remains of a dock or mooring. What is typically fragrant is only a vacuum of disjunct objects. This is a scenario in an accident. Somewhere ocean flowers gorged with sun drape countless fish in shadows. They calm the mammalian heart: it is the witness. The mind of the mammal if the mammal is a person discovers over and over again this preinclination to calm in the midst of activity, it, the mind, can not reinvent. This mind develops a theory in Gardener's sleep—that calmness is achieved only through the perceived inability to copy: the mind stops working on targets. A barge crosses Gardener's majestic speculations, which return morosely to consciousness and the ghost of a man trying to catch the glint of silver chain around her neck in the lens of his camera; but he is only a chimera from a glimmer of history, a cropped chunk of metal washed up on the jetty she seems to have borrowed for a bed to keep Goldilocks company.

A spirit jetty. What if Goldilocks wakes up and finds Gardener this close?

Gardener is in a bad situation, but she dramatizes herself as a slab of meat. What if I don't move? She spies in herself a groggy willingness to decay. A crab swishes over her arm. She jerks her hand, and it bangs on an empty carhood. Wet sand below dampens its otherwise resounding thud. Out beyond the carhood rusty cans embroider the beach with a kind of compulsive prose ripped to shreds from neglect. Another crab creeps across her forehead. She hits herself on the face. She thinks she is everything she thinks. This disgusts her. She wants to learn how to use a drum machine.

Because there is no distance. Fish choking in tepid water.  
Or clouds gorged with trees.

The grinding gear changes of a truck gloat in nearby shrubbery. She considers this an attack on her numerous superficial abrasions. She considers that M. might enjoy counting them. Then she would hose down M.'s contusions, if M. had any; but instead, feeling belittled by the proximity of the third person narrator, Gardener intervenes in the narration—which possibly saves her from dying.

M. I can't get up! I can't get my mouth open. M. knows it already. It's so like her to already know it, I can't stand it. There's a problem with water M. says. This I readily understand even though it's clear she thinks I won't as she looms over my witchy cringing and whimpering. It bothers her, the problem with water, more than it bothers me. She's made a fire and all the smoke's coming my way. The dark old woman on the other side of the flames surfaces ephemerally in the optical shivering of the smoke. M. is trying to decide if she should leave us here. Another truck passes grunting its way to Lady MacBeth's psyche. I'd rather that someone else save me than that I save myself, I say. I think my mouth is open now, because M. seems to have heard that one. She's trying not to get pissed off. I tell her I'm sorry. The old woman says there's something wrong with her not being dead. She can't speak for anybody else she says. I think that's what she says. I'm not so sure she means those lines she must have gotten from somewhere. Who is she? I can sense M. going against my will and deciding to leave. I hate her. Then fall asleep in the old woman's lap.

The whole world is long and dizzy. It is a set of vast clouds

whirling in intemperate air that seems to be punctuated with details of landscape. A shrub. A giraffe from a nature show. A fetus in a monitor. Dog prints. A piece of blue string on a patch of snow. A red bird gathering the string. A black seal on a rock. A manzanita. Sticks. Cherry blossoms. Wheat. The shell of a truck. A bullet and bottle. Mountain lion feces. Lupine. Nut hulls. Tire rubber strips. A shred of shoreline from Lake Erie smeared in oil drenched in headlights. The world is flat. The old woman unfolds it, a bed sheet, shakes it out, bits of everything topple off her map, then she tilts it, and everything left pours West. The map sheet swells into a globe with a contour of California kissing a cave of Japan. I'm on a bed in space watching. When the old woman nudges the continents together she resembles a child playing a shape game. We are stopping the oily purple, she says. Not the only people.

When I wake up, we are jostling in the back of a pickup truck. M. looks at us through the filthy window. I am tied. The old woman is crying. Smell of fresh water.

Welcome to the new world a sign states on the other side of the road in matter-of-fact lettering. My view is from the rim of the truck gate upward. Depression peels off the weathered roadside fencing. The stink of cattle adheres to a world put together before I got here. I start to relax since I no longer have to put the entire universe together while in bondage. Then, further down the road is a sign with an image of silhouetted men, women and children racing in flight holding hands. This is all iconography from the plague days. Is it still in operation? Or are we bouncing backwards in time? I feel something that has been lost to me since childhood, disappointment. M. didn't think to blindfold me probably because she knows that

I'm gutless. Suddenly I have this inane fear attack as a voice rises in my head: nobody's driving. I look over at the old woman and I hear myself say, "Did you say that?" She stuffs a wet cloth into my mouth and I suck on it ferociously, unwillingly, while swallowing my words. Who, damn it is watching after Caesar? It is a fact that I am his mother, yet it is a revelation because it was an irrelevant fact, and now it matters but only to me. Every sensation of the journey becomes as clear as his dimpled fingers.

M.'s face is pressed against the window again. She's trying to see through the filth. Or she's acting like she's keeping an eye on us. Someone is driving, it's obvious. We've turned off the main road and we're descending on a dirt road. We stop at a cabin in a perfectly round clearing. The doors to the truck cabin open and close. A man in a red flannel shirt, the driver, opens the back of the truck. He grabs the rope joining my hands and pulls me along with a sack of produce toward him then cuts the rope with a knife. M. stands behind him trying not to look at me. Wisps of hair stick to her face. My hands burn. A young woman with a child runs out of the cabin to help the old woman down with her free hand. The old woman introduces herself as Sandra. I can't stand it that her name is news to me. I walk away from all of them—as if my body works and I have the courage that I lack. Another woman walks into the clearing from someplace else, carrying a child about the same age as the first one.

Persephone is the only god, in my book. And although she is typically attentive to those who try to climb out of the underworld, Persephone is not attending to my transgression: nothing happens. I keep walking. A child chases me with a canteen. I think he's about to lure me back into a den of

iniquity, but he just disappears as if he were trained to service people as a sport. There is nothing more lonely than everybody letting you do what you want. I think this is because I'm thinking about Caesar: right now he'll be ruling over the roost. No one will care. I'm supposed to be there to prevent him from thinking he's god. It's my responsibility to bring him down for his own good. I think all this because everybody's treating me as if I can walk on water even though in one day I almost drowned then allowed myself to be taken captive. The captors are non-plussed. Many of them, women and children, possibly two dozen stand silently next to the shade trees that line the road that will take me out to the highway. I remember two gay guys with AIDS walking along a bleak city sidewalk in a torrential wind holding hands, both of them gaunt and grizzled, arguing about Schopenhauer, one man, the older, chastising the younger for not appreciating his ideas. I remember thinking that his madras pants didn't really suit him. The younger man after a violent fit of coughing telling his partner that conversation is more pleasant than music and that he would rather die on the street arguing than listen to Bach.

I am going to get picked up by somebody else. I have been deposited at the wrong destination and everybody back there knows it. It bothers me to think of M. and Sandra now there. I start to wonder if M. is stupid. Not the kind of stupid related to making mistakes but the kind of stupid in which there are no mistakes. One day one's a biker, the next a pingpong champion.

There is a pingpong table in the garden. Sometimes Caesar sits under it while we play over him. The ball smacking the table delights him. He likes to scream. The leaves crunching

under my feet as I walk along the side of the highway remind me of his shrieks. Today, I enter my third life, the one that will make sense of the other two. It is the one that has committed Caesar to being a contender in it. In our niche, every action decides something about the future. This is why women have power, but it is a problematic power. We can't predict the nature of any given outcome. A helping hand comes out of the sky, but I can't see what it's attached to. Whether I grab the hand or not, something in the world will be effected; although, this time I presume the effect will be to pull me back into that paternalistic boot camp M. and Sandra seem to be lost in. Sometimes I like to think of myself as a weed. A truck stops next to me. The door opens, and I start to climb in. The driver says it looks like I have lost my dolly. I laugh at her joke and she slams the door in my face.

With every unlinking that old fart, happiness, floods the cavity of the cerebellum. Thus I feel like a blissful dog on an olfactory adventure in a commodious cave. Yet, this is not a cave but more of the same mountains in shrouds of dank forest near the coast. I am walking North. Where I come from and the present route I'm now on bare the banal burden of similarity. In some other story this would hold me back. I would become enervated, fall into a passive stupor, make love to bears. To the geese, my brothers. Am I starving? The canteen water is as sweet as the vanilla bark of the pines. New scruffy little trees, profligately planted and all less than two feet high are filling up what was recently eroding ground sloping down from the road into a dry forest of black green. It is so damp that droplets of water hang from the new green needles of the tiny trees. I pluck a needle and suck the droplet

off a tree whose top touches my knee.

From the apex of the slope, I descend into the canyon. Pieces of red-walled cliff on the east side crumble and slip down onto the road without any warning. I wedge my shoulder into the rivulet of an eroding mountainside as if I were a giant resting in the gall of a kingdom of dunces. If a rock rolls down it will pass over my face as I sleep. Below, the vibrations of the invasive reflection of an austere lake steal me into a nap. I dream that a child, surrounded by women in a window is explaining to them that he's not a metal worker. Look at my hands he says. They're caked with red dirt. Don't strip me, please. He says this as politely as an employee in someone's domestic services. Don't strip me. It's the same red as the rocks I've lodged myself in. I think I better find something to eat, so I keep walking inside the dream and out of it at the same time down into the graveyard of cars. What I thought was an icy lake is smashed stacks of cars beaten by the sun covering an entire valley in a reflective surface that ends at some far distant hills. Other heaps of old parts that I may have mistaken for boulders jutting out of the (false) lake rise above the pressed car bodies. Rust has bored through everything joining the stacks and heaps in an aporia of eaten metal. I try to decide if I should wait to eat or make myself a dinner of ants while I squat, coincidentally, over an ant hole and piss in it. I haven't seen a car since they were outlawed.

## *Three Winter Songs*

*"a cupful of syllables"*

*Angela Jackson*

I.

silence and its attendant  
particles, lint spun  
along the windowshade's

bright fissure, morning  
light, the kitchen's moist air  
quavering, crazed radiator,

windowsill, pale velvet,  
untended, brittle African  
violet leaves, hands, fingertips,

syllables paced out,  
one breath at a time, against  
the table edge *do sway, do dance*

II.

City! if love is a circle  
and morning is its radius,  
can night be its center

or the darkness that  
surrounds it played at  
or among, as though

it were shaped into  
treeforms and gangways,  
spaces your breath recalls

or footsteps strike  
as you go quickly,  
the passing contours

of bark and brickwork,  
yours by right of  
unprovoked remembering?

whose body is this  
anyways, leaning, whose spirit  
lifts your arms now,

your voice soft  
and unexpected? child's  
play, these unlit presences,

pasts traced in sooted  
snow, bits of bright glass  
held beneath darkened ice,

the way home, the way  
back, alley after alley,  
street names rung out;

center, of course, and perimeter  
bent inward with your  
fingers, and what is held there

and said once again,  
a song, nouns reeling to  
their own sweet whisperings

III.

*do sway, do dance—*

fingertips, fingernails  
busy with words,

a song does leaf here,  
and what you say now  
says its flowering, is made

of light and water, snow-  
quick and greening, petalled,  
the sepalling syllables

say street, say lamppost,  
brickbat, what was scrawled  
red in gray concrete, called out,

arms asway and bare shoulders  
counting the music, summer, all  
that the snow's pale present

covers, layers in and slows  
rises in your throat and flares  
across the window's chill panes.



## *Afterward*

—for Julian

afterward  
wind's as usual  
swing around trees shuddering  
the road the winter-  
bleached grass—

basic grey changes  
to blue snowlight  
a muffled  
drum sharp rim shot then lament  
of a keyboard  
so near  
air's sad song—

& now this huge  
intense cloud-rush  
over field & river  
takes the lead  
coming  
straight on—

## *the Deep E*

from *An Icon of the Mouth*

Coax the Lord out of the box of the icon

coax the traced divine anatomy

coax the dark part

coax the light from the golden mirror

coax the mirror to speak

coax a shower of feedback the Lord reposes in

a four-petalled spiral radial pattern—  
triangles pinwheel stone polish star—:

this is a story of feedback.  
It begins with bees.

Until 1851 beekeepers harvested honey & beeswax by  
destroying the colony living in the hive.

Lorenzo Lorraine Langstroth discovered the principle of “bee  
space” in 1851.

Bees leave a space of 6 millimeters between wax combs: in an  
artificial hive this space can be maintained by screens.

A comb is a frame—:  
A box holds 10 wood-bound comb-frames.

This is the Langstroth hive, first built in 1851. Will you keep bees? Then you will use such a box; it hasn't changed since. Each frame can be harvested from the box, leaving the hive intact.

Workerbees secrete wax, build honeycomb, gather nectar, gather pollen, gather water, convert nectar to honey, clean the hive, defend the hive.

When you think of a honeybee, when you see a honeybee, it is a worker.

The workers fill their honeysacs—an enlargement of the esophagus—with nectar while collecting pollen, which forms in pouches on their legs. At the hive, the nectar is regurgitated to house bees who deposit the nectar into cells & start the work of converting it to honey. Honey is their food; bees live off it winters.

Honey ripened, the cell is capped with wax.

Pollen also is deposited directly into a cell. A field bee visits only one species of plant on an excursion. Bees are the most outstanding pollinators in nature.

Even wind even air carries pollen less efficiently.

The hypopharangeal gland in the head of the workerbee secretes royal jelly, sole food of the Queen, pabulum for the bee larvæ.

Pheromones—current & index of the complex of hive knowledge—come entirely from the Queen.

Drones have no stingers, no wings.

Bees are essential to crop pollination in the US: to wit:

fruit crops: almond, apple, apricot, avocado, blackberry, blueberry & huckleberry, cherry, cranberry, cucumber, dewberry, gooseberry, grape, mango, muskmelon, peach & nectarine, pear, persimmon, plum & prune, raspberry, strawberry, watermelon;

seed crops: alfalfa, asparagus, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrot, clover, cotton, onion, radish, squash, sweet clover, turnip.

These pollens are too sticky to be wind borne.

Langstroth boxes can be moved from field to field. The honey bees make from pollinating fields—for instance melons—is bakery grade.

Six-sided cells gelid with ripe nectar.

Pull the comb-frame, empty it, & the worker bees will feed honey back into vacant waxy hexagons.

Feedback loops the grid electrode.

A portion of the output of a system returned to the input.

Feedback cycles are present in organic systems: Ice Ages, the body, for instance. The heart.

Feedback in electronic processing may be the thing most closely resembling human thought that is not itself thought.

Feedback is the capacity for self-correction.  
Feedback is pneumatic.

Guitar feedback involves an oscillator. This consists of an amplifier & some type of output signal fed back into the input of the amplifier.

This can be tweaked by overloading the amplifier with output, resulting in yell, bark, noise.

It can also be settled into the sonic equivalent of perpetual motion: vacuum frictionlessness: pure tone.

“There is an essential homogeneousness to pure tone, an essential repetition with or without redundancy. Breathing is pure tone, as is the sound of a steamroller under Michigan Avenue. A car alarm is not pure tone, nor is television. Pure tone feeds back into itself, by feedback, echo, or biorhythm. The Strange Attractor is maybe the mathematical shape of pure tone. Pure tone stays very much on the side of turbulence, but turbulence is never that far removed from calm, either. I can't separate pure tone from the effect of overlaying two pieces of music, though they're very different on the face of it.”

And there is a harmonics of pure tone—:

Sound is airborne vibrational waves in transverse motion on the medium: moving while staying still.

Air molecules ferry the sound agitation working parallel motion to the direction of the propagated wave.

Noise is complex sound. Feedback is sound bent into a circle of fixed intensity—the amplitude of the wave. Interference paths—as of rogue waves shaken across the continual wave—produce distortion.

Noise is a white light:  
pure tone is a gold in feedback.

The ear has the capacity to resolve missed frequencies. So, on unsophisticated equipment, when the deep  $\epsilon$  is sounded, it may not go that low: but the ear imagines the missing pitch & supplies it, making a tone of the fundamental note by resolving beat frequencies from its harmonics.

The ear makes the low echo initial then:  
makes body from spirit.

In 1091 the last Arab rulers were run out of Sicily.

From the 1140s to the 1180s, Normans ruled the island, largest in the Mediterranean whose omphalos is  $\text{\AE}tna$ .

Succession of conquests in Sicily run:  
Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Ostragoths, Byzantines, Arabs  
(from the 7<sup>TH</sup> C), Normans, Germans, French, Spanish.

Its faith runs:  
pantheist, Xtian, pagan, Xtian, Muslim, Xtian from the 11<sup>TH</sup> C  
on—: but to Rome not Constantinople.

Listen to this:  
The two Norman Skeptokrators, Roger II & his nephew  
William II, read & wrote Arabic. The greatest of all Arab  
geographers produced his monumental treatise at the court of  
Roger II & dedicated it to him.

Palermo's Norman Palace houses Roger II's Capella Palatina:  
covered in Byzantine mosaics, it is a hive of light. A ceiling of  
gilded Lebanese cedar carved in Islamic stalactite design hoods  
the floor of pure marble pattern:

four-petalled spiral  
radial triangle pinwheel  
stone polish star

It radically omits any Xtian reference. As with the ceiling,  
Arabs left in Sicily made this floor. They did it because  
Roger II let them live in peace.

Palermo smells like the air has been exhausted &  
spontaneously replaced with fuel; oxygen lost for ethyl as  
splendid as that ionized tear on the air from a lightning strike.

Monreale is on the royal heights above Palermo. A basilical church on a vast scale. William II would build a church more stunning than his uncle's.

1.5 acres of tesserae  
100 million glass & stone tesserae  
cover the walls

Byzantine mosaicists remained in Sicily for 40 years at least to complete the work of these churches. Additional workers imported from Constantinople.

What of the floors & ceilings? Arabs laid tile, tooled wood on ceilings into combs of shadows—

inscribed in Latin all over.

I want to say this:  
it is a lustrous intelligence that made of the marble patterns of the floor, the Byzantine mosaics of the apse, transept, nave, & the stalactite ceilings a feedback.

Massive path of curvature.

I want to say this:  
Roger II & William II conceived by moving the mosaicists & the Arab handworkers, like a beekeeper endlessly pulling the box-frames from the hive, that, like bees, these artisans would continue to produce images of Saints,

patterns of the Lordly

as if filling the comb.

I want to say this:

The Lord is coaxed in the feedback pattern of  
marble, of glass, of wood.

All holy flow  
florid mosaic royal light

tesserated stellar constant  
grid of rigid light source trembling

marble radial four-petalled spiral

comb of suspended wood

I want to say this:

God is a feedback God is a beehive  
a box of wood

Bee space is a screen of the energy of God  
stretched onto a grid  
torsion keyed as tensely as a kettledrum  
air pressure thrums the skin  
tone spread across as if announcement of prayer—

Only prayer can capture the deep  $\epsilon$ .  
The bees feed back into the dome of light—

hive of stars  
apse is apiary

stars are crystals of digested pollen—  
tesserations placed by mosaicists

photosynthesis is the imagination of bees.

There is no screen—of air, of icons, of fabric—  
that is not ecstatic with the energy of God.

An icon of the mouth concentrates the Word, feeds back  
syllables culled into a lozenge that

coaxes the Lord into the voice box.

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note: “the Deep e” refers to the composition “Unregenerate Pure Tone” by the Anziano Starship. Send \$5 (checks payable to Peter O’Leary), or an audiocassette & return postage to LVNG, PO BOX 3865, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60654 for a copy of the performance of this piece as aired on WHPK 88.5 FM Chicago in 1998. The quotation comes from personal communication from Robert Clark.

## *The Crow*

### *I. As the Crow Flies*

Breath, disaster, habit—the simple mockery  
of it. Unblinking as a pack of roaches  
rooting the dross of a nuclear winter.  
Shocking as the rasp of a crow's caw hackling  
through the crystal air on the coldest morning  
of the year. It is a question neither of  
the will nor technology. All words uttered,  
even words kept hidden turn away, never  
nearing what's there—not forbidden, not to be  
bidden. Knowledge, seeking only the unknown,  
also is useless.

Days go by unnoticed  
when the smell of smoking fat is enough.

Otherwise, it's best to speak of love under  
the shade of an ash. Slow swirls of air sometimes  
linger where the smoke begins to dissipate,  
up there, in the slow moving oaks, a motion  
like the smoke itself, like the dull slosh of foamy  
waters folding back into themselves slowly.

Underneath the black ash tree shambles a crow  
soaked from rain all afternoon. Day's dust settled  
on the street, no attention paid to any  
lack there is. The crow stops and starts an awkward  
take off, the ragged edge of its wings loping  
over traffic—shock of black against a pale field:  
“All flesh is grass; surely the people is grass.”

## *II. Birds of Paradise*

The crows were bothering me again today.  
It started sometime around eleven.  
They were waiting for something, not for me,  
but something else altogether. The sky  
was nearly beige and all the buildings seemed  
to form a room from everything between,  
a ceiling free from stars and destinies,  
a courtyard as long as the hours allowed.  
Walking along, I heard them up there, turned  
and saw two crows fucking, a mess of wings  
above and beating still the gutter of  
a chapel used for only small weddings  
and funerals. The pure rank of milk gone bad,  
the bittersweet odor of time and time's  
demand to procreate and know itself.  
Who knows? But bombs keep pounding the ground  
to little use, as if the earth will yield  
its secret or the dead will speak without  
a mouthful of blood and smoke coaxing up  
the throat an unknown syllable. The words  
that made the war are predator in search  
not of prey or sport but hunger itself.  
Another thing happened later on  
when I was waiting around for the bus.  
I saw one loping by the parking lot  
of the Smart Museum begin to pick  
at a pile of discarded chicken bones.  
I couldn't tell if it was just nibbling  
on some leftover gristle or somehow

making a tool to later harvest grubs.  
It finally quit the bones and, laboring  
up to a flickering lamppost, stared straight  
into the setting sun. It cawed without  
end, peeling into screeches like a newborn  
wailing for mother's milk or God knows what—  
*the sun, the sun*. I see the sun and am  
without desire. The earth has only one  
secret and it's too hard to understand.  
Technology is surely bitterness  
in this respect, a rigid calculus  
not of stone, but of the motion of stone,  
and therefore circumscribes and passes by  
whatever thing there is that's standing there.  
Caught in the middle of a massacre  
and obsolescence, we always fall back  
on what we know best. Helicopters plod  
along an overcast horizon, filled  
with trees and smoke. I just read the paper  
and swear by every word. Most days it's all  
I can do. Otherwise I deny it  
altogether, saying peace saying guilt  
saying I'm no longer a citizen  
of the world and haven't been since the days  
of prophets. Spectre of atrocity,  
forgotten presidency, idle threats,  
weak army—a test of cruelty “to see  
if we were any good out there.” This too  
is reportage, though of a wholly more  
despicable order. The dream is done  
but now we can't see the real for ourselves.

*O Liberty, what crimes are committed  
in your name!* After the Revolution,  
I had to make my own way down the stream  
and now I'm lost somewhere between cities,  
swimming somehow but with nowhere to go.  
My hands, my tongue, even my enemies  
are useless. I can barely keep up with  
the weather, and for this I owe you, Lord.  
Release my enemies from anguish, fill  
my mouth with dirt and send a stranger who  
is selling candy on the train my way  
so I can freely feed the crows with it.

\*\*\*

I woke up early this morning, before  
dawn to listen for owls out back and get  
an early breakfast. Waiting for coffee,  
I sat down to a bowl of cereal  
and read something about Chinese cleavers.  
My wife, who was sleeping and who would sleep  
most of the morning, occasionally  
woke up and told me, "All I really want  
to do today is lie in bed with you."  
Just then I heard one out there, not an owl,  
but one crow on the gutter cawing low,  
as if the night had told him neither here  
nor there, but everywhere the kingdom of  
heaven is as a man traveling in  
a distant country. On my way to work,  
I caught the headlines: THERE AREN'T ENOUGH WORDS.

*April 1999*

*III. The Lonesome Death of a Crow*

Death has its way with you too.

Buzzards you  
mimicked who picked the dead  
calf clean could have told  
you all that.

Curse all flesh  
or become like the rest  
and in doing so  
curse further.

Curse it best  
or cursed flesh all the earth  
is dusted in dust  
tonight, Crow.

And every  
night, you would have told me.  
Death is the final  
mimesis.

Supple as  
saplings brittle as twigs  
all is blessed even  
in death, Crow.

None the less  
dread to see maggots crawl  
in the gullet, flies  
in your eye.

Terrible  
earth no more than a black  
veil of ragged wings  
dangled done.

Who will yodel for you now?

*Among the Tall Graves*

“Praising, that’s it!”

Rilke

Ketchups explode  
with a step toward  
these buildings.  
It’s a kind of prairie roof  
I mean  
I am driving in the deer fields  
with all the pretty animal eyes about.

Deerfield, Illinois is shining  
with pretty animal eyes.

But no, you can’t have any of my fries,  
not that I like them too much  
or you too little  
but lunch is almost over.

The lobbies are home.  
There are shrubs planted in rows  
to take us here.  
My arm over the skyline.  
Something in this large coke.  
Play the Pilgrim’s travel songs,  
let us arrange a secret Acéphale  
with these tables,  
a negative community,  
a stop poured down the ear  
of us—

## *Infant with Love*

*No conseguirá nunca  
tu lanza  
herir al horizonte*  
Lorca

I knew you were watching  
and kicked the air  
cartwheeled  
over in sand.

My hands dried by salt.

A man is a leap—  
a contraposto before water  
and where there's one

they're in many.

See them out there to their knees.

Lights in the ocean.  
The cartilaginous  
and bony fish.

*In the Mosquito Populations*

The chairs on the tollway  
seat us in the eyes of the Lake  
and the blood itch  
at the shore.  
Milkweed sliced  
with fingernail  
scaled silk.

Follicle Monarch's  
one hunger and thirst  
in Osmos  
the cell's sweet breath  
the cell's sweet bread  
testcross organ to  
streets vacant of power  
in jelly spindle  
veiny wings  
glitter and stars  
suspended in this pen  
loves this girl  
loves this girl  
I have millions of creatures  
inside me

so I am immanence  
some nimbus  
puffing stack  
beak's act  
the precise threading of the host  
a beautiful brown earlobe  
those in love, the  
with world  
the notion impossible  
to sleep in impatiens  
or tire lake

Fingernail tapped to formica  
a big stone, sweet  
they love me, my blood  
is sweet. Your job,  
edge the line  
of grass and walk.  
Supposing we  
are made of plast  
I'm asking wing.  
Wing don't know  
the streets.

## *Behind Target*

What will we do  
with all these display cases?

I am walking on my toes  
by the river  
careful  
not to startle  
the sleeping insane,  
saying “shirts,  
sayings shirts,  
saying.”

## *The Burly Real*

I stand  
between buildings.

It snows.

Chicago.  
City of braid hair.  
I thought it was philosophical  
the densely plural  
universe I've gone to.  
That is,  
this morning we  
    are invisible from above  
        the burly real turning

Scales

.

A meaty dog named Donkey lives  
    outside my apartment door  
I hear his  
toenails when he gets up  
or lies down.

I need him

.

I am spinning.  
You are spinning.  
The planets are so often  
turning backwards.

Early Sapiens running to the North.

.

The foil sky is a bounce.

Like a moving picture I tremble  
with

dune and swale  
blinking by.

Figures footing  
over

the dazzle.

Dried teardrops on the windshield.

Lake  
with floaters.

.

I live over two alleys  
with bits of tree  
and thousand roof tiles.  
Meat is moving  
all through the city.

Meat is moving all.  
There's no apology  
in existence.

What of it, drivers?  
Why honk all day?  
To put music in our lives?

A wafting  
in this dab of meat.  
A cube of Hi-lows  
banked with light  
sails up there  
on the freeway  
in the mote  
and flake.

## *Hello Ladder*

*Of a horizon*  
*no foot can grip*  
tender as an octopus  
before his reflection  
before ambient lost  
its meaning “to go around,”  
as amblypod’s gait  
as a lope in the valence  
of the big, broken, and baroque  
under my toes  
curling into the sand—

This is called motion pictures,  
he yelled from the beach,  
do something, move:  
There are stars and catkin arcade.

I jump the bluff  
running dune fall  
running to catch my legs  
from roots and glass  
the flat pressed sand :  
I fall from the ladder  
climb the ladder  
jig with ladder  
in the rasping grass.

Yes it rains  
never less than wet  
never less than perception  
the disturbed surface  
the picked ripple running farther out:  
To be alive in city  
one of those faces

the same faces you see  
the same dispersion  
of force and follow  
and migrate origin  
of metal and gas to  
what swum in Indiana  
shadow factory, peppermint  
chew for squaw.