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Modern Ancient: A Thesis of Poetry

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MODERN ANCIENT: A THESIS OF POETRY

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Master's Program in Creative Writing

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2021

MODERN ANCIENT: A THESIS OF POETRY

by

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THESIS

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Preface

Modern Ancient is a full-length poetry collection exploring both the connections and rifts in our contemporary world's relationship with antiquity. Utilizing Mircea Eliade's dichotomy between ancient and modern ontology as a theoretical framework to structure the manuscript, the collection moves from expressions of alienation and disconnect to an engagement and appreciation of the past. Holistically, the poems ultimately examine how experiences and knowledge of ancient realities may lead to greater understanding in our modern lives.

Modern Ancient is divided into three sections in order to follow the trajectory of a conceptual arc examining the relationship between modern and ancient ontology. Each section includes twenty one poems, divided into three subsections of seven poems each. This structure seeks to both ground the reader as well as present a progression leading to conceptual climax—that is, an affirmation of antiquity echoing Pablo Neruda's *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* in its move from modern despair toward ancient appreciation. Additionally, the conceptual and thematic framework acts to anchor the collection in order to provide more freedom for the poems themselves to explore and move in different directions with regard to content, geography, and style.

The collection opens with "Dissolution," a section which explores modern alienation and a contemporary state of existence that has abandoned its ancient foundations and mythic mindset. Cultural and environmental destruction is often implicit in this disconnection as well. Exploring our streets, homes, and institutions, "Dissolution" recognizes and examines the manifestations of our contemporary existential crisis. With modernity now stuck in a limited construct of historical (time) rather than mythic ontology, these poems work on the premise that contemporary alienation is emblematic, indicative, and caused by the rift that Eliade refers to as modern

humanity's "spiritual aridity" after primarily moving to a profane, utilitarian, and desecralized existence. Viewing contemporary contexts of loss, angst, despair, and disconnect, "Dissolution" examines human experience and situations where antiquity and mythicism are ignored, forgotten, dismissed, and at times even overtly destroyed.

The second section, "Navigation," explores the co-mingling of modern and ancient experience and ontology. As the middle portion of the collection, these poems look at contemporary lives seeking to understand, examine, and experience the past. This is representative of what Eliade calls a "new humanism"—the chance for modern humanity to learn from our mythic past. In this section, the rift between modern and ancient may still exist, but it is probed, questioned, and recognized. Poems examine not only locations and activities that evoke our ancient past, but also look at daily, contemporary moments and the role of artistic expression in our lives. As such, the beginnings of a general moving away from the state of loss and disillusionment occurs in this section, with guidance from the past leading the escape from certain constrictions and confines.

The final section of the collection, "Hierophany," examines numinous moments of modern experience that draw explicitly upon a mythic ontology of the past. Artistic creations serve as thematic sparks and conductors in this section, recognizing that creativity itself is directly connected to mythic experience. In addition to music and visual arts, these poems show that travel, exploration, landscapes, and even friendship, among other possibilities, can serve as vehicles to numinous experience. Nature, animism, and mythology itself are also a natural participant in these poems, seeking to put mythic experience and sensibility at their core in order to acknowledge the significant meaning antiquity can provide in our contemporary lives. This third section brings a close to the thematic arc of moving from modern despair to a more

cohesive being grounded in the knowledge and ontology of the past: moments of vision, elucidation, and transcendence to counterbalance the fissures explored in the collection's original section.

While Eliade's ontological paradigm and study of the sacred and profane serves as a great marker for the thematic drive of *Modern Ancient*, the collection also draws significantly from two additional sources which not only share thematic concerns, but more importantly, aesthetic preferences—namely, early twentieth-century German Expressionism and mid-twentieth century Chilean poets, particularly Jorge Teillier and Pablo Neruda.

While a variety of poetic styles and forms are utilized in the collection, expressionism is perhaps most prevalent. At the beginning of the twentieth century, German Expressionists also focused on *Modern Ancient's* theme of lost modernity, and did so with an equally intense and energetic aesthetic. As with *Modern Ancient*, the core of expressionism seeks primarily to evoke mood rather than to describe or present an objective reality. Communicating a sensation and subjective idea is paramount. To do so, expressionists use exaggeration and distortion in order to maximize the emotion conveyed, although expressionism generally does not go so far in these directions as perhaps surrealism. For expressionists, lexicon, poetic technique, and, to a lesser extent, structure itself, are all vehicles by which exaggeration and distortion is executed to produce sensation and mood. As one example, the utilization of the poetic technique known as enjambment, while not frequently relied upon by German Expressionists, is often used in *Modern Ancient* to create a similar expressionistic aesthetic. Enjambments' effect of creating multiple meanings and crafting transmutations otherwise seeks to stir distortion in the reader's mind and experience, similar to what German Expressionists sought to achieve.

While expressionism is at play in the overall collection, the tone of the poems, particularly as one moves deeper into the book, also evokes a sort of idealism and romanticism, or what could perhaps be termed nostalgia with a nod to mythicism. In this aspect, the poems are more broadly aligned to the Chilean poet Jorge Teillier, as well as Pablo Neruda to a lesser extent, although these connections are more on a level of spiritual aesthetic and outlook rather than language or style per se.

Many of the recurring images in *Modern Ancient* also correspond with Teillier's poetry: ghost towns, interiors of middle-class homes, cities and streets, as well as a general interest in navigation, walking, and arrival in new places. As with Neruda's seminal work, *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, *Modern Ancient* also visits archaeological sites, and views museums and modern artists as representatives of windows to the past as well. Together, these sets of images permeate each section of *Modern Ancient*. They offer not only connections and a holism to the overall collection, but also frequently function as laboratories of emptiness and loss, change, and/or relationships between past and present, depending on the distinguishing sections.

To further examine the connections between *Modern Ancient* and German Expressionism, the anthology *Music While Drowning: German Expressionist Poems* is useful, featuring a number of German Expressionists difficult to find in English translation. In the book's very brief introduction to analyze the movement, "German Expressionist Poetry" by David Constantine, strong similarities with *Modern Ancient* emerge in areas of aesthetics, imagery, and theme particularly.

In regard to theme, German Expressionism developed after a period of great industrialization and social change, with most of the representative poets having lived in major metropolises. Combining those experiences with philosophical foundations based on Nietzsche,

German Expressionist poetry focused on “dislocation, bewilderment, and alienation (Miller and Watts, pg. 9).” At the same time, while the group sought to address modern neuroses and how this might lead to the end of civilization, contradictory possibilities embedded in their poetry ironically produced an essential dynamism that offered a “new birth” of sorts. Furthermore, many German Expressionists viewed life through a lens of nostalgia, looking back particularly at rural life prior to massive industrialization, viewing it as a more secure way of existence offering a greater sense of humanism. This thematic paradigm, outlook, and concern compares strikingly with not only the themes of *Modern Ancient* itself, but also its theoretical underpinnings found in Eliade’s ancient versus modern dichotomy. Poems in the collection’s first section, “Dissolution,” particularly display the themes present in German Expressionism. Even the opening poem of the collection, “Jigsaw Man,” for example, focuses on the disconnect and lack of holistic meaning in modern life. This remains the underlying theme throughout “Dissolution,” which is likewise then confronted with a search akin to German Expressionism’s “new birth” in the next two sections of the collection.

Stylistically, German Expressionists employed a variety of techniques, some of which often walked the line with dadaism and surrealism. These techniques included fractured syntax, single-word lines, neologising, and crafting autonomous images side by side to give the impression of a world lacking connections and things having their own significance. Such strategies result in evoking a picture of a humanity much less at home in the world, one in which “the anthropocentric order disintegrates (Miller and Watts, pg. 11).” While these techniques and styles do not necessarily pervade *Modern Ancient*, they are undoubtedly present in numerous poems. One strong example of this would be in the poem “Before the Evening Meal.” The majority of the lines in this poem contain single words, with a strong usage of enjambment that

moves between autonomous concepts and images: meat, cockroaches, Tom Brokaw, and a rock band in less than thirty words.

Aesthetically, German Expressionists use strong, vibrant wording aligned with the garish, forceful coloring on display from their artistic counterparts. The intent as such is to express inner psychic realities as well as “to show, to warn, to imagine alternatives (Miller and Watts, pg. 12).” As with *Modern Ancient*, this dynamism is focused on transformation of the individual more than any form of social or political goal. Additionally, German Expressionists often sacrifice a logical order of language in favor of a “coexistence in space natural to painting (Miller and Watts, pg. 12).” Each of these aesthetic tendencies are also employed to various degrees in *Modern Ancient*. “A Morning’s Prehistory” would be an example that utilizes pulsating, even esoteric wording from a variety of scientific disciplines including geology and archaeology. Logic and the ordinary sense of time is altered in order to communicate the inner dimensions of a woman who is otherwise simply sitting down for her breakfast.

Furthermore, the imagery of the German Expressionists’ poetry works in conjunction with the aesthetics outlined above: images of death, birds, ghosts, nighttime, cities, and landscapes are frequent, particularly in the poetry of Georg Heym, Hugo Ball, Ernst Stadler, Hans Arp, and Gottfried Benn. This likewise finds a very common ground throughout the poems in *Modern Ancient*.

Of all the individual German Expressionists, it is perhaps outsider Georg Heym, dying at age 24, who aligns most closely with *Modern Ancient*, particularly in its first section on modern dissolution, but in overall scope, outlook, and intended potency as well. From the introduction in *George Heym: Poems*, a collection of his work, Antony Hasler refers to aspects of Heym’s work as “almost numinous” (pg. XVII) despite the fact that he is most frequently viewed as dark,

brooding, and demon-infested. Aside from his strong apocalyptic tendencies, however, Heym laments a lost pagan world and pens poems for artists such as Van Gogh, Rembrandt, and El Greco, closely mirroring the valued aesthetics and content choices in *Modern Ancient*.

Returning to the Chilean poetic influences briefly discussed earlier, *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* is a twelve-part poem inspired by Pablo Neruda's own visit to the ancient Peruvian ruins that many consider one of his best works. This collection of Neruda's poetry in particular lends itself to multiple meanings, making it somewhat subjective even to summarize the basic context of his writing; however, for *Modern Ancient's* purposes, *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* explores the limitations, loneliness, and lack of meaning in its protagonist's life, as well as modern life in general. After climbing to the ancient Incan city of Machu Picchu, the narrator contemplates and experiences a change that precipitates a new tone focusing on how the past can inspire and empower contemporary experience.

As such, in its most elemental of themes, *Modern Ancient* mirrors *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* by following a trajectory of life in reverse, from modern to ancient: the former is stuck in a contemporary morass of what Robert Pring-Mill calls in his preface to the collection as "petty deaths" and "humdrum urban life (pg. XI)," while the latter offers a return to "heightened consciousness." In the early sections of Neruda's poem, Pring-Mill goes on to state, there are numerous examples of him "displaying resentment and disgust at every form of city life (pg. VIII)." As the text continues, however, it becomes a "pilgrimage through human life in search of meaningful truth (pg. XI)," which is, again, equally the essence and formula of *Modern Ancient*. Throughout sections II and III of *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* particularly, Neruda both mourns and excoriates the profane being of humanity's modernity, further linking it to death in sections IV and V. Such themes and imagery are on early display in *Modern Ancient* as well in

such poems as “Jigsaw Man,” “The Comfort of Home,” and “Last Night,” with each poem ending as well with a connection to death.

While Neruda’s twelve-part poem begins moving toward a more positive tone with the climbing to Machu Picchu in section VI, *Modern Ancient* works in three distinct sections as earlier outlined: the first examining modern emptiness, the middle showing the navigation of modern being as it looks to antiquity for guidance, and the final section displaying moments of stronger awareness based on experiences with ancient forms and realities. Naturally the structure is not identically replicated to Neruda’s, but the general movement is very strongly aligned.

Throughout the latter sections of Neruda’s work, clarity and meaningfulness arrives through nature and a connection with pre-Columbian humanity, both represented in the ancient site of Machu Picchu. Once again, Neruda contrasts this very strongly with modern life in the opening stanza of section X, as throughout the work he has sought to find “the old and unremembered human heart (pg. 63).” Additionally, as Neruda incites in the final section of his poem, the final section of *Modern Ancient* also seeks to “Strike the old flints/to kindle ancient lamps (pg. 69)” via nature, ancient archaeological sites, visual arts, music, and myth. A poem such as “Church of Kala” mirrors *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* even further as the narrator of the poem is climbing in the Greater Caucasus Mountains to reach a medieval church in ancient Svaneti land, finding an icon there to touch sacrality itself. Thus there are strong connections to not only the greater structure and theme of *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, but within individual poems as well.

Neruda’s national counterpart, Jorge Teillier, is a contemporary poet born in small town, southern Chile with whom *Modern Ancient* has an even greater connection. His collection *In Order to Talk with the Dead* includes poems from his early work until all but the very end of his

life, 1953 to 1985. Teillier's poetry reflects his continued and growing alienation with modern city life, as well as the influence urban realities had upon rural and provincial life. His work is known for a magical, dreamy, mythical idealization of the small town life of his childhood, with a yearning for what seemed to live on only as a phantom memory.

Teillier's poetry connects quite intriguingly and intimately with *Modern Ancient*, German Expressionism, and Eliade's ontological sacred-profane dichotomy. First, subscribing to Eliade's differentiation between ancient and modern ontology, Teillier himself says, "For me, poetry is the struggle against our enemy, time (pg. xviii)." This statement serves as a critical component of his work, as Teillier so often casts a dreamlike quality in his poetry. It also mirrors Mircea Eliade's statement from *Images and Symbols* which is used as the opening epigraph of *Modern Ancient*: "One is devoured by Time, not because one lives in Time, but because one believes in its reality, and therefore forgets or despises eternity (pg. 93)."

Extending the connections, Teresa R. Stojkov states in her introduction to *Jorge Teillier: Poet of the Hearth*, that Teillier's poetry "has its roots in Heidegger's anti-technological humanism," and that his aesthetics of dream and discontinuity are foundationally mythic (pg. 19). She goes on to explain Teillier viewed technology's influence upon humanity's relationships to self, earth and each other as tragic, and cites comparisons between him and not only the German Expressionist George Trakl, but also Rilke and Holderlin, two Romantic poets whom many of the German Expressionists mined (pg. 25).

In poems such as "In the Month of Foxes," "Dark Lantern," "Exorcisms," and "In Order to Talk with the Dead," Teillier evokes myth and ritual itself that comes from both pre-Christian beliefs of the Spanish and German settlers of southern Chile, as well as beliefs of the native Mapuche people. The power of local spirits, household deities, and "the numinous energy of

certain objects, trees, and geological formations” appear (Teillier and Stojkov, pg. XIX). At times there is even animistic imagery in Teillier’s poetry as beloved objects such as country houses, abandoned flour mills, parlor pianos, and photo albums become totems to his mythic past. All of this works to bring about a sacred tone, which Eliade would quickly recognize as a step away from modernity, to “become mediums of communion with this now lost, hermetic, almost magical order of life in the past,” employing both an ontology and phenomenology of pre-modern existence (Teillier and Stojkov, pg. XV). This intent for Teillier to “transport us to a different way of being in the world (Teillier and Stojkov, pg. 33)” aligns with the themes, goals, and strategies found throughout *Modern Ancient* as well, particularly in the poems of the final section, “Hierophany.” A poem such as “The Conquest of Symbolism in Valladolid” would be one strong example mirroring Teillier’s work. In this poem, the ruins of a church do not represent death, destruction, or Christian religiosity, but rather the numinous qualities of animistic and pre-Christian realities.

Despite Teiller’s mythic sensibilities and wish for a sacred space, he is very much a contemporary poet living in the present. He is painfully aware of his trapping, and the mythic landscape he writes about admittedly lost. Still, at his very core, Teiller was opposed “to the voice of this civilization whose meaning I reject and whose symbol is the city in which I dwell in exile, solely to earn a living, without integrating myself into it (Teillier and Stojkov, pg. XIX).” In this sense as well, his work greatly mirrors both the theme of *Modern Ancient* and the German Expressionists’ focus upon urban alienation and dissociation from modernity. Teillier’s later poem, “No Sign of Life,” ends with the lines, “They say that syphilis will once again be incurable/and that our children can dream of being economists and dictators.” Although the

images of economists and dictators are of a different slant, the overall sentiment, tone, and theme could very easily be plucked directly from a German Expressionist poet.

But as with the Expressionists, and even more so, Teillier counters what is adrift with a living nostalgia. He yearns for the lost world of the past that he wishes to resurrect, even if sometimes only a world of phantoms remains, thereby leaving his poetry “haunted by disappearances, suspended animation, and death (Teillier and Stojkov, pg. XVI).” These “lost living” themes and images are also found in *Modern Ancient’s* “The Comfort of Home,” “Last Night,” and “Santa Laura.”

Other poems in *Modern Ancient* which might most clearly draw recognition of Teillier include a group set in the landscapes, mirages, and ghosts towns of the Atacama Desert in northern Chile itself. There, the ghosts of Teillier reside and should acknowledge his presence. “Cobija” and “A Discussion on Dust,” for example, strike with a tone and imagery quite similar to Teillier’s own propensity for “walking the village’s now weed-choked streets” and “exploring its ruined sawmills and derelict wooden bridges (Teillier and Stojkov, pg. XVI).” In these poems, too, there is a yearning, a mourning for what is lost, with a strong interplay between the remnants of our past and the contemplation as to what to do with them in our present, a grasping of something that mostly drifts through our hands.

In the particular context of both German Expressionists and Chileans Neruda and Teillier, the influence of Spaniard Federico Garcia Lorca upon *Modern Ancient* gleams all the stronger. *In Search of Duende* is a succinct volume collecting bits of Lorca’s writings that focus on his concept of duende, both a critical concept and important aesthetic in his work. To summarize, duende originated as a mischievous fairy in Iberian lore, but later came to be viewed as an artistic force which, as Christopher Maurer writes in the preface, has four components at heart:

irrationality, earthiness, a heightened awareness of death, and a touch of the diabolical (pg. IX). Duende resides in cultural and creative expressions where a heightened sense of being breathes, at least partially because death is near to produce a spark. Duende is a place where life and death meet, feeding off each other. Lorca points frequently to bullfighting and flamenco as the truest, most native formats where duende lives. Duende bleeds into writing and poetry as well, however, where it evades rational analysis—be it in form, image, or other manifestation. As Maurer says, duende is “not style, but god-given grace and charm (pg. IX).”

Numerous aspects of duende connect with not only the ideas and aesthetics of German Expressionists, but with Mircea Eliade as well. First, duende is an enlivened reality and exaggerated aesthetic, bent on eclipsing time. It also unequivocally looks not only to ancient connections and beginnings, but also sensibilities. These characteristics mirror Eliade’s concepts and also closely resemble the Expressionists’ focus upon a vivid, poetic lifeforce, a dynamism that evokes the limitation of rationality. Such well-known images from Lorca as “ants could eat him” and a “lobster could fall on his head” could easily be found in the poetry of German Expressionists, displaying not only an intensity of expression and a move beyond reason, but a shared edginess as well.

A further perspective shared between German Expressionism, the Chilean poets, Eliade’s sacred-profane paradigm, and Lorca’s duende is that there is almost a “complete lack of a restrained, middle tone.” “An Andalusian either shouts at the stars or kisses the red dust of the road,” Lorca claims (pg. 12). Likewise, Eliade’s modern-ancient dichotomy shows an intensity of extremes, while German Expressionism and the aspects of Neruda and Teillier described previously both exert most of their energy on either shouting at the catastrophes of the modern age or idealizing its opposite.

Additionally, the entire cohort is intertwined by virtue of their esteem for nature, with Lorca going so far as to say his poems of deep song are “magnificently pantheistic (pg. 15).” This focus upon nature, whether in celebration of it or in lamenting its loss, is not only a theme for the Chilean and German Expressionist poets, but also aligns with the changes humankind has undergone in its journey from “sacred to profane,” in Eliade's estimation. Aesthetics derive from both a poet's being and world view, and the active agent behind Lorca's pantheistic poetics is not only found in both the Chileans and German Expressionists, but is also a manifestation of how Eliade would describe the nature-based, sacred outlook of ancient humanity. Lorca's quote of Goethe regarding duende as a “mysterious power which everyone senses and no philosopher explains” would, in fact, be one way to summarize Eliade's description of the sacred, mythic being of ancient humanity.

These commonalities identified and outlined are all at the center of *Modern Ancient*, a collection charged with looking at a heightened sense of being pulled from the throes of tragic death, with each of the items on Maurer's list of duende's components present: irrationality, earthiness, a heightened awareness of death, and a touch of the diabolical at times.

To conclude these considerations of aesthetic influence upon *Modern Ancient*, two poets from somewhat opposite angles, both from the United States, may help put final illuminations and contextualization in place. First, despite being a poet who is often considered obtuse and esoteric in the context of current, favored trends in North American poetry, Will Alexander's work is unmistakably identifiable. Lexiconic fearlessness and cosmic contemplation resides at the heart of his poetry: words unknown, words “too long,” too scientific, too antiquated. “A Morning's Prehistory,” in *Modern Ancient* approaches Alexander's style of language. As is evident in *The Stratospheric Canticles* or any of his poetry collections, Alexander carries all

experience to a cosmic level and is not afraid to write on a diversity of experiences to get there: music, volcanoes, time warps, etc. Oftentimes his poems move from disharmony to discovery, from cosmic isolation to finding other worlds in order to dissolve time and reach meaning, operating along an identical thematic spectrum as *Modern Ancient* when viewed in composite. Even in an individual poem of *Modern Ancient* such as “Diamonds,” there is a conceptual arc quite similar to Alexander’s “Against the Temperature of Time & Corrosion,” with both poems fighting modernity to overcome and find cosmic acceptance.

From a different angle, August Kleinzahler is a second North American poet whose work, in part, relates to *Modern Ancient*. In his thick book of poems, *Sleeping It Off in Rapid City*, Kleinzahler writes as something of a “traveler in life,” moving through varied places and experiences in the contemporary United States. A good portion of the work is a celebration of place and time, but there is also a strong representation of loneliness, decay, and post-industrial madness found in his work. At times, chemical ghosts and the deadened heart of factories settle in the book alongside a hopeless American kitsch bereft of any life beyond the most superficial. The result oftentimes is a throbbing sense of loss like “a stranger to my own heart,” as Kleinzahler ends “Grey Light in May,” a poem which would fit quite cozily among the poems in *Modern Ancient*’s first section. In fact, Kleinzahler’s poem “Portrait,” feels eerily like the poem “Retirement” in *Modern Ancient*’s “Dissolution” section, and “Retard Spoilage” follows a similar drive as “A Morning’s Prehistory.” Kleinzahler’s overall concept is not to thoroughly lament or critique modern life, but there are numerous poems which have a strong connection of decay that would beat quite well alongside the more caustic poems of *Modern Ancient*.

Aside from the poetic influences and connections, and as stated throughout this discussion, it is difficult to overstate the importance of Mircea Eliade’s scholarship in the field of

comparative religion if one wishes to understand the theoretical underpinnings of *Modern Ancient*. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade examines the religious-mythic and ontological differences between ancient and modern humans, outlining how ancient peoples lived in a sacred world, while conversely, modern humanity has distinguished itself by developing a desacralized existence, living instead in a profane world. To view this notion more closely with regard to how it frames the poetry collection *Modern Ancient*, Eliade's world view establishes a clear dichotomy between modern and ancient states of being, and examines both with regard to space, time, nature, and vital functions of life. The distinction is so drastic, Eliade argues, that modernity's desacralization makes it increasingly difficult for contemporary humans to even understand the existential dimensions of antiquity, much less have any sort of commonality of experience.

While the distance between Eliade's ideas and the foundations of poetry might at first seem vast, Octavio Paz's *The Bow and the Lyre* clearly indicates that the two bubble and gurgle from the same source. Paz examines the phenomenon of poetry itself, consistently connecting it to the mythic: poetry is "prayer, litany, epiphany, presence. Exorcism, conjuration, magic (pg. 3)." As such, Paz's position is that poetry is inherently rooted in both the numinous and Eliade's foundational thoughts, acting as both a conduit to the sacred and a vehicle of hierophany, eclipsing both time and space. As Paz states himself, "Poetry puts man outside himself and, simultaneously, makes him return to his original being: returns him to himself (pg. 97)."

Furthermore, Paz clearly follows Eliade's dichotomy of modern and ancient ontology, stating that the epistemology at the heart of Western history has given both mysticism and poetry a "subsidiary, clandestine, and diminished life (pg. 87)." Even more critically, he claims Western metaphysics ends in solipsism, and "to destroy it, Hegel went back to Heraclitus. His attempt

has not given us back our health (pg. 87).” This idea is at the heart of the themes and organization of *Modern Ancient* as the book focuses on a rift between two distinct modes of being and value systems. In fact, a single statement by Paz would be a good start at encapsulating the collection altogether: “Hidden by the profane or prosaic life, our being suddenly remembers our lost identity (pg. 121)” when we reach for the poetic.

While both the spirit and aesthetics of *Modern Ancient* credit the inspiration and influences of literary predecessors detailed above, there are aspects that diverge. First, many of the examined traditions and poets reflect a high degree of localization. Jorge Teillier wrote solely about his native Chile and is known as a “poet of the hearth.” German Expressionists remained focused on Germany. Kleinzahler, too, although varying his localities, remains almost primarily within the United States. While both Neruda and Lorca diversified their settings, and thus subject matters, by virtue of their travels, and Will Alexander, too, seeks to go beyond his own time and place through research and subject matter, *Modern Ancient* attempts to draw on an even wider array of experiences and settings. Without writing exclusively on a particular cultural place or examining a singular, monolithic time and location, the collection instead relies on a multitude of contexts and geographies. This is done not merely through a study of poetry or topical research, but through firsthand experience that goes beyond the poet’s own locality and place of birth/residence. While the general tendency within literary circles is to argue that intimately depicting a specific place opens up a lens to the universal, *Modern Ancient* seeks the opposite: to present an experience of “any time, any place” in order to reveal how the collective experience of the universe is relevant to an individual, that Eliade’s eclipsing of time and space can be achieved, in a sense, in reverse.

Likewise, while Eliade points out that the world of the ancients still lives in our modern system today in various ways, he argues it is mostly on a superficial ceremonial level (a birthday party, for example), through our dreams, and antiquated religious rituals that have lost much of their efficacy. This, in turn, means that none of the ancient remnants experienced today can bring us near to the total ontological experience of the ancients, and thus modern individuals, ultimately, are fated to live in a profane world. Eliade states that even when modern humans have moments of “hierophany,” they still cannot push through to an entirely mythic, pre-modern outlook and existence.

While it is, on the one hand, difficult to argue this stance, *Modern Ancient* attempts to posit that, on another level, modern hierophany *can* perhaps bring us closer to an ancient ontology than what Eliade argues. In that spirit, the scope and exploration of hierophany in *Modern Ancient* is not to belabor modernity’s limitations, but instead to exalt the act of hierophany and show that any contact with the numinous does indeed offer a moment of alignment with the ontology of the ancients, no matter that they are fleeting or leave us in an overall profane world once their climactic moment recedes. The moment of transcendence, not its transience and return to a profane world, is what can shape how we view and live in the world.

On that note, it is hopefully apparent at this stage that creating *Modern Ancient*, as well as the greater discipline of writing in general, is not merely an exercise in form or stylistics, nor the result of sitting down and cognitively constructing meaning. Instead, this collection is birthed from my own sense of “being in the world,” seeking to communicate in a space that engages with self and other in both the critical and foundational areas of life that might otherwise be left as a void. I am not a writer by birth, trade, genetics, familial influence, or disposition. I am a writer because it is one of the few ways I know how to express myself and engage with the

dynamics and forces that enliven both myself and the universe, a power whose reality I learned of by discovering writers who preceded me—and who stung me with an ineffable magic as I read.

Before I began writing, I was an explorer, a wanderer, a seeker—but one without a voice. I had no voice for my own place and time period, nor one to communicate with other locations or eras. Instead, I had only an amorphous ambiguity residing somewhere inside me. As a writer, however, I now have not only a way to engage with the circumstance (time and place) of my birth, but to go beyond it. While various writings offer a range of my self-expressions, *Modern Ancient* represents a particular outlook and trajectory that my own life has taken, although it is not stated explicitly and there is no unified narrator present per se. Nonetheless, the collection displays a personal rejection on many levels of the contemporary belief systems and accepted formulas for “being in the world” to which I myself was born into, and seeks to expand and drift out toward an appreciation and love for other times and places which offer a different ontology and way of being. With “Hierophany,” it is hoped that this expansion is not received as merely a cognitive expression or a superficial, trendy dipping into the post-modern cultural smorgasbord, but a transformative expression seeking to dissolve the ego in recognition of the mythic vibrancy that is the essence and foundation of poetry and creativity itself. Indeed, prior to writing, I engaged with the moments of hierophany in these poems—the natural world, art, music, and “traveling” in ways that would show me past systems of knowledge. These are the experiences that have provided meaning and sustenance to me as a human being. In turn, they are at the root of my poetic aesthetics, and I am a modern ancient.

Modern Ancient

by Timothy Dodd

One is devoured by Time, not because one lives in Time, but because one believes in its reality, and therefore forgets or despises eternity.

—*Images and Symbols*, Mircea Eliade

I. Dissolution

Canst thou not brush the fly away? Are thou too sluggish? Thou man, that hadst so many busy projects yesterday!

—Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*

But hollower now year by year.

—Georg Heym, “Last Watch”

Home

Jigsaw Man

The pieces lie scattered on the table, dumped
from the hollow cave, a cardboard god-box.
Bernard and Sasha can't stop pointing
at its illustration—as if copying guides us
to completeness. A few fragments will fall
on the floor, in your lap, hide under others;
nothing seems significant in and of itself,
only in lieu of a hoped-for replica—to finish
and get back to the mail, phone calls. Fun
is this strange and vague sensation: to feel
those edges connect, join—that's progress,
accomplishment. Followed by a hundred games

of solitaire? Jigsaw man, were you purchased
at a Toys R Us in another self-contained cardboard
plaza, car-cramped even off the highway? Running
on sweetened gasoline? Or are you, me, a corpse
in the bog, the incomplete, made from hundreds
of bodies, from different times and places never
seen, all merging together under the thick black
soupy night swamp calling out for new forms—
searching for a soul, rising up from the dank
to look at this mess, this puzzle spread so thin,
a web interlocked around us so tightly that we
can't sniff what's around the corner, our ancients
looking on, wondering if we'll put ourselves back
together—this lonely death lying out on the table:
scraps someone chopped up, boxed up, and sold.

A Morning's Prehistory

She sat down at the table,
dawn's erosion play over her
shoulder in the bay
window and the comfy,
cushioned chair. In her coffee
waves, she met the deep
slumber
when imagined time peeled
off dry mascara, the layers of her ruddy sandstone,
sediment, and she found fossilized crinoids
hiding under the ripple of morning news displacement
disorder and the flagellum
on her tongue licking
the memory of our limestone bed.
"Thanks for preparing a tasty breakfast,"
she says to the silt of *Agaricocrinus*
americanus in her omelet, fragmentation in the flakes
of her cocci, croissant, and stratification fogged
by halitosis, uplift, deposition—
all washed
down with juice
and an eye on extinction.

The Comfort of Home

Behind the open door
is a narrow space
strangled by television tickles
and inarticulate clocks
speaking in cant.

Evacuation orders forgotten.
Let the mosquito bite.
Then scratch
and sniff
with sugar.

The pantry is full
of cereal box families
procreating year-round,
growing their babies
in Gerber dust.

Hanging awaits next Saturday,
but it's not the end of life.
We don't die here.
We just stretch our coupons
until we disappear.

Before the Evening Meal

German
cockroaches
eat
their dead behind
the sink
my mother
only
speaks
to telephone and TV
meat
thaws
Tom Brokaw
brother
turns off
his Alcatraz
myths
snapped
like bones.

Diamonds

They fall out of her dead mouth
like little shards of glass stone and shine no longer
of fasting feigning fearing the dull inside from years
core-crush in her home
dinner parties
holiday feasts
days when red roses were picked and placed
for biblical or cocaine
noses written now in kitchen-code collapse, a swirl
of perfume-stain attracting
floor ants.

Start with a scattering across plush carpet:
mauve and framboise, coral and coal
to get away, drift from corpse reclaim gem brilliance
out sliding doors onto streets Honeysuckle Lane
or Ambrosia Circle flight from funeral ride
that stripped the mantle of deep discovery
crossroads and tarred routes
now all looking the same. Ancient call so distant,
her mouth ruined cave
her teeth stalactites of cadaver
her speech profit divine chanting in country clubs
coin vacuum cleaner.

Retirement

Ah, those old, framed diplomas resting
on the living room wall—they cover
our cracks well, don't they? But so often
they feel like the clichéd castoff treasures
of sunken ships that once sailed the sea as we
got stuck cleaning cabin toilets and the poop
deck. And in those dull black and white
photographs off to the side, a man is not
convinced that it's himself anymore. Then
the coffee comes, and those flimsy, discolored
papers make our feet smell so much better,
make the plucking of the duck feathers
lining our pillows a noble act, make us
feel proud that we scraped out decay
from the teeth of strangers for thirty-three
years as they lay back on a reclining chair
like the one we fall into each evening, wondering
how many nights like this are left, but not right.

Last Night

On the cozy side of town we punctuated our Sunday dinner of scallops and calamari with a California Riesling, my eyes resting on the pale skin above the low cut of her new peach dress, gold necklace sparkling through her wine glass in Luxueux's dim light.

The drive home was even more radiant: smooth asphalt curves through the mountains—her body overlooking lapping ocean waves—her tongue under a starlit sky—her diamond-covered hand.

When we said good night after an hour of lovemaking, it was more than formality, and the relish, the gusto, believed in forever.

Then the storm came, we're told, and its winds kicked up in streaks and swirls and spit out the lids of garbage cans for all the miscarriages to fall into the streets. Tiny wrens cowered, and carefully designed mailboxes deserted their poles to chat with uprooted flower boxes and trees, even sassafras. The vacation-collected stones in Mrs. Maldehen's shrubbery station fled to the little woods half a mile away.

Inside our three-story Georgian, under the deep sleep of our comforters, our heads propped on perfumed pillows like gemstones resting on cotton candy, we didn't see, we didn't hear. No, somehow we didn't think of anything at all.

Until the next morning, after waking to our alarm for poached eggs, black coffee, and office work. Taking a sip, I pulled back the living room curtains and saw the road buckled, dogs shivering and starved under fallen telephone poles, rakes and chainsaws lying smashed on ruined roofs, automobiles burned and stripped to hollow carcasses, all in a light as dim as that for fine French dining.

She was already in the bathtub with a Sicilian bergamot body lotion and the perfect water temperature. And even then I didn't wonder

if the rabbits and chickadees were beheaded,
if the neighbors drowned, if the sun died, if
we would make it to our own funerals
with the preferred formalities. For the last
good night had passed, and we were not
sure when we became the waiting dead.

Streets

Extinctive

Now the boats are lodged in meter mud,
a sorry slant to our oystercatcher's orange
snip, forsaken to the rain and rot. Change
has arrived—rushed onto this island

like a pack of starving wildebeests, and I
can no longer hear grandmother's voice
over the motors. Today, even ibis squawk
is different—dead on roofs and steeples,

but rattling in the cracks of our handshakes.
These days we lock our doors and drive
long distances, wreck our remains in search
of a tiny, tranquil spot where birds can

chirp. But then, we're short on time: Uncle
Raul blows his horn, Mother yells across
the road and Chappie fields a dozen phone
calls. Avocets stopped flinging mussels here,

and the clock dilates our pupils. Back on
the road, baby foxes fail to look down
from the hillside, yet the gas is in a frenzy
to buy plastic-bagged flowers for the bride.

Finders Keepers

so much of the day is shoe shuffle and car
scream drinking the gasoline; no one says
much, so I greet the parking meter; life is
game show now: coin slot and acceleration.
A glimpse of green on ground, like a head
of cabbage in the soil, pushes our instinct:
pulse to grab, to gain, without plant, sow.

City Limits

The pacifier lies
on downtown asphalt,
melting into the pavement.

Newscasters read
of intersection spinouts,
car crashes, salvaged

androgyny and lost cameras,
then cut to cute commercials
hailing Huggies. Rock doves

have acclimated, but gargoyles
and gods are gone. Mastodons
can't marry Food Lion

and Piggly Wiggly. Hades
heats. My liver rusts,
waiting for beautiful ruins.

Chinchorro

I can only see you now in the eyes
wandering along these little roads
of Chuquicamata, the fishhooks
from shell and cactus, mesh nets
stone-weighted, all traded away
for crumbling clothes and stained
hands, open-pit's fumes of white
gold and copper. It's another sort
of mummification perhaps: organs
removed, brain included; packed
inside with white clay and the skin
sewn back, painted in red ochre
or manganese black. Tradition lost
as assimilation mints its own coins:
the stares walking these brief roads
for Codelco are angry alicanto wings
caught in the mist of telephone wires.

Antofagasta

We British left fine architecture here: a clock tower, for example; and Victorian train station, balconied and green. We abandoned rusted engines to the north that propelled nitrate mines and a new nation's economy. Now, backs to sun, seals yelp behind the fish market as Canadian missionaries scoot on rubber soles around Plaza Colon, rimmed by multinational banks. In a rush to get here, I left my alarm clock in Yorkshire, and white pills, little antihistamines, in Santiago. You have to wonder how it all happens—I mean, the forces, distant desires. Don't roses and hot dogs grow in Halifax? Couldn't I sing *Paradise Lost* at my local fish and chips shop? It's dizzying, Lorca—to think how that Atacama dust forever swirls, swallows pueblitos whole, just like the Maipu girl I came to see swallowed cocaine when she was 17. I mean, I mean, is it just the British still in me?

Sacred Souvenirs

Hosts brought out the glitter—gold-plated gifts, kitsch, replicas of honorable times now soaked overnight like a bowl of beans.

My third day in the capital, tiny tourist I—which do you prefer? they asked. Choose one or we'll give you all of them. How lovely

—little leafs from a golden age still floating like the spines of old books stacked for sale on Rustaveli sidewalks, or the Svani icons

in mountain hideaways, Colchis diadem and Taniel-breathing light behind museum glass—their splendor all now cloned on coinflash,

finger focused on chitchat, birthday ribbons and plastic like wolves wearing out what they believe were only once glorious perfumes.

A Discussion on Dust

Crammed between giant Atacama dunes
and Pacific waves, old nitrate dries
and rusts in occasional photographs
and Pisagua pigeon shit. Dust, as our old
barons knew so well, invites herself
relentlessly—to ballrooms and brothels,
tea houses, cemeteries, and casino steps.
We smell of soot, too: from lingering dog
waste to stale urine dripping down building
corners and fish gills at market stalls. Still,

hopeful hands erect new statues: busts
of ex-mayors and mining winners, dead
masks of growth. True, few of us know
their names now, and even fewer stop
to introduce ourselves, but in confident
bronze they glare out to sea or down
the boulevard. Sometimes I stop to shake
their hands, tell them it's okay: we're all lost
thieves, dying in heat, our children's fingers
layered in rings eaten by eternal sand.

Institutions

Holocene XIII

ye scientists with a three-gerbil scurry below
the white-clothed table for here to decree
this massive extinction
underway a sixth scampering on the leg. You
bought it, brought it yourself Homo Sap-
iens spinning wheel and it will kill
us as well and experimental rats.
What did you find? We said it will
kill you as well. *Something just bit*
my toe. Well there's still time
and dinner served —those little hands
caressing olives shipped in from Rome.

Medieval Times (Pop Doctrine)

Lorn of faith
festers the fellow shallow,
trinketry a function of self
iconography, its saintly
chalice sprinkling crumb, clip

and coin on the vest. To temple
consumption, a cope of faddish
color walks dogma, its prayer
of preening all the same,
sanctuary snap.

Codex

Another morgue and the corpses stacked
symmetrically. Call
numbers line up in climate
controlled lowlight. Bodies opened
once on arrival, examined and logged,
then stashed, forgotten.

Circulation
desk is dead too as I walk past haunts
with name tags: Hawthorne,
Irving, Whitman— hanging
about for the odd ghost
who might wish to locate their haints,
who might wish to converse with some past
order, who might wish to talk to our dead;
if not returns

and checkout piles
of films in automated arm drag, beeping
out boppers for our Hollywood fix.

Turgid,
torpid, the melodrama we folk lying
tangled midday on a decaying footbridge,
as if laid out in massacre electricity
to turn off and on, otherwise inanimate
as a hotel chain.

Back
to the books dusty and collecting
our frowns. Who
committed this murder?

Alexandria and Ninevah—
no, we can not be their children.

Santa Laura

At first you'll see the magnificent red
in her undulating dunes. You'll taste white,
remnants of salt, and admire aloe vera
blooming yellow under celestial blue.

But then you'll notice the rust starting to drip,
her old English machinery. On the horizon,
you'll see Mr. Harvey Peterson carrying
his briefcase with two dead dogs in heat.

And by afternoon, you just want your blood
to turn to stone. Your soles are burnt bones
and all the color has scattered in sizzled meats
and lunghole. Even nighttime has aged.

Then you think of life back home on Magnolia
Street, her strong beak spitting rough stones
into your stomach, crunching coins and copper
and picking at your parts until you pop a pill.

After the Cemeteries

Here our dead live a little longer, joining the wild festival
where lush grass covers broken tombstones and relics
lost in weeds: femurs free, the skulls crawl along the earth;
nose loss and finger fracture, scattered sculpture fall veiled
in moss; paint peels, concrete cracks, sepulchers chip;
door handles drop and mausoleum glass shatters; tree roots
push up through graves; gold engraving sleeps and fades.

Behind the cemetery, grey apartment blocks stand coated
in dust with half-washed laundry hanging from its railings
and woman on the seventh floor of concrete looks across ribs
of land, sees the puff of exhaust rising from the coal plant
upstream, belching lives forgotten, pushing vacant eyes.
Here they mix, living and dead. And young men in autumn
attire, at the gates, must choose the more attractive hand.

The Hospital Dead

Orange zotz—I remember
liking their fizz, otherwise
blahed numb by gold-glittered
holiday walls, the purple knot
in Dr. Zin's tie, and my drops
of six-year-old leukemia blood.
Why were the thin books
always about colorful fish?
Forty years on I'm a survivor,
but still stretching for a real glow
to this medical monotony, not
just the faint blue veins streaking
my temples or the fluorescent
plastic following us like needles
in sodas, soaps, and fingernail
polish. Outside my fifteenth-floor
room today a grey mockingbird
sings on a telephone pole, songs
sealed out still by Andersen
windows and artificial flowers.
Rembrandt lifts even with browns
and blacks—but here they hang
only cute copies cheering summer
sunshine and gazebos, folding me
further into the bed like a casket.

Kyrr*

Oil addict, I am, and magnificence no longer matters. Even
at night the luscious liqueur runs about my bedded body.
Without it I can't rise, black fever tragedy beyond Baudelaire's

opium. In my house, domesticity yawns for her sofa, childish
chat give me prosper, but for wild the animals can not stay
calm as the walls of their homes cave in. The cage opened

then the race got lost. The colors wilt, the wolves weep—
look in their eyes as the rigs rise and dine, spilling their seed-
stain, an excrement on ancient fur, and none left to warm us.

At grandfather's funeral—the speakers: army of avalanche,
glacier collapse, forest fall. And they said: turn back. But then
it comes, now they come, comes the crashing, post-Kontinuum.

*translated as "Still" in Icelandic

II. Navigation

Around the table stood several men. One of them wore tails and was saying: “We have to turn the blood around so it will go out the veins and back through the arteries, instead of out the arteries and back through the veins.” They all clapped and cheered, and the man in tails jumped on a horse in the courtyard and galloped off, through the applause, on clattering hooves that drew sparks from the flagstones.

—Felisberto Hernandez, “The Daisy Dolls”

He surveyed a patch of sun-dried cattle-dung upon which the abstracted Jason had inadvertently planted his foot, and across which was slowly moving with exquisite precaution a brilliantly green beetle.

—John Cowper Powys, *Wolf Solent*

Future Past

Wind

A pilot's hat doesn't help one fly.
Gripping the rake doesn't constitute farming.
And advertisements won't keep meat free
of e-coli or werewolves, will they?

Then what does a suicide end?
What do Jackson's words dissolve?
Or man's burning hands destroy?

Killing lives.
Living kills.

So I've baled ghosts in the bog,
chased fog running the ban on time.

I've watched as Wilson waits and wilts,
leaning the pole in the corner of his coffin.

Wardsend Cemetery

Snail-drag across who, Sergeant
William—the queen's marching

to a stoneland grey now groomed
in monkeyweed. Is it her lime lichen

promenade riding tomb tilt? Her fox
tails fluttering among the dominoed

stories, where only wind stirs
the limbs? They are children, in fact,

hiding on the hillside, softening with each
rain, underground. Asleep, like you

Sunday morning, awaiting old Sheffield
steel and her maps, while the skulk

and slug crawl and prize, in breaths
of fog, keeping our medals and dead.

Achill Island

I can still see it unfold: rolling hills, sea cliffs, and wide, clean Atlantic blue; low-lying peat bogs and people in their brown flannel who but said goodbye. I can still see the cattle grid at the driveway entrance of the Dugort B&B, Rose Keane and her tight-lipped, anxiety-ridden service setting down our full-on breakfast plates as Toby drank his tea. I remember questioning if this place was as majestic as the tour books stated. Yet ten years later I hear its silence lasting, as if all the world's small talk was already said and ancient mammals forever lost replaced by tourists like a quiet forgetting of how to burn kelp or make your own casket, of the sound of the curagh moving out, and a windswept resignation growing louder during savage storm but not by much.

Cobija

There is a soft voice
releasing forgotten;
a breeze tickling another
life under the stripped,
insect-eaten door.

Her walls lean to dust,
looking on lost ground;
her windows are wasted
knives in sand, murders'
foundations in a star.

The Pacific still comes
and goes, visits the steps
to ask for a meal, then
returns with no answer,
retires to her deep being.

A brittle Jonah is held
down by rock, his ear
wind-flipped, his whale
message beaten back
on elemental testimony.

And it's the rusted gate
to cemetery holding
our gourds, harvesting
the memory bone dry.

We pulled the copper out
together. Heated it, welded,
clothed a fashion to turn us
anew—then forgot spitting
and stabbing divorces seed.

Black Chevrolets to Tocapilla
pass me on Highway 1, asking
if I need a lift. But, no, Cobija,
I walk and listen on your spine,
the hot sun telling we all go.

Émigré

I may have once visited a forgotten country—
a land whose somewhere map smelled
of campesino sweat, soil
glorious and gifted,
born of obsidian seed and nameless sierra.
And there my big-nosed brother was perhaps a tapir,
mother a pregnant capybara, lovingly
appeared the sloth with my eyes.

Last I recall, before I took the donkey
and the ship and the underground
passageway away, my old and distant
father said: “Don’t stay long
in that poor place. Just long enough to learn
Spanish. It will make you more marketable.”
But when I looked back at him,
his golden lips had burned,
his words a fizzled prayer of pulled weeds.
I am not sure if, later, his postage stamps
even made it to that forgotten country.
Why learn to spell its name correctly?

Forgetting is a type of dismissal.
And I don’t remember all my parents brushed
aside. Or the nations they disregarded.
Maybe I was born in one of them.
Or maybe I just visited and stayed;
made it more than my memory—
found a fresh step in forgotten fields
was the land I had longed for.

Conversion

There is no one kneeling
inside the aged cathedral,

volcano-sunken, leaving
only sold and sculptured

sainteys to peek at prayer
ash and crucified altar,

the hymn-jumbled fans
numbed with humidity,

all floored now in pious bat
chatter, their cave melodies

humming whole in a hidden
underground where little

robed men needing glasses
no longer raise their arms

as if they know how to float.

On Mount Slievemore

In a wing of the airport, Dax and I found
our rental car at Dooley's, and in highway
bog cut across the land to wry Connemara,
stopping for a Beamish at a tiny den in Birr.

On Achill we found Synge's old hunting
lodge full, stopping to study the limpets
stuck on broken cement blocks strewn
oceanside, ate cockles to plover-whine.

Sleep felt less than historical—the sun
posting large blue photos of the sea by day,
and lamplight behind the pub snug giving
minddrift at night—so when we began

climbing at dawn, missing the carved out
path at village head, all our echoes of divorce,
layoffs, bankruptcy, and stillborn crept down
amidst the bleached and hollow sheep

skulls littering the deserted village, a mile
of stone cottages, unmortared and roofless.
The booleys trudge with you, you can see
them with more Harps than sleep. They show

you megalithic tombs, where potato ridges
are still visible under the top layer of soil,
the tethering rings still attached on the walls.
They rub your skin to tell you who walked

from Dooagh and Pollagh in summertime, what
it's like to famine a child, what it's like eviction,
emigration, and the echoes of ships crawling
away from shore. A little further Dax says,

peat-walkers now, where a firm footing costs
and bent ear gleans mountain face: whispers
of carrageen no longer mined at sea, sound
of disappearance, the lives we all once lived.

Of Days

Augoeides

She happens at stoplights—
 red the one moment
for flight—park and bust
came voivode, her index
finger circling the wheel
on a walk by the fortress
at dusk, when a spirit passed
 from rock to task,
and a girl splintered
into the treeline, black pop-
lars, never to be seen again.

But green is gas, and acceleration
the only significant antenna, soul
loaf, loss this flesh with hair
—twisting on tar. To meal, go
 but that she'd depart
for the forest, spread eyes down
a devouring road where a spirit
passes from rock to task.
And a girl splinters into treeline,
black poplars wishing to reappear.

I have wanted to speak to her, me,
for many years. Wished weasels
were my parents. Wondered
at mealtime how a cow wandered
into my mouth, how Clarice comes
to me at the intersection, wishing
to enter, her head sitting slanted
on roof, eating the cock and roach.

Nocturne I

Mother never turned the oven off
so I'm up at three, air-drained
in a dead heat, streetlamps the only
glow as Howard the orthodontist
doesn't believe in teeth at the moment,
Mrs. Bent forgot her Pavlov classroom,
and Herbert left his tax forms and long
bowel movements. Be glad for nights

when windows open, clear widow's air:
an intangible and untouchable calming
to counter this age of professionalism
perceived—hours of owls and bats
and a silent hum. All the lost miracles
slant down to us, settle the sons' sins
and overwhelm our sad psychological
saints. A moment to thirst more for galaxy
watching, in Whistler's shadow and blur.

Modern Man

The dying in us seems dead,
 a mummy-licked hollow
stuffed in Hollywood's crypt.

The Neanderthal and seed now
 less than a gram of Coke,
purse, diapers, and lifecycles

trusted less than Lifesavers,
 lost in sweet sensation's
commercial cavity. Imagine

a casino where the light frees
 your bets, the carpet comes
to grass, and Denisovan walks in.

The Leak to Newgrange

Time to telephone that old roofer—what’s his number—hole in my ceiling, drip of my heart. Call him; tell him: find the leak, Dabny; grab your putty and patch it up; I’ll write the check.

Water’s coming through again, Leif? At least it’s in your bathroom—right over the shower, Celia says, can’t beat that. I doubt you’ll even notice while washing away all your grime.

Since she’s so positive, maybe I should tell her it might also bring back all the great memories of Drogheda as the shower head spits its waters down on me. Yep, those lovely cadaver tombs

of Mr. Goldyng and Mrs. Fleming, then Saint Laurence Gate. Or even just a sweet Smithwicks at The Two-Necked Swan. All in County Meath. Why there, Leif, she’ll ask. Why not our trip

to Nassau where we tanned on the beach, swam in an aqua ocean? And I’ll disappoint her again. Because there’s no Bru Na Boinne in Bahamas, Celia: ancient site where not a single drop of rain

ever found a way inside that prehistoric passage tomb. Isn’t that a better sort of roof than mine? I’ll play it over in my mind again...and more: me in my naked drenching with a bar of Safeguard

versus Celia’s clean idea of lengthening our lives these days. Then I’ll decide: let it leak, let it leak. Instead of all the worry, I’ll head out the gate, call for old deities —something still neolithic in me.

I Skipped Career Day

Instead, I go to their wild, cryptic lands remembered
—as legged by Livingstone and Nachtigal—
where forests have forgotten their fire insurance,
treated tap water stuck in traffic.

Each time, once Lufthansa has served me my crackers
back home
even the discouraging folk ask to see
my photographs that is,
if I took any of mischievous monkeys or baby warthogs.

Each time I return to fill out new job applications,
“glad you’re safe” pats on the back,
and piles of roads and accumulated mail
that never see rhinoceros
droppings.

My best friends are now new
cartoon characters in silent cereal aisles,
staring at me with smiles a bit more genuine
than cashiers as I consider converting
to caffeine.

But malaria and bad back aside, there’s something about sleeping
under thatched roofs, something about watching a lilac-breasted
roller fly away, then picking your own serious mangos with girls
of new names; something about washing your armpits every day
in the Manyame River and returning cattle to kraal with young boys
who’ve never seen a city, their eyes hovering like tiny spaceships,
invisible cables to the sky, floating on like days never numbered.

The Romantic

When they were done with the decorated horses and cool jewels, thousand-dollar trinkets and wedding dresses with five-foot trains, done with the syncopated smiles and poses, done with throwing clipped pink flowers imported from places they couldn't pronounce, I invited a so-called simple woman—carrot-cleaner, wordsmith, onion-chopper—to an empty tea room, cut bread and watched watermills in the distance, egrets feeding on marshland. I had no plan or biblical, only graven images stored in my imagination. She said she didn't want a life in Paris, or trips to resorts in Fiji, St. Lucia, but werewolves howling in the woods at night instead, keeping candles over electricity, and leaving diamonds to the earth. She said she always opens parlor windows to let in the breeze and the smell of stirring trees and weeds, skunks and owls, and when our builder's brew finally arrived, its creamy swirls smiled at me like a serenade.

To Tagveti, with Myriam and Friends

The drunken bridge leans wearily over the Mtkvari like a man with a short leg, its termite-riddled planks warped windows to the flow below. We cross over it to old woods and greenery winding into the hills by skeletal paths, their stories, too, of abandonment, their pebble-covered limbs sometimes slithered over by golden-brown snakes. Not far on the path, we meet her: ghost-mother murmuring of her son's suicide. Then a softened, middle-aged bohemian of ill repute who shows us the bucket of berries freshly picked by afternoon lullabies on the hovering hillside.

Behind trees loom the shadows of compounds, emptied now of lives moved and boxes filled for city-shipping. Dusty coats and sole-less shoes fade in broken wardrobes, weights the elderly could not carry. Photos hang from cracked walls, names covered by green tangles and birdsong. Cows stroll by the windows no longer, replaced by phantoms who couldn't follow trends in time.

We picnic on Sulguni cheese and cucumbers, smoked meat and sausages, dried, salty fish and Natakhtari beer, dark bread and tkemali sauce, its little purple plums covering village grounds like tiny balls scattered in a game, like me and Irakli, and Myriam, and Tamara and Gyorgi and Zurab. We eat, laugh, poke each other, get up to pee. A small vein of the Mtkvari near us giggles a little when wit bears its eyes. Knowing our humble paradise, the wind carries our stories back into the hills, in three languages, for the next generation.

Dusk comes later and finds us full of everything, although my tipsy heart did not invite it. The moonlit sky scans dreams, cleanses us of worry, and tells us we belong to her. All feasts must end, all havens must close. Sleep, were it to come here, would be a wedding dress. On the far horizon, Khashuri's lights shine like Manhattan, their distance documented and diminished by our breaths of brotherhood in nightfall.

A fuddled stroll back to the marvel, an architecture lost to time telling us we know so little today. That love comes to this patch of earth, a village of suspect future, forgotten and mostly departed creatures. In embrace we cross back over, our drunkenness making things straight, transfixed. When the old bridge to Tagveti falls, on which side will we be?

Creations

Secondhand Smoke

When the thief sat down and slid
a hand into my pants pocket, I smiled
at his planet. This is how crops grow,
gravity functions, and cougars carry
their young. This is how the Samarrans

disappeared. Should the thief's hand,
or even the contents of my trousers, one
day find their way to a museum display,
I hope another young man will pay
the entrance fee, and look upon them
in wonder with watery eyes, as I
have stared at Hittite pots and tablets

of cuneiform. Museums are dust
collectors, immobile shadow of forgotten
dance, gills without water, poorly steeped
tea. Yet they're all we have, sometimes,
of ancient miracles. And thieves.

Tenebrists

What did Caravaggio say to us:
in the light and dark, you might
get an impression of malaria
or the sting of an old vendetta

but I have headed across to Malta
in the light and dark, you might
ask how are the beaches there
or the cannelloni and spinach

like with all so many of our nations
in the light and dark, you might
love its old cultures or even
its demons coming contemporary

her artists sifting through faux brands
in the light and dark, you might
find the tourist field, vacation
drives broken on moonlight

and the madness gripping my sail
in the light and dark, you might
sense the waves brushing up
to shore, covering more color,

until death ends our pleasurable trip
in the light and dark, you might
see a life from another age, left
to speculation, wrecked, on canvas.

To Van Gogh's House

Today's maps are lines razored for major highways and plastic gas. Otherwise lost, we McDonald's magnets, Dunkin Donuts' deeds, are caught far from fields. I'm off

the train now and out past Mons station, walking arteries. My director navigates Cuesmes—wanderer, preacher, lamenter through the Borinage, narrow lanes even

today, and on to Jean-Baptiste the baker, his Wasmes house gutted. Smoke rises from down over the hillside where you go underground, Marcasse Colliery: charred

faces digging for coal chunks, tramping burnt-skinned in snow, emaciated to fit through little, twisty alleyways. A calling received. To preach and save via biblical

—no, by oil on canvas. In your guidance I step, the rest always unsure, unstated. Maps are for the lost: progress believers, those who speak too much of their own

names. From Zundert to Auvers-sur-Oise the paths could be read much differently: not machine, but conscience, to places few wish to go. Tell them your route is the one

that grips me: not candied saints, prophets, and advertised idols. Fold up their atlases; tear. Before a starry night you found, here, passages unmarked; lines that meet in me.

Genesis

I paint with old brushes. Some have bristles falling out. Some have loose crimps.
Or caked in dried paint.

My little tubes of oil paint were found in the basement and some almost impossible to open.

I have no palette, linseed oil, turpentine.

I paint without an easel. On the floor.

I have no training. People always laughed at my drawings. And it's true: I could more easily
stop the rain from falling than sketch a realistic face or hand.

But I got tired of so many people asking me, "What do you do for a living?" I don't know.
What does anyone do for a living? Eat, sleep, and drink.

Outside, trees are down. Waters are still rising. People scream. People beat each other.
They're trying to take each other's money and gasoline.

I'm on the fourth floor. With my old brushes. And canvas storms.

Here-in-after, here-in-before

For Ralph Eugene Meatyard

For some a comforting trick
poured down with convenient grin:
to throw away mask by word, tablet,
to give us bone fields, decay hearts,
darkness beaten of its ancient name,
red-smiled forecasts denying disease.

So we believed the crow's throat rested at night,
a twisted nose of defect no longer sniffed sideways,
and the dead never died and roamed beneath us.

Then a camera ended the vacant serial: masks
returned a winding of vines and shriveled tree bark,
a reading of wrinkled hands and ponder play,
centenarian children check and the mystery
in earthly games. And we steady our gaze
for a lost vision cut out with the umbilical.

Tree Roots, My Friend

Outside the chateaux's walled grounds,
somewhere under the wheat and sunflowers
that have dried and decayed the last twelve decades,
the borrowed revolver has finally changed colors,
its hard steel dissolved by oxidized hope,
wilted with the brown stems of a new century's hypocrite mist.

Why have they not found the gun?
What has grown since the fall?
How long will the soil remain?
When will you come back?

Clouds fall and sever the hand, Vincent.
You lie alone to rust in spinning fields—
roads never clear, the pull of family never pure,
the universe too infinite, the body mourned in thistle.
Through the stomach you have drawn a bucket of blood from the well.
You could not finish the ideal.
You could not crouch with peaceful farmhouses forever.

But perfection held hands in those pastures,
and its ghost still lies there, trapped—maybe,
even after you lifted it to canvas
from your last sinew, word, bone,
to shine on man from behind the sun.

This was our best scarecrow.
Getting down into the twisted dirt,
planting and loving, sinking and losing,
equal the beauty and despair, eye-pinched
by big, black crows in random, eternal flight.

Inspirations of a Thief

What was I thinking about in the checkout line,
bottle of juice and tuna sandwich in my hands,
as a knife appeared and security guard lunges,
wraps two fat hands around a stubborn ankle
pulling away while two snow-white-haired
ladies properly gasp, “Oh dear.” It’s Cardiff day

one, that’s what I’m thinking: where’s the castle;
the bay; just keep walking down busy St. Mary’s
and cross the canal to reach the national museum;
watch people carry their bags; and the comfortably
perched in windows with a frothy pint of Brains;
soft bunnies on City Hall Lawn. That’s what I am

thinking. Except that now it’s all filtered through
the drip of our thievery—how we *all* do it, call it
whatever you will: unofficially, legally, indirectly,
under the table—or not. I pass more coffee sippers,
a lazy moat, South African War Memorial, arrive
at the grand building with dragons, lions, to find

entrance is free. I pass through, to roam the magic
and charms of momentary canvas. But then, is it
an hour later, I come to one I can’t relinquish, like
Sarah back home in Wheeling. I twist my head,
confirm I’m alone, reach up with two hands, remove
it from its hanging. I turn, walk out the room, down

the hall, stairs, past museum staff, security men,
expert on Turner, or Bacon, The Castle Ploughman
with me. I near the gilded doors—the clear, pale
blue beyond its glass—then feel his pull, some man
never seen or spoken to, his arms around my knee,
sliding down the leg, coming to stop at my heel:
he’s on the ground, holding on to my ankle with all
his might, as if begging me not to leave. But I look

at my Maris, dear Thijs, and I see now how we cut
bone from mouth, close hands to dried bread, how
what they label weeds might bring me chlorophyll
from a dead wall, decayed eyes, sad seats in somber
uniform. So I lift a bite of tuna, wheat, to mouth,
all paid for—ready for the streets again, I steal what
may never belong to me, but nonetheless is all mine.

III. Hierophany

One of the deep silences fell on them, that seemed so much more natural than speech, a timeless silence in which there were at first many minds in the overhang; and then perhaps no mind at all.

—William Golding, *The Inheritors*

Sight & Sound

Arrival at Vyškov

The train station door squeaks
like the floor of grandma's house
or a smile from 1869. Entering,

facial umbrellas stare my dry days.
With a sneeze I nose in for one
ticket to Brno. In my country, no

one asks what I'm reading. But
here, a young stranger in violin
offers slippery words of bronze

pigeon, Bernard, Root guitar.
Together to platform, she points
with bow across rainy tracks

where roadwork's Sunday morning
tarp flaps and swirls mist, and alone
from the void, a spectral figure rises

near swaying cypress and butterfly
bush. Resurrected by their digging,
she's shocked by this new kind

of heaven where few see her. Until
phantoms move minds and Nina plays
mournful music, without hands.

Church Of Kala

High up, they say,
is isolation. Old
kingdoms to hide
relics from invaders.

A trek, then another
climb, tree-fed,
may open the rock
if the queen smiles.

Step inside and forget
Belgrade, even Gelati;
these icons stun her
geography, soft Svan

eyes droop and noses fall
down hillsides. Long
faces keep the message:
tristful, loving, true.

I know but one other
like this: from Chuberi,
she studies in Tbilisi now
—tristful, loving, true.

The old icon-makers knew
her too, saw sacred in her
eyes and brought them
to wood, knowing they'd
disappear in the mountains
rather than surrender.

Shattered Room

Seeping the stained seclusion,
they came within the walls

like whirling Whistler sounds
in nocturne blue, a sly audio

lifted to visual, showing far
the spinning lung; and a cell

left to smothering spread out
to the unknown, as Russian

film studies, outer space pull,
the mystery of what is wanted.

The shattered bones of all
Lords backing in on ourselves

is clearing now, with shrinking
closets opening to sounds more

than motor run, spicy blowhard
chatter, and newsdroll. Casting

lost tints of grey, there's a new
fixx: pulse of possibilities saved

by zero, outside, the sign of fire,
loading on waves to come, carry.

Old Margaretha's Hand

grabs me, the right one; a 1661 grip
stopping my stroll. I gaze at execution
of the arms dealer's wife, Van Rijn's
commission in millstone ruff. Motors

fade, footsteps mute, I pass myself
to her. Under the sky roof, clouds
milk the sun, the locus a fragment
of her canvas. That hand, parched

skin running veins like graveled streets
as evening falls, doors following
the last departed; her guards gone,
lights never known. Through the night

I stare, awaiting guidance, a touch
of dark ether. Comes when she rotates
her wrist, shows the palm, and closes
on my heart. Rembrandt's foreclosure.

Vektor 2/8/16

The desert brings us her alien
with speedy little fingers
plucking strings; down
in our abandoned factories
the shriek is heard: move and fly,
or dissolve into a parasitic plastic
whose tiny buttons latch
meaningless voids that never die.

Outside, every car lights up
as spaceship, carrying frenzied
cerebro-matter and automaton
eyes poking at creation
with crisscrossed circuitry,
fretting under a skyline
ironed in madness, midnight
lit for a belly of decaying
bridges and wasted wires
softened only by darkness.

But inside, cosmic cortex kicks
our accelerating universe. Asteroids
land on exploding brains, crafting
a crooked chaos for smoke-filled
lives; today's tomorrow finally
worth our outer isolation.

At the National Gallery

entrance, their coat check is \$5—
which costs more than my actual coat
because Mr. Fasil donated it to me
as part of my ghost costume
for his Halloween play, “Serious
Business Haunts Our Lovers,”
an Ibsen adaptation where an old
carpet salesman contemplates
suicide as a result of inheriting
an apple grove from his older
cousin, also a former lover. The play
sold out that September, at least
the first six rows, because Topeka's
Kiwanas Club gave out free
tickets, notifying the public
via rock radio stations. I sweated
through that performance—the long,
wool, black duster reaching below
my knees. I didn't have any speaking
parts, just had to hover around the stage
phantom-like, arms extended, my brow
drenched in perspiration...which probably
didn't help create the spooks Mr. Fasil
intended. I wish he could see me
now, floating room to room with Hopper
and Rousseau, hardly touching the floor
thanks to Rembrandt's little lamps
and Fauvists keeping my head a rush
with bright candy. I soared right over
the head of one egg-faced gentleman
stuck in his shoes, bored by the coins
he had collected in his pockets; I sailed
between the legs of a short sexagenarian,
limping due to calluses stored in her
little loafers; I flew through rooms
like a conversation with Blake, cocksure
my coat would surely be everyone's
favorite if only they could see spirits—

Earthscapes

Nereids

Aye, another shipwreck, rusty and warped, barnacle-heavy, and we stranded in its tidal pools as tadpoles, or semen squirm for next unknown. In turn, I stare at my hands, not mine not history's in modern moonlight's shady murk. But she, too, limps, and thirsty, my day coming to walk shoreline, fearing horizon, gravity, waves, all things not falling under the narrow width of my step, confounded by a mischievous, creeping tide. One handful of water could soothe, but no, it is salt-fused, bitter-braced, heavy with oil merchant sweat, naval crew fat, skin flecks from pink and brown thighs attached to rotting asses of beach tourists, miles of coast fallen to chewed days, swallowed for what? For traffic disconsolate on other sides of our livers, for fresh exhaust from hot dog vendors and bank blow, for ratty roadway's roundabout whistle where it costs more to turn off engines than turn on. But the day comes

when she finds me—my energy expended, sitting in coy against the hull, nibbling uniforms lost in preachers' crosshairs, rocks gummed in harvest vandalism, discarding star madness, wondering if murder must go on. She has fresh water hands that filter the briny booze of modern offal, countering song sting. "This all came from copper mines. Mankind will eat it in scoops and scraps before next nightfall; a tip always leads to plunge. Just pull yourself to center," she says, tugging me a step closer inside the shipwreck, like a curling up into her belly. And in a wading oystercatcher's graceful wing tuck, another day fades into frosty

glimmer, a comet of green tint bringing in the night as the shipwreck tilts upright, steps into sea, glides, until we dwell, hand in hand, among ambivalent ghosts and soft nitrate-agents, eating seaweed and loving more than what was ordained, each morning her back rising from the water, starting leagues away, from void, from nothing, from womb, to speak to stones and carry her being as the many unseen colored creatures, the clams laughing

at affirmations, mine. My old focus—that island bobbing in the distance, a foggy, unreachable place, trickles near when her body lightly presses mine, her form changing with lunar glow. And I move into her nothingness, through her voice, capturing my first lick of atoms, a drifting, a return to the inanimate. On her wings, blackened skies plunge into ocean depths and the crab crawling onto my toe hands me sturdy breathing as breaking waves fit together and salt dissolves this shipwreck. In time loss shared, we, too, swirl and collapse, in gradual and lightning, around us, the living myth, cloud drop, our few short breaths roaming together.

A Second Glance

After Fu Baoshi

Suave-grey rise, these cathartic karsts,
unconquerable terracottas of original man
where ghost and butterfly koi
lift our wings without coin,
where mossy extremes bloom
in amethyst and mangosteen,
and ferns fall into the water like the fleece of a breeze.

But the ancient alleyways, dusty and riverine,
now wed the castoffs of Fu Xi and Parminides.
A tar-hardened modernity is blackened
by lanterns of gold bullion and color-blind traffic lights.
Straw cages of cramped birds
are machine-built from ivory cadavers.
And Confucian tooth decay is disguised
in lounged consciences and luxury void.

Away, the stone still guides swallows
from dysentery lagoons.
Even brittle, commerce-bugged corpses
may find the shimmer-time
when the vireo grows its pale green eye,
kings and converters put their nose to the soil,
and the seed does not rue.

Bonded

You can say it's because we gave each other hepatitis B, but that was three years ago and only just now have we gone our separate ways. You've moved back to Athens,

and I'm here wandering through ghost villages in Russia. My mother can't believe we've broken up, and I didn't know what to say: all good things come to an end?

Things just didn't work out? We were never meant to be? It all rings like a giant death bell, the sound moving out in circles, further and further, until it's so far away

it doesn't feel like it belongs to me anymore. That's when, in fear, truth be told, you come back to what should be concentrated, close knit, and tight—your life's roots

I guess. Like you, now home, in a little stone house on the outskirts of your birthplace, living next to your parents, with traditions you've known since birth, eating moussaka

and taramasalatas. And where am I? Huddled in cemeteries, crumbling and forgotten, dusting off eyes of icons as the Urals and Peter the Great's Cyrillic climb around me.

None of it is the reading of my heritage, origins. But is there a tree behind tree? Gods above god? When I find the one old woman living here, her bread tastes wiser. Donkeys

are freed, the fog floats without complaint, and the paint on the wood pushes inside, catches its moment farther back than lineage, from all that spills into us. In the dark

there is cure, and a liver smiles hearing our earthly chant in tiny room; icons birthed in corners of the world that only fairy tales told me about—lying in crib, crying roam.

Isla Negra's Faraway Friend

On separate continents we trek
together, eat week-old grains
atop darkened rock, its edges
hiding us. Full clouds might stop
planes and ships here, our eyes
on the crests of waves drinking
on invisible forces, pushed up
by stingray, sponge, and squid.
We crash with them in cold spell,
our white foam crawling into tiny
inlets and gaps in their caricature,
forgotten by sea mothers, he-gods.
Unseen or trampled, we filter over
barnacled stones; inside our shells
we hear deep crashing. In nights
we can't sleep, passing each other
in the plight of endangered plovers,
their black rings around our throats,
a wild-sounding call that could be
our fairy tale to warn and warm.
Didn't we meet as the storm came
in, surge-smashing fury at the shore
and all our molecular dust? Called
over the water, greeting in Neruda
as we come from mountains; come
from baked bread and quiet climbs,
sour yogurt and goat whiskers, flute
isolation where ancient rocks walk
to sky, where well-earned smiles
remind us of far away seas, gather.

Under the Relics

Ilha de Moçambique: January, 15, 1997

There is the language from Lisboa,
and perhaps the hats and hammers,
concrete and church crumble, slow
sealing of centuries, pottery shard's
land lingering and patchy evidence,
a lost lot in light of lamppost ruin,
wall wilt, the bit by bit decade drain.

Buildings decay and our generations
dissolve, leaving chapel char, cannon
rust and remnants, fortress fragment,
particles and pieces, a simple shred
of bazaar, warehouse sway, capital
stench, and an empty alley folding in
on itself from moonlight. We are all

but vestiges, and what remains, don't
forget, is cellular: sea animals evolve,
streaming our history from the inside,
a form of preservation, energy transfer,
and in the fuzzy foam of ocean edge,
arrival sits in brief, the longer fade
of pure flickers without goodbye, tight

binding of terrestrial atoms left to dry
in flecks of gold and ivory, her spices
swallowed in tortoise shell, on fabric
worn by new beetle, weed, wildflower,
winding down in the mouth of a fish
and an old man's sleep vowing never
to waver. Anchors oxidize deep down

in waters that gleam with tomorrow,
a brilliant washing away for next song,
bird beak, sky fix, clam, coral colors,
a propulsion of navigation from some
sacred source, and the monsoon winds
bringing new dhows, a gliding with—
that something reluctant to leave.

Horseshoe Crabs at Broadkill Beach

Arrival

from the murk a carapace,
perfect timekeeping. Crawls
the sand at moonfeed. To breed,
blue-blooded eons appear.

Meeting

where the boardwalk breaks, crevices
of concrete swallow. Desiccating,
we lament the sea. Let us release
the hard capture of presidential
handshakes, Mother's womb wound.

Departure

tails wave, ancient art
pointing at my moving
cells, to the primordial
world, of mutual rescue.

The Man at Pennypack Creek

I come to the banks on the edge of the city,
sit with kingfisher, swallow on the water;

woodland surrounds, surveyed by the old
bridge arching over us, its traffic racing on

to hell. Catch the right day, time, and paths
empty of new folk, the millions momentarily

disappear. That's when I'll see him, sweeping
by: dark red marks on cheek, a breechclout,

and wampum at the wrist. He moves cat-like,
at home, the bus of history insignificant. He

knows where the heron feasts, how it waits,
but I don't have what it takes to follow him.

This is my placement, watching the cycle
repeat: a shift in the ruin. Across the river

another group of coolers has arrived, candy
wrapper luxury already tossed into the water.

My mind works to float with it, but away,
into deeper, mystery, quietus, until forgotten

appears, wind stirring the branches. I lift
my hand, find dark red marks on my cheek.

Myth & Spell

Diwata

The blue evening spits sparks: elements
chemists say to save for circus. In indigo

another day has gone without eating on,
breathing Manila fire, fidget fees, traffic

exhaust. On spine in dusk decay—urban
counterfeit twisting down in gnarled roots

of old balete trees, their feet buried in pits
of squared soil surrounded by concrete—

where the azure spins, lives, color forged,
inferno cast, and a lava burning in the soul

sparks on. See it now in new orange shards,
fragments they can't mine, where diamonds

lose their worth: molecules emerging from
a dark volcanic rim—the mouth of infinity.

Anatolia

I have forgotten you, Ottoman,
like a little footstool passed over
in the parlor. I have spurned
your empiric odes for quiet
names embraced on lonely
ridges empty of pop pester
and crowds swamping Sultan
Ahmat. In barren hills behind
Batman shines the tongue-less
on stones, chiseled cuneiform
cut more finely than cavalry
sabres—in a place condemned
but not conquered by clogged
caliphate. No Constantinople cry
needed for the Hattian, Urartian,
or Hittite who with dust-capped
dreams still expand and rule on
tiny tablets under elegant skies,
the names of a thousand gods
still read by a hallowed wind.

Plaza de Armas

She puts the taxi out of business. Her creased hands cultivate the cabbage; her back bears the rest. Sometimes I fall to trance, watching her cross at the corner of obsolete knowledge, my other eye a foggy nightfall, the shivering mist storing more than salaries and home improvement. She hangs on to the mystery that even speeding cars obey, the grinding up of lost coins her foreboding. She carries premonitions through the square as the dried up altars peek at her old skirt, ghosts guiding.

The Conquest of Symbolism in Valladolid

I look at the guano on altar, termites crawling
on Christ's ankle in crucifix, Spanish hanging
behind pulpit: a foot stepping on what breathed
before it will bed together in tropical decay
as the legs, golden crown, and drips of blood
trail down to toes. This eternity is not our own
propagation, nor the things newfound wealth
would rather keep unsaid: good and evil are two
sides of the same donkey, sacrality lives in termite
teeth and the whirr of the fatal and fateful atom,
jaw of Mot lying forever within energetic weeds.
A cross around your neck dissolves in what bore
it; oyster-fossils in coral-stone wall communion.

Adam and Eve, for Outer Space

Wrens peep out of old men's
pockets for cheery-chorused
creepers. Thousand year
old hands and heads rest
in the forest undergrowth.
Stringed songs from sheep-

intestined instruments swim
with rotifers. People gather, soft-
hearted by the rain, without money
plates or tithing bowls, to watch
tiny coins roll away. Frankie
forgets his fungicide and snow

absorb missiles through his tongue.
Mother has stopped twisting
her ankles on Barclays cards, now
shoots loud bras to the moon
with crutches and a secret slime
that feeds pregnant crustaceans.

Streetlights to Acahualinca

Unlike the men mostly lost in their moustaches,
or the women crammed between crates of mascara,

I'm obsessed with Managua after midnight—
bus station of walking trinkets, thieves and stranded

travelers, dungeons and dancehalls, cemetery veins
branching across the Amerrisque, through selva and sierra

to pueblos and abuelos forgotten. I sleep on its streets
and bury my head in hidden bosoms, watching the ghosts

come out from cornhusks covered by the cement. I rub
the bullion inside its banks and put her unnamed children

on my lap for the fees are frozen in fog.
Moustaches and mascara will float as ancient footprints

on planets afar seen for first afternoon aglow.

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About the Author:

Timothy Dodd is from Mink Shoals, WV, and is the author of *Fissures, and Other Stories* (Bottom Dog Press, 2019). His stories have appeared in *Yemassee*, *Broad River Review*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, *Nightscript*, and elsewhere. In addition to the poems in *Modern Ancient*, his poetry has been published in many literary magazines including *Roanoke Review*, *Modern Poetry Quarterly Review*, and *Iceview* (Iceland).

Also a visual artist, Tim's most recent solo exhibit, *Come Here, Nervousness*, appeared at the gallery Art Underground in Manila, Philippines. His expressionistic oil paintings can also be sampled on his Instagram page @timothydoddartwork.

Tim completed his B.A. in comparative religion at Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT, and his MFA in the bilingual creative writing program at the University of Texas El Paso. He is an avid traveler and has spent extensive time in such places as Zimbabwe, Republic of Georgia, and Philippines. You might also find him at music concerts from Aster Aweke to Anthony Braxton, The Fixx to Farmacos, and of course, Shape of Despair. Or, more easily, visit him at his "Timothy Dodd, Writer" Facebook page.

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