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Losing The Audience: A Poetry Collection

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LOSING THE AUDIENCE: A POETRY COLLECTION

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Master's Program in Creative Writing

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Robin M. Latimer

2022

Dedication

For my mother, Florene, an avid reader and highly discerning and observant intellect, my family, who have supported me always, my lay apostolate brothers and sisters, and the teachers professors, and writers who have inspired and taught me.

LOSING THE AUDIENCE: A POETRY COLLECTION

by

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A THESIS

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PREFACE TO *LOSING THE AUDIENCE*

Chapter 1 Introduction

Losing the Audience is a collection of poems that engages the idea of audience as something that one can lose, purposively, as did Charles Baudelaire, when he published *Le Spleen de Paris*, with its challenge to the “moral certainties” of the book’s readers (Scott 93), or by virtue of failure to attain the audience’s comprehension, attention, empathy, or attraction. The idea of “losing the audience” also refers to the notion of a failing to gain ground or accord with someone who has the power to entertain requests and deny or grant them as in, say, a royal audience. A loss of the audience may also reflect the reluctance of the lyric speaker to let go of or finalize the poetic utterance, that is, to allow the poem to take place and be given over to the audience. (Celan identifies this aspect of the poem as its “Ever-yet”, as will be discussed later, and often the result of this failure to let go or leave off becomes a hermeticism that disrupts or narrows the development of audience). These general outlines of the concept can apply in both private/intimate and public poetic contexts, and the collection works to represent both of these contexts, relating them within the framework of the poetic tradition of elegy, the poetic genre specific to the encounter of loss. Some of the poems enact failed communications based in spiritual distinctions of speaker or hearer (audience) as in the several poems that deal with healing, or in cultural and social differences that problematize communication, as in the two poems that reference relationships of the Deaf and the hearing. The audience is the object of projections of grief in the poems, and this grief coalesces around manifold vexed communications in which loss is experienced, between daughter with mother, society with governor, lover with lover, even poet with poem. This grief ebbs and flows in tones that range

from idealistic to caustic, forming a compounded elegy.

Audience

What constitutes audience has been the subject of much theorizing in our own era, such as Ong's positing that audience is constructed by the rhetorical situation, such that it is a "fiction" (Ong, "Audience" 13). Porter distinguishes audience in this way: " 'Fictive audiences,' ...are those which can be inferred from the texts. They are the counterpart of the 'implied author's' personality that appears coextensive with the text, that embraces its contradictions, and that in poetry we call the 'lyric self'" (113). In this collection, I am not operating around any one theory of audience. An audience is those who hear, or listen, or follow, or witness a story, a person, an act, be it by plan or happenstance. An audience may be an agreeable one that appreciates a performance, testimony, or other perceived phenomenon and seeks more like it, or one hostile to the same, either shunning its source further or seeking it only to complain against it. An audience may be oblivious to what it attends, or it may be thoroughly involved in the making of a performance, even becoming part of what is made, as was Antonin Artaud's demand of his theatrical audiences. An audience may arise by accident or through cultivation, it may be internal to the narrative element of the poem or story or external to it (the reader/listener/viewer). An audience may be a group aimed at or targeted, as was Baudelaire's in *Le Spleen*. Whatever an audience is, it carries with it the "a much richer set of meanings" (Park 247) than does the concept of readers, and, despite humanity's sojourn from "orality to literacy" (Ong, *Orality*, 31-32) through print and now to digital technology that supports fulsome visuals, audibles, and script, (say Metaverse), the notion of voice has been retained and remains a key concept in the idea of the audience of poetry.

Voice

The idea of an audience of poetry implies the operations of voice, be that voice in sign language, body language, or in words, and this collection has worked to extemporize, critique, and evaluate the concept of voice, though not exhaustively by any means. The collection also means to undercut voice's being associated only with a projection of a clear and unified identity such as is asserted in the political concept of voices that represent an ideology or point of view. Alice Notley has described her sensibility of poetic voice in an interview with the *Boston Review*:

Poetry *is* the sound of poetry, even when it's telling a story. Its definition is the way the voice changes when you read a poem. The ghouls let me speak for them because only *I* will. But that's because I'm a poet; I'm not in it for the money. I'm at the mercy of my poetic voice and of their voices. No choice in the matter. (Turner)

Poetry speaks through the poet as Notley observes, but it also crystallizes around the vocalizations and thoughts of a poet, emanating from layers of the poet's history. That history may have been orderly or disorderly, improvised, colonized, integrated, interred ...and the list of enunciative categories could go on. Poet Paul Celan notes in The Meridian that "the poem today shows...a strong bent toward falling silent" and not mostly because of the difficult logistics of technique required by post-Modern efforts to break with tradition, but because of its need for the Other, of "conversation" (410), for the "[p]oem is lonely" (409) as it reaches for its "Ever yet" (409). This "Ever yet", relative to the encounter continually called into being by a poem and a poet "mated with it" (409) requires, Celan tells us, "someone who does not forget that he speaks from the angle of his inclination of his very being" (409), a specific meridian. It is a similar idea that Li Young Lee considers in his statements around the "prime reality" that we "are constantly living in the late report of antecedent events" and that therefore, "poetry is the voice of an earlier body, not this body" ...such that "all art is yogic" in the sense that we are

linking ourselves to the future and to an “original nature” (Young-Lee, ctd. in Dearing and Graber 87-88). Both poets here deal with the recursive and potential aspects of the poetic utterance as it shapes itself into the present moment and curves back into the language from which it emerged. This yogic aspect of poetic language, or what Celan might call the “Ever yet”, operates, then, as an elegiac format, pressing into the present and ultimately public moment with the memories and concerns of the past. The sense here is of a never quite complete poem languishing in language and memory. In this sense, the poem always enacts a kind of grief. Neither Young-Lee or Celan remark directly on the concept of audience in their theoretical musings around the effort of the poet to retrieve the “yogic” or “Ever-yet”, but it is clear that a poem is not only coming from an origin or meridian, a past, a voice or myriad of voices; it is present and going somewhere, and this process, largely unfurling without witnesses, will eventually be left only to be understood by witnesses. Thus, the very act of voicing from the past into the present and aiming at the future (audience) is elegiac in nature, with the poem a type of monument to the poet’s process and voice, and for this reason I have enjoined the trope of audience to the genre of the elegy in this collection.

Elegy

A strong understanding of elegy as a genre is beneficial to the reader of this collection precisely because this collection broadens the definition of elegy to include the idea that elegy is a context of writing relative to past selves/voices and to the very past of the poem that is worked out to the present. Jean Genette’s work on the lyric genre noted that the “the relationship between theories of the lyric and theories of genre is intimate in modernity” (Jackson and Prins 11), and that elegy is one of the lyric poetic forms that has undergone the journey from “enunciative”(11) genre in its ancient sources in choral Greek funeral rites to its

modern iteration as “imitative” (11). The genre of elegy represents a process of grief or sorrow brought to bear or performed toward a public, (members of whom may also carry the same grief privately), and its enunciative aspect or voicing allows for what Ong notes as the sensation of sound’s “special relationship to time” (Orality, 31-32) , that is, the fleeting aspects of the temporal in sound. In the movement from an enunciated elegy to the imitative one, what we can call the performative aspect of elegy deals in temporality, incursions of the past into the present, and is linked to the traditional structure of the elegy that attends to the “monuments” (be they symbolic or actual) of the past. For any poet, this “performance” operates from some degree of pain or effort (grief) based in retrieving or drawing the past into the present moment. Such a task also casts the present moment of the poem into the poet’s consuming fire of the “Ever-yet”, the unfinished business of an exact and complete retrieval. The poet, as a result, may view the “finished” poem as a paradox in the ways described by Celan and Lee Young Li, and this paradox may, in turn, hinder the relationship with the audience of the poem in the sense that the audience is structured by a rhetorical situation, which, from the poet’s viewpoint, is quite fluid. Alice Notley observes of that fluidity in an interview with *Poetry Northwest* writer Sierra Nelson that, “[a] poem comes to exist somewhere between the mind and the vocal equipment, also with the hand or hands involved (sometimes I feel that my writing hand is speaking). Also between the poet and the poet’s audience (reader)” (“Nothing Keeps”).

Elegy as Supplemental Form

The elegy is traditionally understood as formed of three parts: the lament, the praise of the grieved object, and a finale dealing with consolation and solace (*Elegy*, Academy of American Poets). This definition by the Academy does not look back far enough into the Greek roots of form

but does note that “[m]any modern elegies have been written not out of a sense of personal grief, but rather a broad feeling of loss and metaphysical sadness.” Of its ancient origins, Nagy adds to the understanding of the enunciative aspect of the elegy that the elegiac couplet common to ancient elegies is a combination of one line of dactylic hexameter, followed by a second line of dactylic pentameter with the critical point that the

markedness of the pentameter can be seen most clearly in the use of this meter for the purpose of expressing a meaning that supplements whatever meaning is already being expressed by way of the hexameter. (Nagy)

The second line of the couplet, which is specific to the elegy form, is a “supplement” to the first line, with the first line not marked specifically to the elegy genre but an outgrowth of the epic hexameter form. This point is significant because it ties the second line of the couplet, the genre-specific line, the mourner’s line, to the stable, consensus (public) meter of poetic discourse—the hexameter. Nagy finds this pattern of “the supplementary function of elegy” to be “an overall function of the elegy.” (Of interest is Nagy’s observation that the lamenter in the elegy is usually a woman, and always the one most impacted by the event, which, in Classical antiquity was often the death of a loved one in battle). This early form of elegy underwent changes as singing was professionalized by Sappho and later by Alcaeus as elegies were delivered over into the male-only symposia (Nagy). Perhaps this subsumption of the female voice in the elegies of the Symposia poets was a change mirroring an alteration in the social discourse such that the female point of view was suborned or rejected.

The elegy’s traditional use of its supplementary line of pentameter as part of memorializing the past as if it is somatically present is noted by Estrin in his discussion of the elegiac engraving on the “cenotaph in the modern city of Arta, ancient Ambracia”(299). In reviewing the first

several lines of the engraving, Estrin notes that, “the hexameter opens with a “deictic...gesture[] towards two.. men, Nausistratos and Kallitas, introduced as if present” (303). Estrin continues, “Yet the pentameter reminds us that “dark Hades” holds them back forever. (303) Two points are to be made here. One concerns the idea that the couplet addresses an audience, for the grammar references “these” two men, as if present and in need of designation for a present mourner. Secondly, in addition to the deictic grammatical form, “the hexameter points to the deceased and so, fittingly draws on techniques of visualization associated with epic poetry [while] the pentameter pulls us back to [the] reality”(Estrin 303) that those referenced are absent. The elegy operates in a representation of the events of the past as present in some sense, through a literal monument or a line of hexameter evoking a visual presence of the dead, or some other means. The supplemental function is to bring this past into the “real” present, the present moment in which there is no further actual “somatic” presence, only a memorialization or evocation of it. The structure of temporality in the elegy, then, is related to the presence of listening mourners, an audience who are directed to the remembrance of the subject(s) of the elegy.

An elder statesman of Classical Studies, W.P. Trent, urges that with the addition of the second line of pentameter as the completion of the elegy’s opening line of epic hexameter, the “stately flow of the epic was now supplemented by the purely personal poetry” (6-7) and this development suggested that “Greek poetry had practically cast the molds that were to shape the subjective poetic utterance of the nations yet to be” (7) . Even in the late 1800’s then, the character of elegy for subjective poetic utterance around lamentable conditions and situations, from love to politics, was understood to be part of the elegiac tradition.

The Modern Elegy

Anita Helle writes that “elegy, a genre long associated with personal mourning, is being newly called to account for its changing historical circumstances, its modes of production, and relation to literary as well as non-literary discourses” (51). Her article catalogues the changes as those that foreground the element of “witness” or “testimony” concerned with historical and political matters, rather than the personal.

For the modern elegist, the work of bringing the past (the former, the dead) into the present and often public moment is rarely performed now through the structure of meter, begging the question of how the performative aspect takes place, for the performative (with its relation to audience) remains with the elegy in its current imitative form. Thomas Gray in “Elegy in a Country Churchyard” effects the performative aspect of mourning through reference to the various monuments in the graveyard. The speaker “reads through” these for the poem’s audience in his personal summarizations as he walks through the graveyard. For example, in the lines, “Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast/The little tyrant of his fields withstood...” (ll. 57- 58), the speaker obliquely references perhaps one of the headstones that are in or may be in the graveyard. (It should be noted here that in addition to oblique reference to particular or likely headstones, Gray’s speaker surveys the monuments through a lens of topical allusion to English politics). Gray’s poetic strategy is derivative of the performative elements encouraged by the Ambracian monument. In a modern poem, say Forché’s “Angel of History”, the monuments become allusions to historical acts (the Holocaust and Hiroshima) as these are understood relative to Paul Klee’s painting of the Angelus Novus, a “slack-jawed” and “aghast” angel, which Walter Benjamin noted “ ‘is how one pictures the Angel of History’”(Farago)

looking out over the post-modern period of history in which genocide, war, torment, and oppression defined history's march.

In several of the of the poems I have collected here, I attempt a performative mode of elegy by means of characterizing the speaker as someone who can call in the present into the past by undoing “ the shades/between us” or by stating that something in the present (a “midnight dance”) has been “crossed” by something that is from the past, or from the imagination of the speaker.

This Collection

The poems in this collection fall under this rubric of testimony, confession, or witness and obtain towards the performance of the past in the present moment. The first section focuses largely on personal grief as the outflow of failed communication. “Effigy” brings the implied audience of the poem's speaker into the present moment of the burning of an effigy. “Tempted” brings the reader into present moments of conflict as a young lecturer rewrites a lecture to remove elements targeted at a student in the class. Several of the poems in Section II of the collection (“Elegy in Country's Graveyard”, “Elegy for the Woke”, “Americas”) offer a more political level of grief similar to what Helle notes among modern female elegists as reconsideration of America “as an afflicted body” (53) . The two sections are not meant to communicate with each other in a particular manner, only to effect the work of elegy in both private and public contexts, sharing primarily the voices of mourning.

Appropriately in terms of the ancient tradition of the elegy, most of the poems in this collection come from a female speaker or perspective, though with some exceptions. The collection is presented in three parts, with the sections intended to mirror to some degree the traditional elegiac structure of lament of a death or loss, followed by assessment/praise of the lost

or deceased subject, and a final effort at consolation. The first two sections of poems, then, deal with a background of witnesses, testimonies, and confessions on personal and political levels, respectively, foregrounding the element of “witness” or “testimony” that is part of the modern elegy. The second section, while taking part in lament, focuses on elegies proper, as, for instance in “Elegy for Dylan Thomas”, and further begins to consider the consolations (and inconsolability) of poetic voicing. The third section offers a largely ironic viewpoint on the elegiac consolations of self-expression and “voice” or voicings and picks up the ironic tones of the second section to confront the reader with what the speakers view as unethical and narcissistic self-expression and voicings. In the poem “Homunculus”, for example, the speaker takes on the problem of being an invented voice. In “Robin Hood”, the speaker decried being a voice outlawed. The last four poems of the work devolve into a kind of solipsistic self-expression as if to clarify that without ethics or morality such is the direction of poetic utterance. While I was not thinking of the end of Eliot’s “The Waste Land” when I set these three in place, I am reminded that he ended that formidable poem with a kind of babbling (though one much more intellectual than my own).

Summary

As a function of the temporal orientation of elegy, many of the poems in this collection are reaching to Li Young Lee’s notion that poetry is the “late report of antecedent events” (Young-Lee ctd. in Dearing and Graber 87-88) and attend to a sense of loss of communicative value for the speaker (or the implied hearer/spectator) in this movement from the personal to the public, (or the past to the present), hence the title I have supplied this collection-*Losing the Audience*. (This title also references other aspects of such losing, including alienating the audience, confounding the audience, losing in an engagement with someone who holds power, etc.). Quite

a number of the poems deal with an audience in the sense of a hearing or spectatorship in which some kind of loss is represented as past events are relayed in the present. The elegy draws out the private sphere into a public space, the space of audience, and it often does so inside of forms or structures that include sections of lament, praise, and consolation. The poems I am presenting in this thesis work with all of these structures and forms. Some of the poems simply draw attention to the personal or private that is suddenly brought into the public space or confessed or testified to in a way that reveals the previously private thought or feeling. Other poems reveal personal or private experiences as they emerge into a politicized realm. In some instances, the poem might offer an image of one culture emerging into the context of another, shaping a sense of something personal becoming public or political (as in “Le Crise” and “Farah, Cutting My Hair”). While I emphasize personal voices, some of the poems bring in a more public and political voice as in “Americas.” The political theme is in keeping with some of the ancient traditions of elegy as Trent notes in remarking that while Solon was using the “elegiac distich for political purposes, ... Minnermus was devoting it to ... his hopeless passion for the flute-player, Nanno” (8). The concerns of womanhood in the current era certainly are present in these poems whose speakers deal in sex and sexuality, romance, oppression, and a more pervasive if subtle theme of the problems of existing in the minds of others, affording a sense in many of the poems that navigating between the state of being and the state of being witnessed forms an elegiac terrain from private self to public self. In poems like “Farah, Cutting My Hair”, “Matrimony”, “Women: An Elegy for the Liberation Movement”, laments of the oppressiveness of being seen or known (or formed into an image) are presented. The poems do not exclude male speakers from such laments, as in “Robin Hood” (male speaker) or “Homunculus” (gender neutral). The navigation from private to public self may be problematized for the female/feminine insofar as

the public domain has so long been the territory of the male/masculine in patriarchal societies, but it forms a problem set for all who are in some way outside the patriarchal norms, who are its “supplement”.

In the following sections, I will discuss individual poems as they convey an extemporized poetic mourning in keeping with the ancient and modern traditions of the elegy while also examining their placement and contribution to the patterns of the overall collection.

Discussion of Section One, *Witnesses , Confessions, and Testimonies*

As noted above, the modern elegiac tradition foregrounds the element of “witness” or “testimony” and confession that is part of the modern elegy (Helle 53). In this first section, I work with these elements in reference to the audience of poetry (a general audience) and also to the implied and often internally represented audience of the speaker of the poems-“the you and I” (Duncan ctd. in Nordquist), as , for example, the person in the bath in “At the Door”. I start at this place to offer a phenomenology of the poetic self that is dealing in the sense of loss on a personal level as it begins to bleed into the sense of loss on a poetic level. Questions of regrets, mistrust, ambivalence of sexual posture all are interrogated in this section as the various speakers review a history of loss, from temptations avoided, to relationships undertaken. The two short poems that Losing the Audience opens with concern sexual desire, constrained in the first and celebrated in the second. The first, “At the Door” open the collection in the imagery of hearing and sensing through a door the water and heat of the beloved, this person characterized as “night’s encased corsage”. The represented (internal) “audience” here is a secretive and solo one, and perhaps, an unknowing one, as there appears to be someone in the bath of the room before which the speaker stands at a closed door. Contrasting with this impassioned and lonely experience, the second poem, “Sappho Reads to Her Poetry Group Concerning Anactoria”, is a

victorious, literary and perhaps a bit of a jaded look back on a sexual conquest before an audience of one's peers. This poem internalizes an audience, depicting an in-group relative to female sexuality and poetry, and touches on the forbidden fruit of sex between an older and younger woman. I use these two poems as a way to set up some parameters of ideation in the rest of the section, which deals with foregrounding "the element of "witness" or" testimony" that is part of the modern elegy" (Helle 53). Of course, confession is also part of these two types of address of the audience. The confession of the first poem is a sensitive and private one, the confession of the second a ribald and public one that effaces the sensitivity displayed in the first. The poles of communication patterns, or voice, a poet can bring to the audience are thus represented.

The third poem in this section, "Persephone's Regret", works with the concept of "At the Door", the audience of one, where Caleb is the Hades-like voyeur of the speaker's Persephone, she outside hanging clothes, these reminiscent of the flowers Persephone was picking when Hades seized her for himself in the myth. But the confession is the speaker's, not Caleb's, turning the mythic situation around to reveal the "robbery" of Caleb's desire by "one dark act of denial" on the part of the speaker, who confesses her desire for him in the past moment and at the same time her choice at the time not to engage it, leaving him to experience the darkest day of his life. The speaker confesses, undoing the "shades" between Caleb and herself in the present moment, this, reference to the shades a continuation of the Hades -Persephone metaphor and an extension of its scope in terms of allusion to the potential betrayals in a relationship of a man and woman. (Penelope tested Odysseus' identity by having their famous wedding bed moved, and Medea's speeches in many versions of the Medea play carefully carve out Jason as a traitor while showing Medea carefully avoiding her own confession). As well, the grammar

twists a bit in order to formulate some of the reversals involved at the narrative level. Thus, in the temporally-stretched phrase (“an honor I nearly wanted and had”), the speaker clarifies her command of Caleb’s romantic history and her top rank in it:

There I thought on your two Helens;
the first in Homer was your second love,
but your first was Helen, a governess you said
made one day in your life the darkest
of all, an honor I nearly wanted, and had.

This poem of regret, an elegy for the rejected lover, is also a confession. In the present, the speaker confesses the guilt of her choice to reject the Hades figure (Caleb), though she did desire him. The use of the myth capitalizes on the ambivalence of the myth in representing sexual innocence, and suggests that in the logistics of desire, there are no innocents. In this poem, the confession forms a connection with the broader theme of the “lost audience”, here of Caleb’s understanding at the time of the reality of what occurred between himself and the speaker in the moment of their connection outside their shared home as she was hanging clothes in early spring.

“First Date with My Husband” continues the confession and testimony, this time of a speaker who feels herself to be the audience of a romantic effort and who is questioning the implied expectations of the performer (a man who will eventually become her husband). Here again, some telescoping of the past into the present moment of the poem is operative in terms of a conversation represented in the context of the “first date”. This conversation is minimal as the current wife presents herself in the past as realizing that her date (her current husband) is a “man of few words” who expects the efficiency or ease of the silence of companions. This is a

poem about the “space between us” and I have attempted to use the forest as a type of correlative for that space. The man knows his space in the forest, has searched for arrowheads here before. The woman (speaker) does not, and feels disadvantaged to some degree, requiring dependence. The dependence story or the enmeshed story is an old narrative involving men and women, no doubt, reaching back into our primitive histories. As well, the poem configures God in the mix, also, a part of this oldest of stories, and crystallizes the ideation of God with what the speaker clarifies as related to the fear of the other, of the man, and the lacunae of knowledge between them. The elegy here is for the primal aspect of marriage, of relation of man and woman, of God’s presence, all of these things appearing, but tamed in a modern mindset, a “psychological Walden”, for, after all, this is not Eden, but just a date in the local wood, albeit a primitive hunting-ground, to look for the weapons of the past.

“The Undressing” is a workshop poem, written in a course that called for a “cover” of a poem. I chose Li Young Lee’s “The Undressing”, a much better and sexier poem than this one. I moved this poem out of the miscellaneous section of my first draft based on a comment made by one of my classmates this term, and I agree that it fits in with the first section of the collection. Forming a contrast with the non-conversation of “First Date with My Husband”, it highlights the conversational aspects conformed between a Deaf and hearing couple. It attempts to highlight the communication that is tactile and understood between them as the underpinning of a joyous but confusing and ironic verbal relationship, this an effort to draw attention again to the way language draws together and alienates individuals as quite explicitly noted in “First Date with My Husband”.

“Effigy” concerns marriage and a third party. The narrative basis concerns the intentions of a married couple to engage sexually with an outsider, a woman, the speaker, who is quite clear on

the path of the relationship the two wish to draw her into and who prophetically suggests their efforts (the female partner's efforts in specific) are an invasion of privacy relative to personal sexuality and sanctity. This personal sanctity is represented in the imagery of masking (makeup), dance by a midnight fire, and the concept of "not pass[ing]", in which the failed attempt on the part of the married woman to gain sexual power over the speaker is subsumed in the speaker's statement that this beautiful creature will be consumed in some manner, though one quickly sees this moth to the flame is not burned but beats itself against the door prior to a lengthy rain, a natural phenomenon. The telescoping of the "success" of the seduction in the poem is pressed into the future as a "carpet of moths" over which the two will step. The poem is an elegy for the premises and outcomes of this seduction. The poem itself is the effigy to be burned, for effigy is one of the relays of grief, an angry grief here.

"Olive Leaf" picks up on the imagery of the rain in the poem preceding it. The narrative references the Genesis chapter that deals with Noah's seeking to find out when dry land has appeared by sending out a dove. Noah actually tries using ravens and doves, but this concerns the last attempt with a dove, who brings back a branch, signifying that land is visible/accessible. I think of this poem as symbolic of the dynamics of understanding things through proxies, through voids of communication. The message supplied by the dove was requested by the speaker but not really welcomed. She, for I think of this speaker as she, reads the leaf, "vein, vein, vein, artery". What question was it she sought? Stanza two presents its lineaments. The imagery is of a mated dove, whose mate awaits, perhaps even on a nest with an egg. The sense is that the message of the presence of land equivocates on the actual status of the presence, that it is ripe for nesting. This is a poem, like "Effigy", about the presence of a third party, a murky

member of the audience between the two . This leaf “reads too simply”, the speaker notes. The message is incomplete.

“Chic Romance” is a bit like “Sappho Reads to Her Poetry Group”; it is concerned with the speaker’s awareness of the vantage of others on a budding romance. Its conceit is a kind of boast to a new love with a satire on the elements that couples use to call attention to themselves as a couple while maintaining a cool distance from the admiring others. It is about the paradox of wanting an audience to shun.

“Control” is part of a series of poems on the concept of control. I include it here as it responds to the previous poem around the insecurities that flourish in a new romance. It plays toward the next poem, “Tempted”, which deals with a young lecturer’s conflict about her attraction to a student. These two poems together reach back to the theme of the forbidden love in “Sappho Reads...” and they are oriented to conscience relative to the power dynamics of the lovers, which consternation the persona of “Sappho Reads...” does not suffer. The elegiac aspect here simply concerns the confessional mode involved, a haunting of the present by what could have been but what could not.

“Resolution of a Fate” revisits the reverberative power of Classical Greek mythology that opens the first section. As well, it revisits an old but significant or fated romance. The speaker is framed as a blind person in myriad images, reaching to the construct of a Fate who must share an eye with her sister, with the manual aspect of that transfer highlighted with references to the hand. The narrative is oblique but follows an encounter after a party, with the concept of one stranger’s face (the speaker’s) buried in the hands of the other, an image of knowledge, of death (“buried”), of blindness. Like so many of the love stories alluded to in this section, this one is unfinished, incomplete, and the poem ends with the question of the entire section, which

is who is this audience with whom the speaker is sharing secrets, worshipping to some degree? The “forgotten valance” is the space of knowing, of loving, of being known. In the first section of the book, then, I hope to voice out some of the problematics of being known, being loved, and I try to disembodify the collected voices of the poems from any specific gender, sexuality or unity of speaker identity across the group.

Discussion of Section Two, *Elegies*

In this section, I work with and focus on particular persons and places as opposed to the mysterious first and second persons of the first section of the collection. As well, I worked on what might be called proper elegies, oriented toward those who have passed or forms that the elegy has appeared in.

I start with “Life Lesson”, a prose poem that represents the mind of a child on the subject of death. It fairly speaks for itself on the subject, conveying in images from family and American history. I moved it out of Section I based on comments by classmates

The next two poems are also ones I moved from Section I to Section II based on class comments. “Farah, Cutting My Hair” and “Le Crise” deals with intercultural aspects of gender and are forms of elegy for the sufferings of the two women named in the poems. They mark a shift away from the more private/interior poems that in the first section of the collection and open up into a public space of dialogue. The woman Farah is a hairdresser who fled Iran in 1978, and the second woman is Kathryn Koob, part of the Canadian Six, (hence the French in the poem) who along with Elizabeth Swift were foreign service detainees during the Iranian hostage crisis of 1978.

Through the speaker’s own experiences as a gay woman. “Farah, Cutting My Hair” draws this tale of oppression of Middle Eastern women into the sense of secrecy required by the

speaker of the poem as she relates to Farah's stealthy taking on of the prerogatives of heterosexual Western women despite her husband's vain protest. The rape referenced in "Le Crise" is one fantasized by her captors per the speaker, but the hostility toward herself and Liz as women is historically accurate. The strong language toward the traditions of the Muslim is definitely not the voice of Kathryn, though the incident with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad did happen. This poem deals with the oppression of women within the fundamentalist religious government still operating in Tehran today and in other societies. The line from Baudelaire, used also by T.S. Eliot in The Wasteland, was originally — "Hypocrite lecteur, — mon semblable, — mon frère!" in Baudelaire's famous poetic preface to Les Fleurs du Mal. It refers to the reader as a hypocrite and is really a floating address insofar as it might be a rejoinder from Kathryn to Ahmadinejad, and it might also be a warning to the reader not to judge too harshly Kathryn's strong sentiments..

"Elegy for Dylan Thomas" considers the American tours of Dylan Thomas, these littered with tales of his drunkenness but serious performances. It takes a swipe at the way contemporary associations and academia often deal with speakers and performers with whose politics or identities they disagree and reminds us to consider that all are implicated in behaviors they project on others.

"Women: An Elegy for the Women's Liberation Movement" is a very sarcastic poem that suggests the speaker's attitude toward some of the female behavior he or she encounters. The speaker's gender here is not specific, and, in fact, gender is sent up a bit in the line, "You that I follow. Women/are almost always of your gender". The speaker seems to take exception with the demure or passive orientation of "women". From oven or bed or filling up water or just being an object to be saved or looked at, the many cliched images of "woman" as performer/

performance are tossed about in the speaker's derisive viewpoint. The speaker is ironically elegizing the liberation movement, suggestion is that women's liberation did not change much at all about women.

"Elegy for the Woke" is a rant against the "woke" movement, declaring its destiny to undo itself. I see it as similar to Gwen Brooks' rhymed poem, "The Boy Died in My Alley" (Brooks), a poignant rhymed poem (but also a type of rant itself) about victimhood, though I rhymed here to make the poem's sound just about as absurd as "wokeness" itself and also to pound in the last lines which allude to the death-like pose of "wokeness" in the image of the persons projected on (that is, "the patient") by the woke. The poem uses an allusion to T.S. Eliot, who prophesied in his poem "The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" around the wasted civilization that produces such a person as Prufrock, someone unable to project or identify successfully.

"Elegy in A Country's Graveyard" looks to the pattern of Thomas Gray's famous "Elegy in a Country Churchyard", a poem in which the many grave markers of the common man are viewed by the speaker, himself a member of the short-lived Cromwellian elite in Britain. The speaker's empathy is somewhat undercut by his privilege, though in times past, the voice may have been seen more sympathetically. Unlike Gray's poem, this walk through the graveyard of the United States holds no punches. In the first section, the speaker laments the issues before the nation as the speaker sees them. These concern the impact of Big Brother and to a lesser degree the impact of the Left/Right divide. The second section begins to lay out the praise of poets for the project of the United States relative to liberty and individualism, including the era's making war against beliefs it disagreed with strongly (as in the Civil War). All poets noted in the section were poets during the Civil War and the poems cited address their politics to a

degree: Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Frederick Douglass, Wadsworth Longfellow, Laurence Dunbar, and Cullen Bryant. I intend that their voices praise and glorify deep-seated American values. The resolution or consolation section of this long elegy is short and reaches to indigenous poets of our own era, Da and Harjo, for their remarks on the role of language and silence in making peace. As well, the speaker philosophizes on the need to make peace with the binary in language.

The next poem “Americas” is intentionally obscure or hermetic; it deals with imagery of Mexico, and Canada as places from which come immigrants into the space between the two “dark lines” of the southern and northern borders. It plays with language and space in a way that I generally do not. For me, it is a nod to some of the experimental LANGUAGE poets, but it deals with the question of who really is the “*unum*” of the United States’ *e pluribus unum*, referencing immigrants from the Southern border and from the Northern, with a sub-reference to the indigenous Cree in the North. The poem is an experiment with language less than a completed argument. It elegizes not so much the colonized as the sad and strange flow of the colonized into the colonizer.

I have added a poem to this section that I am calling “Elegy for My Three Years in the Alaskan Bush.” It uses the present imperfect tense to convey the emotion of the past time in the Alaskan wilderness within the present moment, sustaining the sense of an impinging challenge of the wilderness on the speaker.

The next to last two poems of the section, “Comber” and Matrimony” from a bit of an elegy on the topics of romance, nature, and marriage. “Matrimony” suggests that womanly advice on marriage has not worked for the speaker. “Comber” focuses on a searcher and the sadness that can produce a natural beauty that draws love or affection. The next poem of this

section, “On a Deaf Mother and a Lazy Grandmother” performs a swift genealogy of the loss of hope across two generations of women through the Great Depression and World War II relative to the place of hearing and being heard.

The last two poems return very directly to the overall construct of the audience and present parables of “losing the audience”, observing scenarios that involve literary situations of audience, audience projections in dreams, personal/private recollections of an audience hoped for and denied, and a snide overall description of how audience is pared into a niche. The tone overall in the last stanza is ironic/caustic as is much of the coming third part of the collection. The final poem of the second section of the collection, “Losing the Audience” steps out of the mode of parable and problematizes audience, pointing out the hypocrisies and neediness of the audience, which acts unconscionably and looks to the artist to sear its conscience of the consequent pain and guilt.

Discussion of Section Three, *The Consolations of Voice*

The last section of the collection, the segment oriented toward resolution of some of the elegized aspects of the first two sections, places the construct of “voice” as a potential site of consolation. Of course, it is voice that formed the chief aspect of the elegy in its ancient form. The voicing of grief allowed for the expelling of it from the community in these choral elegies of the ancient Greeks. The consolations in this section are offered poetically, with the ironies of “voicing”, from the political and philosophical to the personal, represented, at times quite caustically. This section on consolation is a caustic “treatment” overall, not a homeopathic one.

The first poem reaches back to the last one of the second section, offering a healing prescription which suggests that the audience, today’s hearers, like Bartimaeus, needs to gain some humility and understand their roles as seeker and beggar, and not just as makers of artists

and celebrities. The poem also suggests that the audience should desist from the fascistic cancellations of others (for in the story of Bartimaeus, the crowd tries to shush him as he calls out for Christ).

“The Vocative” is simply a short notice that an old grammatical case, the vocative, was a command form and dealt plainly in the idea that commands from anyone suggest hierarchy, and potentially inequity. The little verse continues that freedom is never necessarily allied with equity, a lesson our current era may well need to hear. These verses are just a reminder that we can attend to the voicing of inequity or intone it ourselves, but we do not have to be its victims, are free to disobey the commands it conveys. That one cannot command equity into existence but can always exercise freedom is the ultimate thrust of this little bit of verse.

“Samuel Beckett and Djuna Barnes” might be viewed as more properly placed in Section II, but as I view these two as artistic geniuses in conveying the problems of the post-Modern era to their own eras, and I want to highlight that they reached into the grave of language that Modernism was to convey the death they were experiencing in life (as was also Paul Celan, who is also referenced). To this speaker, the two (and Celan) were prophetic of a lost spirituality they themselves suffered, and the work they did in representing that loss amounts to a revelation to their audiences about the “whitewashing” of the truth of death and loss among their peers in the era of the world wars. This poem offers allusion to one of the “hard sayings” of Christ to the Pharisees, whom Christ viewed as failing to accurately portray to their followers the truths of spiritual death.

“A Voice at the Table” picks up on the notion that so many in our time have been concerned to be heard and represented, and it notes the problems of “voice” as representation in an image of someone at the table who is never completely “here or there”, who is polished,

stylized, mirrored (in the utensils) but whose personal truth is eviscerated in the conventions of representation, of reverberation within the mouths of others.

“The Healing” reaches back to “Blind Bartimaeus suggesting that healing of the grieved involves some standing aside from the noise of others, a backing away from “the audience”. It alludes to the story of the Christ pulling the deaf and mute man away from the crowd, and it suggests that the children at the table (as the same ones in the poem “A Voice at the Table”) are hungry for just such a healing. This poem urges some silence and humility on the constant clamorers for voice and audience, and, like the poets Harjo and Da, reminds one of the place of silences in spiritual development.

The next two poems, “Robin Hood’s Song” and “Homunculus” form images of those whose voices are outlawed or somehow concocted (managed or controlled) and evinces their feelings toward those with whom they are trying to connect. These images of outlawed voices, and voices created to concur serve to suggest the problems and opportunities that arise under oppression. Homunculus, like the Earth Spirit in *Faust*, can, by poem’s end, say that creating an image around oneself is a “trick”, for recall that the Earth Spirit tells Faust that the Spirit he sees is himself, is projected. The homunculus knows the truth of its situation. Similarly, in “Robin Hood”, the speaker (Robin) can offer judgement on those he offers to help because they would call upon him to “believe other/than what [they] will not permit [him] to say”. This is a poem about those who benefit from those ideas and stances they are not willing to take themselves, and who hold an intolerant or fearful attitude toward a free speaker. Both of these poems reach to legends that deal with voicelessness and its problems and potentials. I hope that employing images from legend creates a reverberation around the idea that possessing and using voice is not an entitlement but a freedom, meaning it will come against oppression, and that it is a tool, as is

silence, the latter which both homunculus and Robin Hood have mastered. In fact, throughout this collection, I use allusion to poems, poets, books, legends, and myths, a long tradition in literature.

The last poems in this section remove from the tensions of the previous sections to a place of consolation that lies in constructs that may involve “voice” but are concerned more with more solipsistic experiences with language. “St. Joseph’s Day” is a poem about a long-standing private connection that has come to light to others and seems to have its roots in eternity. Like the poem just before it, it is one of delight in a private discourse, and one that feels a little stingy about being disrupted from its quiet internalization.

“Control II” is a poem about the making of anything, art or speech, or, here, flight, and it insinuates that there are makers and there are the others, an audience of making. It seems to privilege the making as opposed to the observing of the made and is a minor slap at the concept of the audience. “The Difference” cheats grammar to present an image of the artist as someone who is just shy of insanity probably because of some lack of the draw in social mobility.

“Seasons, What Bears Repeating” is simply about delighting in the arrangement of words and ideas, a poem with only the delight of its speaker in mind, not addressed to anyone really. It forms the idea of a voice that is nearly free of audience. These last four poems suggest that the artist will be in play always, no matter the audience.

Summary

The collection critiques of the role and behavior of the audience of both art and social dialogue, adding a broader critique of the contemporary audience fashioned as a manipulable mob or mass identity. It elegizes the vagaries of modern audiences that mitigate against freedom, spirituality, and ethics, suggesting that the lyric poem is tied to elegy in terms of the work of

poetry to evince the voice of the past in the present (performative) moment relative to whatever “monuments” form the poem’s subject. The collection hopes to epitomize some of the complications of voicing the poetic amid that voicing’s witnesses.

LOSING THE AUDIENCE

Chapter 2 Witnesses, Confessions, and Testimonies

At the Door

The black leaves' crush on ice;
you have slept nights I have stood,
sounding out the tiles
by the furnace' blast,
in your open bath, closed wood.
Oh, ask for night's encased corsage and shiver.

Sappho Reads to Her Poetry Group Concerning Anactoria*

But this one is different. (Titters around).
She turns like a moon for me
on pristine feet.
Her love is new, thin, dark,
then cresting,
more wave than contraction,
so rhythmic its interval. (Buzzing and sighs).
For me she stretches silence.

**Named beloved in Fragment 16*

Persephone's Regret

Caleb, I can make claims on you
now. I couldn't before. I was unable,
then unwilling. Liar that I am,
I confessed the inability, hid the will
I now confess.

Once our snow peas were gone
and winter had indulged us,
you set to brooding in the old garage
on the season's chaos, broken windows,
icy tools, but these you found
needed little moving, and made little
more of them than a manly dada.

I left you to this on the first day of March,
Thinking of the wind, went on to the line,
where the clothes were made ready like kites.
There I thought on your two Helens;
the first in Homer was your second love,
but your first was Helen, a governess you said
made one day in your life the darkest
of all, an honor I nearly wanted, and had.

Still, you have these two,
the one all men wanted, and the one
who wouldn't have you, for now
I see from the other side, the shades
between us, and am glad.

It is these shades I now undo.

They come undone like Jason did
in Medea's speeches to the chorus of women.
Until I see you, Caleb, standing again at the edge
of the cane, your canvas shoes muddy
on the cracked cement, your silhouette
against the splintered wall,
until the towels explode and fall
like petals, and you fall down
to take them up, unaware that for once,
I was staid, like Odysseus' bed,
like Penelope, no longer weaving
a web.

I was so surprised
you had watched and known
my light toils
from that dark haven.
Only now you find
of all my labors,
one dark act of denial,
which eluded you,
the greatest.

First Date with My Husband

On the rock that overhangs the field,
I cast over each artifact
until I am sure
of as much as is possible:
This old ground
is your old ground.
Now the natives dance weekends

only at the casino some ten miles away.
Weaponry, your devotion
slides right into my hands,
arrowheads you find right below the surface.
A man of few words,
ear to the ground, you cull
bits from the mounds
to present to me
on that very hard rock.

In one short day, the mind
refuses the weaning, flutters
and rattles, disengaged, even shudders
at the whirl of the forest, where
the cypress knees bend for a reason
to a God we barely feared. These constructs
multiply around you for a moment,
casting in fact for just your form,
which, approaching, woos the impending
panic from one source to another.

In another hollow, on the downslope
of a ravine, I circle the question.
You knew but I did not know. Where
was the west and the stream I forgot
always runs north south? How far east
was the sun when we left? You say,
“ I know by the incline we are coming to the creek”
The crux and pivot of your sense of direction.
You never saw need for extrapolation.

You ask, "Are you afraid?"
I revert to the clinical
and interior inspection:
I would rather syntax
be our strategy of kinship,
But you. I comprehend quickly
the ease you are offering
but cannot tell you
I want to know where I am.

This efficient edge we possess in silence,
you will expect it. Naturally. The etiquette
of companions calls just for such.
Am I afraid? We continue to travel.
I tell myself that I do fear God,
I tell you, "Yes, a little. Yes."

The Undressing

Thanks to Lee Young Lee

I was already undressed
except for the hasty housecoat
when you flew in from the conference
at Gallaudet and texted me from the cab
to unlock the door, ringing first
to awaken me.

"You are taking advantage of my state,"
I mouthed so you could read my lips
in the porch light's glare.
You signed, 'you are too sleepy'
or was it "so sleepy". The difference

is important in the meaning
of “so” and “too” .

If the first, you hoped to get us past it.

If the second, you were getting turned on.

“Thief in the night, body-snatcher”,
I taunt, pulling you into the housecoat.

You sign that you have to pay
the cabman who brought you
from the airport.

I pulled the sign for “need” from my chest
with thumb and forefinger and raised a brow,
probably not the right translation. No, you have the cash,
you sign. I wait
while you run back down to the cab
at 2 a.m. in the morning.

“The Deaf are so loud”, I tell you
as you pound back up
the stairwell of my apartment.

“It is a joke among us Deaf”, you reply,
But I already know that...you know the
barb...because there is no one to hear it.

“Like a tree in the forest”, I sign ineptly.

“Yes, like that” you sign, kissing me forcefully.

Sleep overwhelmed me suddenly.

You trail me to the bedroom in the dark.

I lie back on the pillow, and like the leaves of a tree
in a fairy tale, all your clothes come off at once,
dropping swiftly to the floor.

I am already starting to drowse when
you appear above me
in the shadows,
I see your form,
your hands firmly attached
to each of my shoulders,
and a pitch of light against
a pitch of darkness dilating.

All striations
of the slightest distinctions
appear and dissolve
at a mutual apex
in a perfect world,
I dream to myself.
Next morning, you are gone already
to the Las Cruces conference.
And, having forgotten you completely
suddenly, mid-morning break,
I remember that you had been there.
Did a cab pick you up? “There was
something I could only sense” I text you....
“some uprootedness warmed and comforted”,
I wrote. Only here at 10 a.m.
did I understand the trace you left, the only sign
of you was a vague memory, becoming clear,
the way we love at first, by vague movements,
floated up like a last bubble
from a leftover tumbler
of champagne. “and not”, I write,
“like a dying ember!”

“I hear you”, you text back,
another joke among the Deaf
and their hearing friends.
“Just say I came to you in a dream” you write.

And you ‘ll be back for another, I chime
to myself
so you can’t hear me.

Effigy

Not to burn, marry,
the ancient advice you buried
at the altar’s heel tricked you out.
He loved you, you dared him
to love you and let another man
love you and worry.

The one-upmanship of equality
has no mercy, and this game
hit its knell. Except each other,
you both had lovers
but still shared the same
old economic bed.

I was new grounds, a woman,
a woman who refused
you, him, both, either.
The night you sought me
with glittered eyes and guilt,
I said, in the morning after

I take you, one thousand
moths will have flailed themselves
dead against the light at the door
forming a carpet we will step over
into the forty days of rain
that ended the drought.

I said, you have crossed
this midnight dance
for my dying creature,
and by my fire,
there is violence
in your horn of hair
which slakes the diagonal
from eye to nape,
and you shall not pass.

Olive Leaf

Genesis 8: 10-11

What tree misses its leaf?
You salty bird, eyes cloudy as grapes,
you mute. What I pull from your beak
is not words but an utterance,
minced and gummy: "Isn't this green
fan dead to the watering breast
of the meek, meek earth?" I read
vein vein vein artery
compressing the stem to bring
the milky droplet. I am grieved.

How did I miss you?

You mate to the other, whose eye turns
like the wet egg on the contour
of shell, who waits for worm
or seed without question. Return
to her who will not know
what breaks beneath until it does.
This leaf reads too simply.

Chic Romance

Downtown has edges, my prospect.

Dwelling most beautifully,

one walks in angles,

cuts through lines, eyes unaverted.

The slashing design of jaw

speaks to you only, my party,

a blade to all others,

eyes bled blind

by the crease and paisley,

by our eminent bones,

my coordinate,

my Cartesian darling.

Control

Bring me the one, I said,
who wants my knowledge.
I was speaking of a body of fact,
as if somehow, it were detached from me.
She was brought
under no similar illusion
And now seeking to know why I know what I do
wants knowledge of me, which I have given
albeit with reticence. Now comes
the issue of power. She shall have no power
of me, I declared, but the struggle
is on; I am reserving places,
even in my heart,
and eating and sleeping
reservations.
I do possess control, a modicum,
my last resort.

Tempted

The laconic wind of the cottonmouth
easing into the water,
the sediment billowing on the aftermath,
the falling cloud of matter,
only now is this Sarina's motion and path
so clarified, so charted.

Sarina, First day, first row, first chair,
in the periphery, stage left,
a motionless head.
Lecture day nine.

“Motif of crossing the water”.
Already we are into the fairy tale.
She uplifts a dazzled head.
First essay, Bishop’s “The Fish”.
Fresh air. Sarina emerges
on the page, matchless,
priceless head.

Thereafter,
my performance is vented,
a sifting through the class
for this Sarina’s response.
I come in vexed, depart heated
at myself, my skill and grace.

The ethics of writing a seductive lecture
are not debatable, I tell myself later,
no matter if so subtle as only to find
the ears of just one hearer.

I set about writing another kind.

Sarina, my conscience is heavy,
weighted in the alarming images
of your awakened love.
Having looked into your face,
its powerful beauty, none like it,
I need to say there is, this is
no day for self-worship. The dawn
articulate with animal utterance
is nothing but the creation groaning,

and the weight of that truth
is heavier than conscience,
bears on me more,
for which I am thankful to God,
The truth of this proverb awakens me this morning:
“As in water face answers to face
so the heart of man to man.”

Resolution of a Fate: After the Party, Sharing the Eye*

I

I know your obedience
was the blind's to a familiar space,
even a rote approach for facing the strange
stranger's face you found buried in your hands.

II

Somewhere in that house,
a guest trickled
one bar on the piano
until the ice fell
in his glass,
and still I listened,
not ready to begin the long escort,
as if
in the veil and guess
of your fingers,
I could rest.

Nodding to the sleepy host,
you trailed your hand after mine
on the banister. Just so

the light traced itself
beneath the change of leaves
on the screen door.
So I was trained and drawn away
to the door's snap and the heels' clatter.
In that recess of gravity and faith
when we either could need
a sudden anchor,
you grabbed at my arm,
I pulled you around,
bringing us again
face to face.

III

I worshipped there.
Not for the light unfolded inside me,
but the path it had taken,
into a forgotten valence.
And, unbalanced, I uttered
what waited there
A dispossessed question,
An alien prayer:

“Whose eye do I hold in my hand?”

* The Phorcides (daughters of Phorcys), or Graeae (“old women had only one eye and one tooth between the three of them, so that Perseus by stealing the eye and tooth was able to render them helpless. Aeschylus, Attributed Fragments LCL 505:260-61.

https://www.loebclassics.com/view/aeschylus-attributed_fragments/2009/pb_LCL505.261.xml

Chapter 3. Elegies

Life Lesson

When the ambulance arrived to pick up the old man Mr. Massey, our neighbor, I was playing blocks with my sister on the shattered wooden floor of the porch at 10th Street, the one my father left us to. This screaming white wagon tore into the fig trees my sister and I danced beneath shirtless in the evenings.

We were two and four.

Each night, the Campho-phenique took away the mosquitos' sting, but no longer would I hear of any sickness or death, which my mother spoke of so easily, without removing myself to another room, or any place but there.

He lived.

When we moved to the Boulevard, Mr. Massey and his wife ran a store a few blocks up. All candy was free for us, though Mother paid anyway. Mrs. Massey's cherry pie, when they lived next door, came free and with a peppermint.

I almost choked on one.

When my brother Arthur came in from the rain on a duck-hunting blustery day, my sister and I were counting the holes in his wingtips, which for a nickel we polished. He told us Fat Chris had bounced out of the back of the flatbed and died.

A best friend.

Seated under the ironing board, I saw John-John salute and Carolyn stand as their father's casket, horse-drawn, went to the place the ambulances led or not. I could not stop watching. The cotton steam filled my nose with my brothers' shirts.

My mother said nothing but sighs.

I shot suction arrows at the neighbor's house and rang her doorbell to purge her out, Old Mrs. Collins, who came with a reprimand, a piano teacher doddering on the sill. I found my hobby horse on the border of her yard and rode him fast in the grass below the tree where I had cut my foot on a broken jar.

They made me sit to sew it.

At school, my teacher said, this is the punctuation you live in. Everything else is grammar and spelling.

Farah, Cutting my Hair

First Cut

Assigned to Farah
at the Supercuts,
I consider the length
of her black hair—
just below the knees.
almost a cape,
furthered by the tunic,
trimmed with a skirt
beneath which peeped
two plain black shoes
on two barely visible
Achilles tendons
arching upward
to the light curve
of her calves.

In the chair,
I checked the mirror
and saw her face,
pocked deeply--
(had it been burned?
maybe just acne),
her black eyes
and thin smile
alleviating the surprise
in my own.
We chatted carefully,
Then easily until
Farah became mine---my newest

short-term hairdresser.

Second Cut

Farah mentioned her husband,
that they came from Turkey.
We left off there
and talked Turkish coffee,
the Phoenician Market on Guessner Road,
tabbouleh and falafel,
our love of hummus, and then she remembered,
after all this time,
the gatherings of her family
on the portico under the moon,
before she was married.
and then when she was, remembered
her mother's hands
offering bowls, water twinkling
in the carafes.
In Iran.

“Iran?” I say.

“Yes, Iran.”

They left that country
just before the Shah was deposed.
Never naming his “successor”
aloud, she explained
how many fled Khomeini,
her generation finding
refuge in Turkey.
She tells me how long
it took for her husband

to let her go out uncovered
once they came to America.
Letting her work
took even longer.
He still speaks Farci
almost exclusively,
she adds. The effort
was long and harmful,
but the marriage was lasting,
though rocky for years.
“Now he packs my lunch,”
she smiles.

Third Cut

I do not explain
how I escaped marriage,
though she may have guessed
what type of woman
so easily dismisses
the expectations of men
around the beauty and
graces of women,
I should have told her
I was gay but didn't,
knowing her culture's
heavy prohibitions;
even she might not,
having had no reason,
accept it easily,
though surely a hairdresser
had some clue.

Each time,
I thank Farah
for my new appearance.
I tip her and I tell her that
“appearances are deceiving.”
We nod and laugh
at our inside joke, one she knows
only part of, but enough of,
and I thank her to myself,
Farah, my bold apparition.

Le Crise

*for Kathryn L. Koob, 42, Fairfax, VA. Embassy cultural officer; one of two
women hostages in the Iranian crisis of 1978; and for all of those left in Afghanistan, Aug
31, 2021.*

Cite' irreelle, L'Ambassade des Etats Unis a Tehran.
Je n'ai pu rien vois derriere les yeux de cet homme,
Except rape. Le cochon wants me on hands and knees, sharp apres midi.
Those prayer calls never go out on time, Khomeini ass-kisser, je dis.
Because he never understands. Never will understand.
Then I pray for forgiveness from my Lord.

But he will not touch me else to lose the laid
up virgins after he is killed. Killed probably. Either way,
he will be satisfied. He finds me submissive;
hence, his fantasy, I am not like Liz, the only other woman here,
the only one who curses him aloud, and to whom I am bound
all day in chairs facing away from each other.

Allowed out once in the courtyard,
we are segregated suddenly,
alone together
under Islamic law.

When an Iranian student,
one of the mob, saw us, he began:
*“How dare you do this, how dare you insult
the principles of Islam and show your forearms and your legs?”*
That was none other than Mahmoud Ahmadinejad,
a student organizer, then, later the titular head
of Khomeini’s Iran, *Mon semblable, mon frere!**

* T.S. Eliot, The Wasteland and Charles Baudelaire, Les Fleurs du Mal.

Elegy for Dylan Thomas

In “Refusal to Mourn..”, the great Welshman said
“after the first death, there is no other,”
one of his many sad epitaphs, offering
no hope that a soul or life, is eternal.
holding that by one death, death entered in
to human repudiation and rage.
Yet his singing had such purchase, he performed
solidly on stage, (later vomiting and coughing in fits),
cigarette in lip, furrowed brow, book in hand,
poetry happening all the time and just then.
His sense of the modern materialist man
called him to the pastoral and the grove.
Imagine him now called to perform here.
“An unhealthy, over-sexed, addict (who’s white)”

all the hypocritical individual subjectivists
would cry, forgetting their own moral relativism,
their own fear of death,
their own.

Women: An Elegy for the Women's Liberation Movement

Women, I will follow you sullen providers.
My diversions are twisted.
The places you lead me in terms of statistics
are quite often oven or bed.
I like being led. Sometimes, though,
I catch myself being useless.
One of you getting water from a faucet
surely saw me quite taken with the filling up,
but really I was thinking
how your jaw and cheeks form a little trapezium
or some such.

Women, I invoke you only as a matter of precision;
most often my gaze is trailing you like a fiber
off someone else's clothes which you just picked up
somehow and didn't know it. Like lint.
Something like your dress stuck in the car door
while you fly about town paying bills or buying
food for the dog. You that I follow, women,
are almost always of your gender.

And by the way, women, I too have suffered
the monotony you suffer, distressed victims
of a cliché desire which translates you so often
into the silliest metonymies. You have been in the tower

so long, your screams have become very good.
You are a fine actress, though you look a little tired.
Boredom might salvage you.
You could press yourself to a yawn,
tap your fingers, roll your eyes.
Women, I will bore you sullen providers.

Elegy for the Woke

“This astonishes me...I believed I was something more.”
- *Isidore Lucien Ducasse, Les Chants de Maldoror*

All the discomfort of this uptalk and vocal fry,
this concern for statuses, flags, mottos
culminating in cheap transparency
and a victimization so hollow
it bellies what no one else can swallow,
what of it?

Once everything is purged
and cancelled clean, incommunicado,
and your tabula rasa to expression urged,
what negligibility can be surged?

When you awoke to fear, you were dreaming
that the emergent powers, disrobed of their seeming,
would spare you. But the patient etherized on your table
images the destruction of your fable.

Elegy in a Country's Graveyard*

I The Lament

The engines of Vanity Fair at work now, I speak of Bunyan and Thackeray, ideology has become a fad, and not just any, but radical prescriptions, the Menippean without the joy (or end), and these manipulated by forces far beyond the poor intellects of our era, yet to speak so is heretical and waged on as conspiracy.

The lies from all around, dividing us all into those lied to, make us all an audience. None dare speak as anything other, for fear of offense, arrest, censor, shunning, loss of authority, which to name, anyway, any longer, is to empower a position remaindered from an era not captive of disproved theories, one still according sense to reason and logic, these left now only to intelligences artificial.

Yet I will.

Hardly the Cloud of Unknowing is this suction of our device held contemptuously against us, listening in, edited as needed, without permit. The owners of cell and internet sold us out just before Snowden disclosed the NSA was spying, which made him enemy of the state, the enemy of this enemy.

The lying was heaped. With technical answers, in a staged "hearing", Clapper bought perjury off from a body in Congress who knew what not to ask. When FISA looked away as Comey surveilled, DOJ walked a case to Comey's discretion. And when Comey said no reasonable prosecutor would bring it, he knew no prosecutor with reason.

Unable to attain to the most basic of premises, that grievance must follow appeal, and this civil, we seek instead justice from comment and trend, these bathed in false outrage, the cotton trade

of the greedy. And now we are subject to our own victimhood, suing and whining in the market for what we already own, this cowardice exacted through executive action and rogue representative, and those of our last resort, the media, now corporate and enjoined to one party, and if not, the object of hiss and boo. The political has outstripped our service. This latter shrug, tell us it is a question of opinion.

The nation that cuts down its own children from womb to grave cannot live to tell, (for it is nations that tells). The cataclysm that concerns, the burning sun, the waters' swell, a fact that overwhelms all stories, a global fear of human descent is operant, and its truth, denied or not, a finger in our eye. And this fear of death drives the cowardice to depopulate, empower a central state, and, in turn, decriminalize the sordid. The tactic toward striation is not multi-cultural but division, weaving the poor as a warp amid woof. But so many have bought it, chant it in the streets, take pay as beggars for stimulation, moratoria, and having escaped other demise, claim liberty as a right, forgetting liberty is pursued.

In the New Inquisition of cancel and censor, we execute in public, for pet cause, take offense, and call for apology while threatening livelihood, (that is, the confession). Next comes mocking on platform, and then platform's removal (the shunning). We go after adherents (to destroy community). If empirically provable, we deny it. We call science whatever we want; except for one's own, it is just paradigm and custom. Those insisting his/her/their gender has not yet been described, insist on its naming and unplug it. With surgery and device, we recommend this for children, finding parents are not in their best interest, as the APA and CEC assented. We manipulate DNA, freeze embryos, clone, and experiment.

All is now in place to sustain tyranny:

partisan governance, paid protests, false dichotomies and false outrage, open borders, closed trade, election scandals, enlisted tech, lockdowns obeyed, assaulted amendment rights, media state-run, and budget blast, sky-high debt, neighbors become spies, identity captured and robbed, and masked. Think of it! To leave our or any people behind enemy lines, and our martial supply in the Taliban's hands, to target our police and ignore cartels and crimes. This is the government to whom so many are suborned. 'People of color', the code to divide and distract, antique Marxist theory pinning racism on our backs, inflation and shortage, the new tax.

II. The Praise

Let the Civil War Poets hold us to account.

Listen to "America singing", Whitman urging "discorrupt." Hear the "varied carols" again. Each, he says, is "singing what belongs to him or her and to none else." Hear "our fearful trip is done", "come, my tan-faced children...pioneers, O pioneers", "Let go the paeans of tribe" among the "endless trains of the faithless", step up; "that you are here." tromp the grapes of hope and yearning, for wrath is God's alone, and, like Whitman, as "Independent Missionary" on battlefields, embrace the cognitive dissonance. Dickinson said, "Our journey had advanced...to that odd Fork in Being's Road", Eternity-by Term"? "God-at every Gate" she urges, her "Portion.. defeat—A paler luck than Victory" and declared destruction and death an even prouder winner, her virulent voice, her line end-stopped.

Recall Douglass' claim of "Liberty" perched on its "eyrie" braving "the lightning's lurid glare", talking with "thunders in their dwelling", throned in the wise distance from human affairs, and airing with the powers of the Air. Remember Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic", raising Christ as the flag of holiness, and the Union the flag of the free, or Wadsworth Longfellow, on the day his son was shot, singing out "The Christmas Bells". Of Dunbar's praise,

do not forget “their deeds shall find a record/In the registry of Fame;/For their blood has
cleansed completely/Every blot of Slavery’s shame”, “the gallant colored soldiers”, “those noble
sons of Harn...who fought for Uncle Sam.” Cullen Bryant came around to a flag sewn fast on
colonist’s ground: “Few, few were they whose swords of old//Won the fair land in which we
dwell/But we are many, we who hold/The grim resolve to guard it well.” Dead poets. starry-
eyed, I call on your intention
to be free.

III. The Resolution

We all engage in the same language that is stripping us of freedom. It is
the hazard of language, the binary of freedom, what Laura Da calls
the “path that pulls the taste/of mixed blood into [her] mouth”, and ours,
what Harjo sees as “surfacing the edge of our ancestors’ fights” but adds
“ by listening, we will understand who we are in this holy realm of words..”
I say, we are here again, pitted against one another, but the rhythm
of free life, where is it? Who is listening? Listen again, the call
of crow, the fall of water, the blow of wind, the slide of snow, the thump
of deer, the audience of leaves, the round of seasons, the citizenry of
locale, the turning from the urb gone too far on Heidegger’s
standing reserve.

Here is the balk.

The fear of the binary in language, in walk, the absurd notion that we can
deconstruct it has become our New Babel Towe; that we are not able
to score energy solely from water, sun and wind without oil and atoms,
has mounted our self-scorn and turned fanatics into fascists, compelling
all who still must scratch food and drink from coal, oil to let go of means,
the embarrassment of riches, and fear of the climes under which we are all
children. But the cycle of dominion, which always gives way to another,
will not calm the violence and hate, nor will it ever negate the concepts
of origin.

**Trigger warning: This poem, like the conservative poem it derives from (Gray's Elegy in A Country Churchyard) presents a "conservative" viewpoint on contemporary society.*

Americas

after Celan's "La Contrescarpe"

Yards of neighborliness who is
backyard, front. Dreamers
all lying to the tell of
Press. Blocked
border. Swept desert.
Want exceeding value
withered vine ...mouths O'd.
Summit to new law
delicate of natural right,
blatherer usury, upshot uptake,
salvation askance.
Palling one summed,
outbreak fled. Corporate cheer,
shelled. Infiltrate lubed. Merited engine
of industry, crème de la crème,
warranted.
Filial file of dog-eared
news digest criminals
under-estimated covert product,
crossed and hawk-shadowed
midday, scabbed-cactus drunk.

Dark line.

Dark line.

Assumed, forgot, undreaming
Mother Queen, Father-eye in epaulets,
blanching,
someone's passport in hand.
Cree reserved
slipping, slippers across,
quietly. Leather-moist humus of Algonquin,
plains ground zero, blading the
rehearsed, the reversal, the plot
just one slip across, one
undetected skiff, thy setting sun,
story kept told,
who is the *unum*?

An Elegy for My Three Years in the Alaskan Bush

Every star needles this meridian,
North, the name of the High Queen of witches.
Eight shades of white, violet, obsidian
declined in the forbidden, injudicious
Second Plan (after the alpha this rebellion)
train the eye to a rigor impervious
to everything but an emblem, a black leaf
stamped in ice, a red fox in relief.

Out here a wolverine, a wolf

or a bear, a miscalculation
of what to fear
is argument enough
for studious patrol.
Here where space and time
visibly rend the frosted word,
one takes the trusted way
devoutly, or finding the trail
staccato in the snow, chains
the dogs to trees, urged to name them
out loud, one by one.

Out here,
one goes down by fire,
and lifts his eye
to the one cold crack
left in the hide, crying
“Father, my Father”
to the swaying tip
of a fir.

Comber

Of nowhere, the shore is meager map-
the gulls, the piper, the ray, where to run

is to come to a walk, sounds out of shot,
and the places groomed by wind and grit.

Here, we pick up pieces of jaws,
bone, pretty shells, and nothing
we are looking for ends up
in our sack, sliding against
a broken sand dollar.

But, oh that golden girl
who said this sadness
fell from your eye
and handed me a pearl.

Matrimony

What my mother told me
scratching at knots in my hair,
I have set down. From my bound
and illustrated book, I chant
verses with no application,
and nothing is happening.

Mirror on the wall,
leaves, herbs, spices,
What is nice on the eye?
A micaceous compound?
Might she wear it
very well
In clay, brown to red,
might she find

humor, tone, based in white.
In white and by the blacking
ought be sifted in her hair,
will she hear
one laying pipes?
Water will flow warm there.
And through her taps,
may she drink....
She will dab and hear hard trickle
ring and whistle
this to me
this to me
who sees and sees, her adorer,
that may she bed with one elect,
she bellies to glass.

On My Deaf Mother and Lazy Grandmother

By her silence, I am instructed
we shall live, not be forgiven
whom first she knew and now
must love by vague movements.

Your own mother's hero departed.
She watched him go, eyes gaping.
You plopped into her arms
like a dozen roses, gorgeous and useless
while she watched the mosquitos decorate
the screen door like Japanese needlepoint,
two years before the bombing,
she had nothing but Luckies.

Like a response, you were lacking.
How many years looking at tongues
and eyes, blowing feathers, watching
your breath vaporize off of mirrors,
memorizing operas in the roof
of your mouth, while she blew smoke,
foregoing endeavor. Still, you grew,
married, and when your hero left,
you refused to imagine

a story. About the beautiful signer,
linguistic hands, ideograms, flying
faster than words. Not like the cup
that never poured water, not like the
room you were born in, stagnant, dark,
but a story. Of the man with diligent
fingers, rubbing spittle into your ears
and eyes.

Parables of Losing the Audience

I
All numbers add up to one number.
One number divided by itself is one number.
I have the number of whom I wish to divide.

II
In the triangle.
the supplicants totter up the aisle
and stutter to the King.
Such dispensations as carving a baby in half
are offered, and this is assented to as wisdom.

In a far window of the castle, the Queen looks
across the plain to her lover returned at last,
his helmet under arm. All the hushed halls
attend her decision.

III

Beyond the triangle, the madness of the circus split, a cubist story: Look at the master of ceremonies, his long jacket in houndstooth and top hat. The back of the theatre has become the front, with the entrance doors on either side of the stage and dancing girls (in next to nothing) tapping, as patrons walk up the ramps to the back rows. She is the master of ceremonies suddenly awaiting herself, who is in the ticket booth crying because the work is too tedious. Someone wants in without paying. She asks the manager about it. He explains that it is her damned job, and it is ON THE LINE. It is she who comes out of the booth and dressed in satin, feathers, and high, high heels, walks the long ramp of the theatre all the way to the chorus. She turns and nods here and there as the master of ceremonies calls out someone else's name. The spotlight is splaying across the orchestra in the aisles. The man who did not pay winks.

IV

Of course, the flashy dissolving tale, Breton's "soluble fish":
Someone (fill in the details) in a publisher's office is shouting,
"The text of omissions is nearly done! Prior to publication! The efficiency!"
I say this speaker is Golyadkin or Golyadkin II.

V

I recall
my three brothers
courting three girls in the yard
outside my bedroom window.
A babysitter tried to entertain me,
urging my childish hand to make deep cuts
in a pile of papers. When the paper dolls
sprang forth, I cried in displeasure

and ran again toward the window.

VI

The niche: consider the audience marble to be cut. It is involved. A monolith gone to pieces. Intended for small and large purposes: a stall, a table, a floor, much later is the statue. One always cuts down. There are horizons to avoid. The blade must be of diamond, the saw wetted. Someone or something must be able to lift, port, install, (or carve and chisel) if the pieces really are never to fit again, that is, if the pieces are to be “individualized”.

Losing the Audience

Granted it was small, but attentive
and subtle, goaded with the familiar
only insofar as it had led them astray.
True, it relished the unexpected, but
only as a means to end. And never
referential, quite the opposite, studying
ever to see the work from points of view
as distant as could be relevant.

Eventually, it dropped the idolatry,
requiring no relevance at all.

It began to wince at every
instance of self-accord,
choosing instead to laugh
and cry at will. Against its own
class standards, began to
hiss and boo arbitrarily.

And now it has become angry with itself
and angry for being angry
ad infinitum. Finding itself with a
conscience, has delivered it over to
unimaginable torment, looking
desperately to the artist for the
relieving sear.

Chapter 4. The Consolations of Voice

Blind Bartimaeus

Consider yourself blind Bartimaeus.
begging at the Jericho gate,
You can still hear as he could
(though “hearing” seems privileged
here) and though Jesus said
He spoke in parables on purpose
so that those dead spiritually would
not understand, you know:
“let the dead bury their dead’.
Remember Bartimaeus, who cried out
to Christ, Him to be slain, the Paschal lamb,
the following week. And the crowd,
that is, you, shushed him,
the shame of it all.
“Thou, Son of David, have mercy on me”
is the cry that finally ricocheted again
and Jesus called to those betwixt and such
was conveyed, like FB or Instagram,
that he should arise and come over.
He tore off the nasty cloak.
And your saviour and mine asked simply,
What would you have from me?
Bartimaeus replied To have
my sight. Forthwith, y’all,
it was done, and Jesus said it was
faith that made him whole. (Now
this concept of “whole” could really be
infuriating for some, who consider

their blindness an essential part
of their identity). Anyway,
notice: Jesus collected one more
member of His audience, for Bartimaeus
followed Him, we are told “in the way”.
And why not? Bartimaeus did not have
a clear sense of Jerusalem,
only his own small ruts
from one beggar’s mat to the other.
This is you, beggar at some gate.
It really matters, whatever you ask,
that you ask the right one, and
follow up.

The Vocative

Sorores non lacrimate.

The hierarchy of address leftover in what is left
of the vocative, builds around the imperative
almost exclusively, and, as such, denies equality
but not freedom. (Feel free to cry).

Samuel Beckett and Djuna Barnes

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.” –Matthew 23:27

These two depressed late genius Modernists
remain prophets for all the dead.
He, assured of the bones crumbling beneath
the whitewashed tombs, wrote of skulls,

playing out of them the necessary and futile.
She, relentless in revealing the means of scrub
in every syllable, chiseled down each etymology,
finding a rich but unnourishing quash of roots.
These fastidious angels of death, two lions
poised at every gate of entry except
the narrow one, their purgation offered
to all the dead, who barely recognize
them, (maybe Celan, swimmer in the Seine),
braved it out themselves.to the end,
these seers. Go read them,
for unless you repent, as they did not,
you will likewise perish.

A Voice at the Table

The one at the table you want will become
the one you never had or wanted, the trill
of echo as you shine yourself into the silver spoon
others were born with in their mouths.
The waves of sound stutter into an image
reflected in the high gleam of convex, concave.
You are never, never really here or there.

You know voice as a tool for making efforts,
by which others eke you out of the remaindered
silence, and you clamor for one, having found it.
lost again, at the table, go looking into the
butter knife, a slim visage, a styled scalpel,
for the chords sliced from all but your own,
and almost remember the plectrum winds.

The Healing

When I began to hear the voice of the Lord, I kept an ear cocked to you,
your TV, radio, journals, textbooks, and, back when people conversed
and debated, these. too Already you were sure that nothing was inherent
or transcendent, and you had begun to work this out in theories.

You wanted to embrace Marx, but it was too clear he was bogged in
dualism. Bakhtin clarified the self-defining source of language, and Derrida
struck the nails: “Il n’y a pas d’hors texte”. When Foucault locked you in,
all values became powers, and everyone prisoners with plans.

I can speak your language, but when the Lord began talking to me,
I stopped wanting to so much, preferring to hear your hopeless and bitter
heart. I asked the Lord to heal me of my own. I became mute,
listening to you and waiting for Him. He showed finally. Come away,
come aside, He said, and he stuck his fingers in my ears, plugging in Himself
and you out. He spat on his fingers and touched my tongue, redefining
discourse with a finger in my mouth. Then he set me down at the table
with you. and all those clamoring for “voice”, you hungry children.

Robin Hood’s Song

We took bread from our mother
and tore it to bits.
We called these” birds”, our children’s
tongues so misplaced,
with venison gravy,
tasted succulence, called it
good.

In my hand daily, my mother’s journey
strung with her image in the King’s
hot kitchens

swung around my bowl
and raised me.

We knocked down figs
and squirrels beneath the King's
oaks, the balance I learned there,
shaded.

Now you whose form becomes
dimly intelligible beneath
the black cross of your back door,
would have me believe other
than what you will not permit me to say.

You want gifts from foreign lands,
my burden in this bag slumped
upon your step.

But these are the provisions
of a region, and my thick tongue,
my rough hand, and my own voice,
which outlaws me.

Homunculus

'Du gleichst dem Geist, den du begreifst, nicht mir'-

("Thou'rt like the Spirit which thou comprehendest. Not me!")-The Earth Spirit in Faust I

Weaned of your round hardness,
risen in the waxing nights of your concoction
(In your glassware and herbarium,
I see is a new carnage),
I can now descend the black tower,
archive of your nightly compositions,

to find you at the lectern, where I am
relegated to stage left, an exemplar,
held in your awareness
nonetheless by a dark canopy that
distinguishes us from the men and beasts
you are grafting into silence
in the fields. I smile my crooked teeth,
at them, the sunlight giving blue line
to the cowskin that covers me,
your gift, a garment for winter,
a coat. In the distance, I make out
a gypsy camp breaking, the boys
kicking charred rocks into the fire.
Faith in the concentric is the magician's trick.

St. Joseph's Day

for Tracy

Torrid, the face intent, he whips the wind through the silks he wears and spins about himself, red and silver. I appear, formed in these. I see my lashes are soft again, as are my curls. He has buffed out of a west wind my softest profile, looking east. She is there, the one I have always loved. Her one deep bruise is all of mine. Wound in his kited robes, she sees me, too. We are the same age we always are.

He is undeflected in burnishing these zephyrs of ourselves, we who love across a mere space. He is an iron profile, steely in pose; his matador motions seem imperceptible, yet here, yet there, they plume. He knows how gently I love her, and my will to endure his fashioning.

Despite the space I long to cover, I stay still because the harm she endures is the only description I can offer of our relation. This is the gift between us, the knowing. I never ask anything of her, will not, except the witness, and that has already happened, can never be undone, for time has only one direction. We remember that we have bent to other things unlasting; these hang like fruit we can pick, though we never do anymore. We brush our cheeks

against their skin; the sounds become their names. There is no need to touch what touch can name.

He is always young, mature but young, hard-bodied, twisting and throwing his intentions like fields of stars, stroking us out of the aestheometry of framing, his windmill fighting, child's play in his powers, swept in the air of his sensing, she and I, spaced as he will have it.

The night she said *I never realized we would grow old together*, we began to. We loved and lived with others, reintroduced again and again as what we were but not were becoming. Always the look between us, the knowing, for the taking we refuse to take.

At dinner in French bistro, my two oldest friends say, meeting her for the first time, *but you two love each other. Mais oui, we always have*, we say. Her leg touches mine beneath the table. We live apart, *the best way for us*, we say.

The mussels come *flambe'* and bread from the brick oven. We eat these with wine. Look! I direct her with my eyes. There in the corner next to the fern, St. Joseph in still life, hoisting the child. *How French*, my friends say.

We have come down into details, I say to her quietly. She says to comfort me, *but only for a while*.

Control II *for Henry Reed*

Certainly, we are all aware
of the controls, but some of us have
proven we cannot name them, nor
even recognize them in the panel
except by a kind of braille whereby
one button operates four modes
inside the engine, or simpler
braille whereby we normally
achieve sequence. Yet so many
of us are flying, have flown.
And the rest of us are instructing
from the ground. Yes, some of us
are flying by remote, and others

of us have become mechanics.
So many of us have failed
to comprehend the machine
and are stalling. Others diving
for applause, but many of us are flying
in beautiful arcs, near the faces
of mountains, one aliron stirring us
very close to the point of control.

The Difference

Something in the mania guised.
Somebody recognized it.
How when I
sat cloaked in grey
three stories up on the sun deck
in the middle of the night
directing circumstances below,
orchestrating wind through trees
speaking to an invisible beloved
beside me quite candidly.

All ordained, all reasonable.

How when I
someone in the town not
a mile away
right there lived out
his social mobility
sat locked in the asylum.

Seasons/What Bears Repeating

The humming of God in strings of code
coddled remnants of infinite song,
the annual sock hung at the chimney
which wind can still whistle by heart.
Keats' lambs bleating in the distance,
such seasons Platonic.

The "certain slant of light",
the Western wind, numbered stars
and hairs, the sparrow's fall.
all catalogs of feeling.
the infinite splits of atom's equationed
portion of determinate grace.

Grace split of humming strings
of God's bleating.
Infinite annual
hair whistled in remnants.
Atoms singing
catalogs of sparrows coddled
below stars. All feeling
slant of distance, of seasons west,
the hung chimney, the Platonic heart,
determinate light certain.

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VITA

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