

POEMS

2003-2010

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A., E., & L.

“Where do we go when we die? he said.

I don’t know, the man said. Where are we now?”

—Cormac McCarthy, Cities of the Plain

Hermetica

THE GREAT DOME OF HEAVEN

The creation of heaven and earth
is circles.

No one knows
which way the hand points,

or where the fingers are.

Trees

peel,
and bleed.

Nested inside themselves,
pricked by bone

and blur:
saints with sticks, and roads.

Purple hills rise in the background
surmounted by churches

or buildings,
flat and far and flat with paint

laid on with eggs.
Swollen with color, and stunned sky.

Forbidden pigments,
tincture laid bare by bones

rounded with ribs and sudden.
Out of the earth springs round.

He walks on water.
He forgets the world is flat, and laid with air:

This was the first mistake.
We saw our Eden that it was good, but had to know the garden.

How can we know what is good
if faith cannot serve what is evil?

ON THE LONELINESS OF SYMPATHY

We long for things we cannot have much more than those we can, of course,
And longing breeds contempt for that which lies beyond our reach:
Which is why marriage often ends custodian of hard divorce—
A lesson hard to learn indeed, but harder still to teach.

For no one truly knows a thing until they've felt its noisome sting,
And even if you've seen it with your very own two eyes—
Can you be sure your phone will sing until you hear its lonesome ring?
And how can you be certain that you've not been hearing lies?

The eye, you see (a pun—how droll), is nothing but a poet's tool
To make it seem as if the world comes easily to hand;
But worlds are made of nothing more than thoughts belonging to a fool:
(I speak of solipsism and to you alone remand

The custody of faults which, chastened, clutter up cerebral vaults
And leak into the common urn when most uncalled upon
To stain the course of our discourse and make of talk a limping waltz,
Each awkward silence we must cross a verbal Rubicon).

My point is simply made: In short, the last resort is sympathy
For those who live vicariously—in crowds alone they linger.
Those people who would rather see TV instead of poetry,
The sort of people who would sell their hand to save a finger.

UNDERWATER

It's the day after yesterday,

The stars are in their rows.

Icebergs die of cold:

The hand knows. The mouth knows.

DROUGHT

Not a bird,
not a sound.

Beach the horizon
on whales. Breath

unfocused by cold:
not yet. Autumn still

drying, planting tin
seeds, thin metal roots.

Selfseed,
valleys blossom out

rut cardboard
smooth ripples.

—Know water;
know its lack—

keep faith,
will flower.

The destination
on hold—

for next month
Elms begin again.

Exfoliate breath
with rustle,

the eczema
of sleep.

Leaves in her mouth.
shelter air.

Leaves in her mouth.
no aftertaste.

Roots desire;
giants rise

from hillsides
swept by wings

—not a flight—

In the basin,
shades drawn

over hills
devolve the sun,

dissolve the mother.
What once was stone

are not one,
but neither are they other.

Coda: The telescope
knows not of the microscope,

the moon knows
not of the sun—

Not a word,
not a sound begun.

Late respiration
calms the seas

and air
made hard by looking.

Long
the eyesilence of drouth:

the sound is in the mouth.

FINGERTIPS

chase the hand.

In the steppes,
dreaming particles stir,

and the hand
beneath the fluttering face.

She reaches across you
to the sheet-dune.

The belly-weather is creased,
tectonic and rippling,

her eyes gloved by lids
as the trellis is gloved by roses.

Fingertips climb
the trellises of night;

wisteria blossoms on the windowsill
reminding you the stars are close,

and contain the resting, beating heart.

BROOKLYN

for Arlene

Night has made everything more beautiful but you.

The bricks so red they bleed,

the sky so blue it bruises,

the bridge so long it breathes.

Night has made everything more beautiful but you.

AKELEY'S WILDLIFE PRESERVES

Fever-dream of seasons I deny you.

Heat comes off of the trees,

the grass like water.

Still no motion in the sky

where the omnipotent clouds hesitate,

trembling mountaintops

covered in the fever-hair of rainforest

like the explorer's shed body,

abandoned forever to the animals.

Step up, mistress,

I know what you want.

The cloud cover can't arrive soon enough.

JAR

I am elated
by jars,
and edges.

Not what is in them,
but the strength of emptiness;
what is within and what can be seen
and grasped,
untouched.

The whole round world
is glass
and mouth,
eyesized.

What is most unseen
is closest.

I am elated
by jarring images,
that which startles bone
to breath,
speaks of enclosure
in whispers,
imprisoned in the invisible.

Walk, walk with me
through the great round space:

above,
hole stars.

MIDWESTERN IMAGES

1

My life wastes by.
Long trains along rotten tracks
brush grey leaves and speak.

2

Dark voices under a bridge.
Antelope water
leaps beside elongate roots
half in and out of the river.

3

Underneath the porch where the birds go to die.
Wings beat fitfully in the shadowed places.

4

Tilt your face against the sun:
Gravestones have shadows but mirrors have none.

LIVING FOSSILS

Outstretched fingers.

The bones beneath.

Living fossils.

THE COELACANTH

The coelacanth is lonely,
its friends are in their graves.
Perhaps this is the reason
it lives upside-down in caves.

APHORISMS

1

If love is blind, and blindness sight's aversion,
then God is love, and sight God's conversion.

2

Our bodies consist of cells, skin, and bone,
but what we think is a mortgage is really a loan.

3

For the Christians, a lion made you a martyr;
for the lions, a Christian made you steak tartar.

RECLAMATION

I've seen the rusty battlements,
I've seen the rolling graves.
Beneath the grass and sediments
We make of earth our slaves.

Molecules are reimbursed
For service they have spent;
Each Neanderthal was cursed
By this stone's sentiment.

We eat the bones of dinosaurs,
We drink the virgin's blood;
The men that fell in ancient wars
Our veins' deluge and flood.

Each thing we build with our own hands
Bears skeleton ancestral;
Each thing our greedy mouth demands
Was probably once menstrual.

A reminder born not of disgust
But some macabre bent;
Though we shall all end up as dust
And may be heaven-sent,

Evolution's harsh decree
Revives its ladder's rungs:
Some petrified anatomy
Breathes air into your lungs.

PALMS

1

Trees grow from night's ribcage,
unshaping the night.

Grow into shadow:
night's slinking back-
bone.

2

Canyons:
petrified echoes.

3

Palms locus-
t shaped poles
swarm past highways,
strung up blinking.

Electrical skylines
regurgitate the crucified star.

HOUSE AND LAND

1

meadows alight with sparrows—without seeing them—
you know—they are there—

2

night—punctuation—
to the grammar—of days —

3

we die—a thousand deaths—
the flower—barely begins—

4

the moon has risen—the day has gone—
the house has given—sleep its lawn—

5

yawn and turn like breath—sleep is not like death—
build houses but not land—build each day with your own hand—

HORIZON

The world is hard and insincere.

Have no fear:

Clouds gather on the eastern horizon.

Those skies did not exist before the crow

passed by that open window:

The world no longer has my attention.

Virgin's milk flows from the grave.

Christ did not his body save:

And we are weaker than the son.

What we have lost was never ours.

Beware the winter hours:

There is dark before the rising of the sun.

BODIES IN FLIGHT

1

Van Gogh:
the Morse code
of desire

2

My
indecent
mouth

3

Rain
smells
like rains past

4

Caress the sins
of solitude,
the most sincere

BODIES IN FLIGHT

1

Fevers
dream
of summer

2

Winter
dreams
of itself

3

The heart in winter
beats
more slowly

SUN, MOUTHFUL

Sun, Mouthful, burns.

Spit rises like grass

From an ashen field.

Fires speak themselves out.

ODALISQUE

Phantoms so slender they cannot be seen.
She turns and her flat belly swoons me.
Her fingers are small, perfected by nails.
Her nose aquiline, better for having been broken.

Poets would long to kiss them both.
I am no poet.
I long to kiss them both, but not for poetry...

THE ELYSIAN FIELDS

Shred Elysium,
autumn shrivels every leaf, like slugs.

Laid upon the prurient earth,
homesteads of disaster already woven into stone.

The leaf knows desire because it rots.
Alphabets swoon and cover themselves with branches.
The northern wastes stretch the length of an eye.

SECRET CARTOGRAPHIES

Enraptured by the deep
psalms and scree.
Wounds open inside arteries.
Bleed and do not notice.
Sharp spires have enhanced the dawn
where towers rise and fall.
Crenellations disturb the perpendicular.
Automata whirl and disappear.

DESERTONGUE

Coroner of bliss,
alight.

In the psalms,
great pillars
erupt from your face,

the desert.
Palms outstretched
to stroke the sun.

Fuck mouths,
splay.

Kneel.

BUNKER ARCHAEOLOGY

Fortune has bit
the tongue from heaven's mouth.
Ever-blackened roots
swallow,
suck horns embittered by sleep.

Forget faith,
and the razings of sin.
Eyeblessings ablaze,
rimfires
extinguish the afterglow.

Where windowsills ache
with daylight's
cold castles.
We break what comes up
in the fields we have not planted.

No-one yet.
Sharpens the day on me.

HUSH OF NOON

Twin summers stray, buried. Hatchets and spades dull with
earth.

Scars appear on stiff metal. Rolling on and on. Haystacks glow and are overturned,
buried.

Eaves filled with rain. Hush of noon. Curled up into a ball, the boll weevils imagine themselves
enormous.

Bliss is never enough. There must be its description, and sound. Against the barn lean
great mechanical wings.

FIRST CHILL

Cool crescents.

Metal implements in the shade.

Hard-packed earth slumps in rotten bags.

Across the clearing,

leaves are falling.

IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN, BABY

Africa, my eye.

No one has been there.

Giraffes a fiction.

Savannas too.

All safaris are inward:

Serengeti scorches my desire,

Sahara mounds my breath;

Adam and Eve have been there,

and Abel, and Cain, and Seth.

How you took her head in your hands.

How you mounted her in her sleep.

Dead Museums

ASH

1

a small wooden box.

sky reliquary.

the long horizon line. littered with gold.

trackless animals. limp across the arroyo.

2

a clotted moon.

cellophane night. meteor crinkled.

3

broken bottles. empty cans. long lands.

where landscapes. breach the skies. or silos.

roadsides. cleave houses. where the porches are. are sprinklers. and summers.

broken bottles. on their lawns. shatter sunlight.

4

the planetarium's roof. blew off in the war.

now the zoo. cages strewn with stars.

GRAVESTONES

1

In pastures past her earthen grave
some branches lay too burnt to save;
but lest we marble tombs forget
some broken stone sharp fell to whet,
which gathered in her ribcage lay
marked passage long her earthly way.
As if the sea hardened into stone:
rough breakers passing unnamed, and alone.

2

Three evergreens press the skies with greying palms,
dissected by nightfall, they offer these alms:
A tincture of moonlight encrusted with stars,
pine needles aflicker, the chaste and the chars
are illumined by mouthsun, brittle and burst,
nebulas flare over the righteous and cursed;
everything in equal light: spare, bare and bright.
But then when the dawn comes again (as it must)
everything is revealed as it is: just dust.

FIRE

Crumple.

Oranges

seek edges.

OCTOBER

A barbershop
abuts the road.
Buildings low
against the flattened sky.
There is grey
in the shops, and the buildings,
and the concrete.
Cracks have broken the sidewalk,
suckling soft shoots and scree.
Everything crunches.
Bare streets alight with stones.
Pebbles chatter, scatter winds.
Brief breezes, really.
In that slight, rapturous cold,
teeth bite each other,
flee the warmer tongue.
Long fingers leave the earth
where the garden is,
to change the brightening air.
Across the purple evening,
some stars sting the vast round sky,
and hang transfixed.
Then, softer than before,
are replaced as the planisphere revolves.
Autumn nights do not lengthen.
There is no winter, or summer.
I am the fading, always.
I am the wilting bloom,
the last chrysanthemum.

I am the darkness breath,
faint as all the visible.

SATURN

for W.G. Sebald

1

In my jar of autumn leaves
a leaf lay long suppressed,
an herbal couched in crouching smash
and shattered loneliness;
it curled in stride at agon's door
and shivered now in jest,
for though it crept upon a bough
it withered now as waves will crest,
as if to sigh one backwards gleam
and come at last to rest.

2

Who knows the fate of his bones?—I do:
they will be burnt by supernova slew
and deposited in an ashen space:
we go backwards and forwards, and there is no place.

How often shall they be buried?—I know:
what is not crushed or singed will go
into a vault or earthen womb,
to be forgotten where, or whom.

3

I am the cedars crushed to silk,
the drapes that cluster and drool like milk,
the rotting mirrors hung with gauze,
the manor where you briefly pause
to describe the garden huddled there,
a labyrinth of sky its weight to bear.
The pillars streaked with ruin and mist.
The luminous temple's stony fist.

MOTHS

Forgetful moths
burn their tongues
on yesterday's small death

HIEROGLYPHS

1

When I was young
I made the trip
to the corner grocery
with a girl my age.
Her eyes were the color of stone
and as round
and flat.
Like pebbles
on a long empty beach.
I have not forgotten her.
She was my sucking stone
my bezoar
my ballast
my gizzard stones
left in pyramids
for paleontologists.

2

When I was young
I scratched my name in the sand at the beach
with a stick.
Who has not done this?
Even before names
and persons
there were sticks
and sand
and beaches.

URNS

1

edges dissolve the dusk

2

I am the urn. I am the canopic jar. I am the tongue's rough coin.

3

Vessels lie empty in corners, in soil.

The wells of dirt flow unimpeded underground.

DAZE

1

The day

pops.

Hot wicked ripe plums

swollen with rain

empurple the garden,

where the oaks are.

2

Nipplebright cherries

aloft

alight on

her body:

tremulous, dazed.

3

Bright blue days

an electric lightbulb

swollen with naked night.

A june bug.

4

Perforated damp
stamps
on the desk in the study.

Musty cool air
the color of apricots
and a lampshade
swimming in darkness.

FROM THE BOOK OF THE DEAD

I draw her to me, and place a kiss
Between her lips, lick Scylla and Charybdis
Who inhabit her tongue, where the saliva slides in part;
The rest dissolves that lightest feather balancing her heart. . .

Abandoned Songs

SCINTILLANT

In the winter-time
when frost is at its height
mountains bloom
scurry away on the sun.

Satellites
blur the spaces
between stars.

HARRY CROSBY

Parmenides drowning on the obverse of a golden coin. Sucks the tongue's cold coin.

Smothered the sun: it was a round skull inside.

Ashes in a goblet.

The river was his bride.

UPON A GRAVE

1

We speak and do not put the lie
To places in the earth and sky
Which, broken, to the past resume
In memories that quick exhume
What's hidden in the murky peat
All twisted in a graven seat
Where bodies lie and skin portends
The loosing of all earthly ends.

2

Beneath the widow's bark and bower
A lonely and unclóthéd tower
Reaches to her windowsill;
Inside its wooded gnarl and rill
No xylophone of chlorophyll
Stands in wait, just cloven pine
A stripped, denuded palatine
Of lust and fervor lost to sound
By birth into a queen uncrowned.

3

If there were but one minute more
We would not scream and pound the door
But enter of our own decree,
In gentle faith and mimicry
Of what our hands have always sought;
But never knowing when our lot
Shall slit the earthen door a crack,
We turn and fall in on our back.

Captions

HEAVEN

Heaven
inoculates itself

against what
is already

ROADS

Who can blame

lines

for

stuttering

THE DOVE

The
white pigeon

in its palace
of shit

steps over
guano glaciers

into
snow

SCORPION
after Mike Slack

1

There is a stone and the sand around it is red and is not. The stone is red and the stone is not red in shadow. Where something has been are tracks. Inhuman tracks. And steps; and wave-traces. What blue sea there is only extends so far as its spine. The white wave breaks precisely. Running rectangular and the stone is centered there, pyramidal, entirely without language.

2

Nothing.

3

The sky survives but the ship does not. Only in parts; rectangular parts made misty by distance and decay. Sight's decay, sky's desuetude. The sea is blue and the sky is blue only far from it, as if to deny itself what it is larger than. And the ship, stacked with shapes, mediates. The sky obscures it in part and the sea in part and it remains nonetheless, floating, pressed down upon from three directions at once: the sea, the sky, the eye.

4

Nothing.

5

A line pauses. A line takes a walk and stops. Several at once. Gently curved, without converging, lines break and reform. In careful swarms. Where the cars come to rest. That much is clear. At the end of perspective, where everything falls away, like those caravels plunging off the edge of the earth where the waterfalls are in the old paintings, a red parapet emerges, tentatively. It is not a line but a shape. Two shapes creep toward one another. Lines form and reform and soon it will not be enough.

6

It has been eroded into that shape, but I do not believe it. Instead someone has pinched it at the tip and pulled.

7

How delicately they touch one another; how severe their forms. Yet the rectangle is so gently yellow—daffodil, saffron—and only shadows hover nearby, that I cannot think of separating these two. One almost seems to spin. The other almost seems to thrust. It is like sex: motionless, flattened sex, hovering on a beige, almost colorless scrim. There must be something above, and something below: and there is nothing above, and nothing below. There is only this square, hovering, and the remains of motion, what has never moved, and thinks only of motion. Certain shapes irresistibly suggest what is not impossible, yet has never been. Here is a primer of desire. Trembling and sincere and endless.

8

Those rays are the sun. Whose center is nowhere and whose diameter spans circles. Light and water and sun's smear. Brushes have been here. Imagine sticks scraping suns into the sea. Insects paddling holes through a pond. They flee their constraints and disappear.

9

I cannot say what I see. It is real and not real. It is not what it is but is something nevertheless. What it is is small and inclined. Everything leans into motion, except the car. The car has frozen its tracks. Wanting to move, it draws the eye along a corridor raised above crumpled trees, but only the corridor moves. As if traffic stopped and the freeway moved beneath. Buildings and walls conveyer belts; windows like enormous mini-blinds climbing dun-colored escalators into an uncertain above. Beyond, light spills from a glassed-in bridge. No—it doesn't. That's only what can be seen through. Too much credit is given the transparent. It is not light; it is not anything. It is what isn't there. It is what's behind it. Behind this model is the real thing.

10

One, two, three, four. And one, two, three, four. It is hard to count what almost breaks apart, is pulled, separates, and remains.

11

How unreal. They cannot really be what they appear to be. Who builds like that? They aren't buildings. They are the photograph. Built to be photographed. The unmarked grass slopes down to an unremarkable waterway. A canal, really. The brake of trees at its end are at an end. They mock what they frame. Deadened, the sky has been forgotten. It resembles nothing more than paper. You cannot fold a piece of paper more than seven times. Those buildings look folded, creased and ironed. Glass, we're reminded, is liquid too. The same river, twice. Three times. What emerges at either end, concrete facings, almost blend into that featureless sky, mirroring that featureless water. Enormous sheets of paper, folded, pressed into liquid glass. Over and over again. There are only three buildings but there will be more. They are only three among many. A line of part-pyramids will run the length of the canal one day, stuttered by stripped trees, against an internment of farms.

12

It moves. From the heavens above: nothing. No retribution. It pushes against its frame and begins to fall, falling without falling. Feel it strain. Bricks push against edges until they deform. Meanwhile, from within a second square pushes out from inside. Squares thrusting into squares. From within and from without. The eye spins. The wall tilts. Dun rectangles multiply inside a marked-out expanse, bacterial. It lives, this dull coruscation. Each brick shines with dusty effort. Straining to burst its boundaries, the wall leans—or maybe it swells, pressing up from beneath. It breathes. It is brittle and will never collapse.

13

How long must I flee this vegetable rainbow? the turtle wonders. It lifts its head toward the sand and the sand replies in shadow. Where the water washes up a ragged line walks across the plate-flat earth like footprints. The turtle flaps its fin-feet so slowly it hovers in one position, a ballet dancer unable to return to the stage. Behind, everything is growing darker.

14

What washed-out perfection is this? Two roofs elide. This must be divine geometry. Clouds and a blue sky echo, chromatically, making tipped-up rungs to climb a heavenly ladder.

15

At first it must be destruction. What builds out of the desert is desert-colored and sinks into itself. Terrain and topography nestle together, for once. The desert falls away in parallel lines. Cities are a constancy, regular as blood. What flows down these streets is dust.

16

They are not real but shaped into a semblance, thoraxes assembled into stick figures atop a deep-hued bundle of rocks. Blue landscape sinks into nearness. Barely focused, the figures move toward one another and away, crouching and reaching downward. Everything presses downward, from the people—what aren't people but people in the shape of people—to the land, which crouches in the foreground and pulls at one corner, tugging blue into blue. The sky is blue and the land is blue. The people are blue and the land is blue and the sky is blue and separated from one another by blue. Every blue is different, every person is different. Supposedly. All I see are shapes and weights and a growing, encroaching blue blur, like evening.

17

Something was here. It has left its sight. Crackling here and there like insect eyes. The blue sky is tilted toward and away from itself into a thousand uneven shapes. The sky cradles a spreading white mass like suns, like clouds. The sun struck in a spider's web. What climbs up to eat is sight. What stands in for sight is a window where sight has been, and broken through.

18

Cradled in its gentle nest, every wall has come to rest. Wildflower sprays bend toward it in wind. That soft grey is smoothed by the air and sticks. They rustle and speak against its flanks, tickling. You can almost see the low wall inching into the hill. Old grass parts to let it pass, bending away in an immense, settling silence.

19

The crippled symmetry of repeating forms asserts itself against a gunmetal sky. But the sky covers over every constituent shape and this mass takes on its color, grisaille against grisaille. Inside, reflective blocks await their turn. It is impossible to imagine anything inside, any space or emptiness; instead, there must be blocks, what steps from the outside upward into three angles. Perhaps the angles repeat themselves on another, unseen side; or perhaps there is a concavity there, where blocks stumble and fall, tumbling into an asymmetricality below, jumbled but assertive, finally each one and one and one, without a shape to guide them. Repetition is impossible. Everything must be figure and ground.

20

The red lifeguard station has leapt onto his swim shorts. He will not need to be rescued. He will continue down the sand past the recumbent bathers tilted up toward the absent lifeguards and dive into that azure sea or sky. As the hot grey road will continue, so too shall he swim, red hair burning his head alive.

21

The path along the mountains is not as careful as it looks. That ragged ridge, half in shadow, half brilliant white, treacherous. Down one side trees have fallen. Look, they lie in black clusters like ichorous wounds. Where the sun falls someone has smeared rocks. A Bob Ross palette-knife wipe of stones crumbles over the snow where avalanches wait, cunningly hidden in the mountainside, awaiting a misplaced step or shout. Beware: the cool motionlessness of landscape. It once thrust up from beneath, a convergence of unimaginable forces, and moves even now. Nothing is so tranquil as it wants to be.

22

Every pierced stone reminds us of man. Nature is not enough. There must be *shape* and *pattern*.

23

The plumb let loose into a late afternoon. What will hold the walls down? They will climb into the sky and settle there as clouds. No one will know where their warehouses have gone. When weather systems collide, things will rain from the skies, all the things that they've lost, half-complete, and reassemble themselves on the ground into their component parts, like children.

24

It is not a picnic but a painting, not a cluster but a grove. Bright white shirts and clinging jeans face chairs and something in the distance, maybe a concert, and the trees slowly slope down toward the grass. Parks fighting to an impasse. Where feet have been the grass parts. A topography of paths, indistinct, can be read there in the mottled field: all those concertgoers must have hopped.

25

In truth, no door is never locked. It's reaching the door that's the problem.

26

What is he looking at? Is it the truth? If beds are the truth, then yes. How beds cradle sleep. How beds cradle heads. How glasses lie behind him, discarded, scrap metal in the sea of dreams. Sea of dreams, he says. I must be older than I thought.

27

The path up stairs is crooked. The path we take is not. Only our legs move to meet the challenge. How strange it is that the path must be crooked to climb. Those smooth slopes are too easy to tumble down. Shadows are there, and wait to press against your footsteps. They show the way as the crow flies. But the crow, too, must hop. How many birds have you seen on stairs? They always perch there, or on telephone wires. How strange they choose the places they ought never choose, as if they needed to remind themselves of what they are, in order to remind themselves of what they can be, if they would only rise above it.

27

This miniature forest in the middle of the street reminds me of an amputated limb. An amputated limb made of concrete and left in the middle of the street, untreated, to bloom moss and tiny trees. Someone will paint lines around it to keep the cars away. Who lost this thing? Will they ever return to reclaim it? Or will they just continue sitting their on their haunches like the freeway overpasses, bleary with concrete, metal rebar protruding from incomplete shoulders into an indifferent, polluted air?

28

That reflection is reflection itself. There is something symbolic about this act, the shining puddle in the dirt, the reflected shape of collapsed towers upside down in the dirt. What remained were the retaining walls, and the light that shone on them once again the same light that did not.

29

Down this path is a shape. Approach it and everything will converge. The insect-walls, strident with thin metal; the hills beyond, indistinct and washed-out. It must be a jail. It reminds me of a jail. It must be a jail. It is a construction site; it is a motel walkway; it is a condo on the edge of the desert. It repeats and repeats as all things do, there in the sunlight, which will not last.

30

That trash-can is trying to tell me something. White against white, dark letters hard against its dull surface: could it tell me any clearer? It is only the thing I cannot hear. I can hear that I am being told clearly enough, and that just might be enough.

31

Stub-burnt cinders flash: palm trees always remind me of fire
and palms
too.

It is not what surrounds it.

Sometimes fire comes and effaces their shape, blurry background and blurry bark crumbling across the forest and a wall in LA, where everything effaces. All those concrete walls different shades of grey and white, no darker than slate, writing slate. What slurries them over the wall is like fire, fire that opens seeds in the desert that flowers fall out. All those homes on hillsides crumple into ash as the wildfires move forward to consume what was only briefly ours. This painted wall remains, or so I imagine, or at least it reminds me of what remains, the path past a concrete off-ramp pointing arrows toward the painted-over, the fake, and the effaced.

32

Can you hear that building in the blue? Streaked with bricks like record-grooves, the wind plays cloud-songs across its jagged face, and hewn stone dances.

33

Delicate shapes in the rain. A fog has settled onto the picture-plate, a fog of distance. We can hardly see what lies in front of us. We can hardly see what's far away. Such consolations as light provides never falls into focus, but scintillates dark spots in the eyes' corners, round lights bursting red and green like Christmas comes every traffic light away.

34

We cannot always fit into the doors we try and walk through, but at least we slot into something, somewhere. Giant container boxes along the freeway, cream-colored, pierced with dark holes. Inside them something or someone scurries. Inside them such implacable stillness must be met by movement. When we sit inside a building we do not walk, and the building moves itself in anticipation. You can hear it in the slow-blowing ducts and the cackle of the carpet beneath your chair's slow casters. Parking lots freeze buildings, on the other hand. You walk toward them the white blank motion of an unblinking naked walk-sign and they wait for you to enter. Only later will your impression be imprinted into the buildings' exterior as a reminder of what happens when you sleep within or sit, unwaiting, unbidden, in your square orange flame.

35

Tires flicker on roads long after they've past. Charcoal-colored crayon-traces rubbed in by some vehicle's last remark. Sometimes they're symmetrical. They speak of two wheels or five. They must have been very small in the past, some future commentator says, and rode around in five-tired treads. Why did they need such large roads? To remind them of where they've been, he concludes, where they're going. Every flat surface rubbed into, every highway hard paper, the unrolled papyrus sheets of enormous extinct plants, this nation a palimpsest to be read by vehicles in transit, traveling a half-effaced history, tire Braille, rubber fingers trailing along a vast river of polluted words slowly scraped away as it's read.

36

The miniature perfection of hillsides. To stand atop them and the light from the left sickly and white. What shrinks from the eye. This was once a battlefield. All those Civil War cornfields grown with skeletons. Corn husks in the river soldiers' last eyeteeth. An overbright light blurs them away.

37

Every square is crooked. Every line effaced. Every view blocked at least in part. Every hillside conceals an unseen hillside sloping away. Every path ends in another path. Every sky the same color as the land it compresses. Hold trees in your hand. They are nothing but sticks. You can hold them in your eye like you can hold them in your hand. They are nothing but sticks. Every straight line bends. Every smooth trees buckles into bark. Every leaf a needle. Stumble down that path into your eyes' rough inheritance.

38

Step in and away. Step into blood and out of blood. Wear everything on your body, everything inside and everything outside. Prove the door swings inward. Prove the bricks are painted. Prove your pants and the bricks are not the same. Prove your shirt and your blood are not the same. Prove your shirt and your blood are not the place from which you step. Remind one of the other, for the more same they are the more different they must be. What we're reminded of is not the thing that reminds us. What's inside? The window has a board over it. You must go in to be sure. Step into blood and out of blood. Step in and away.

39

Flurry fingers trailing away. Even the clouds regret going. How can we pass so simply out of this endless blue sky?

40

You cannot rest in a photograph. No matter how comfortable. Those green chairs are eye-plants. That grow in sight, filled plump with sight. Sight is flat. You cannot sit there. You cannot rest in a photograph. No matter how inviting. That red wall is slatted. Lean against it and fall in. Even the chairs slope away onto concrete or plastic. White concrete or white plastic or even white wood. Birch trees in a green meadow. You cannot enter. You cannot rest there. They are only captions. And you do not need to explain the light until it's gone.

41

Nothing.

42

The dog looks toward you and away. He is inquisitive but his shadow is not. It is noble, his shadow, and possessed of a great gravity. It sticks to the sand and the rocks stick to the sand and the sand never blows away. Instant taxidermy. This body stuffed with sand and shadow. The dog looks toward you and away and is gone.

A Summoning of Sea Creatures

HEARTHREAD

1

Left dark,
and thrown.

The candle-mouth spreads
metal, tinfoil teeth
retract solace.

You cannot care
for you,
you neither in-
to or from
the between-board space.

2

Places bend to will,
branches stand-cling in furnaces,
digging for ash.

Spend me, she says,
element in shadow
where thrust-up embers strike.

Veins stick the arm.
Walks through the urnfield
arterial, venal.

3

Let me scab the cycle,
bring the up into sea.

Cannot know,
cannot find,
but for
gotten.

4

Empties puncture the hearththread,
burning itself into beats.

Pulsing, fire climbs the flue
into the fevered, viral sinus.

5

Bed encrusted,
the license-flight wearies.
Her whitish face
lips the swimming pool
emptied of time.

Saturn turns unheard.
Cheap telescopes
red the imperiling stars.
The hole heart empties.

6

Blink, bleed,
what's the difference.
A cylindrical aptitude extends
leaf into chatter.

7

Brimming eye.

Elegance, emergent,
strips the pool.
And a thousand things
rise out of oil,
shimmering.

Overflowing glance.

Rips tide: the arm,
the tabulating elbow.

Skies bend, towers bend, sand clenches and strips.

Leap
led
downward.

Hairs part
and echo.

Reaches and fails, shimmering.

As the eyebrow contains
the dampening
upward-clenching
eye-branch.

8

Spent skyward, the wreath encircles thorns.
Can't tell,
can't speak,
neverending birds.

Spent shrieks
cancel each other out.

9

In the valley strung with electrical wires
reddish balloons blare out round
on spindles for airplanes.

Threading breath, turning suns
a-
way.

Flying too low again, the gall.
Blackbirds scatter over empty freeway.

10

Im-
talent thrown north
the shape of moss
on a roundstone.

Twill and acre respond,
blinding the may-
action.

Pressed between glass,
the never-ware.

11

Threadbare, weak,
darning. The needle
speaks and punctures
the almost-wound,
the temporary heart.

12

Sprinklershards spark the asphalt,
layering mica over mica.
Leapt into armlengths, wavelengths.

Walls planted, sprout arms.
Weeds spy on empty lots.

13

Homes,
unopposed.

Heavy air
rolls up summer,
furnaces jet waver.

14

Rotless, beaten, pooling spaces beneath leafire
burn and burn.

Fire, rootless, explains.

The hanging eyeball

translucent, red:

corolla.

15

Emperils, empearls.

Diamonds are made in flesh.

World's oyster snaps shut into sand.

16

Sunset is coming.

You do not need to explain the dark.

STRANGE WASTELANDS

1

Strange wastelands
black with sea creatures
climb out of black ice.

Windmills creep over pack ice,
throttling the falling moon.

An absence claims itself.

2

Justice, in its temerity,
slides down windows
as the glass does.

Thicker at the bottom
like the night.

Stairs climb themselves.

3

Escalators star and draw
nearness out of echo.

A bursting night

Claims fortune is missing.
But fortune is not missing.

She has opened up her hands into him.

4

Emily found fingers in the open palm.

Palm trees burn open.

Alight on a baked desert.

His bald head itches with stubble.

Scraping fingernails bite the face.

Climb up into the ear-horizon.

5

This thumb

blasted and incoherent

presses on a vivid pulse.

Upon the pallid table,

a floral tablecloth.

Ornamental and frayed.

6

Over the rapids

he strings a cobwebbed bridge.

Stuck with black steel thorns.

Incredibly, no one has thought to name
the arch.

Stainless steel swarming the sky.

7

Timid, or forewarned.

Tiny insects flee from rain.

Great puddles destroy homes.

Sliding off hills,

the unconcerned weight of earth.

Unconsoled, cars wait in lightless garages.

8

Giddy, she mounts those fingers.

Insides the color of wine

are not wine.

Slick engines muffled by blankets.

Sea-creatures emerge from dark holes.

You cannot escape.

NORTH DAKOTA

Fills with dark ice.
It is difficult to see
what the eye covers up.

Wait for it.
Giraffe moon
caught on low telephone wires.

Into the shadows
a silo is tiptoeing.
There are gods in the earth.

Waiting for a sign to reappear.
Hay bales roll on and on
in one direction.

Grilles to the wind,
old Cadillacs
shed paint and grow.

Bulbous fins.
An air
sputters, and stops.

You can never really know
what direction
train tracks go.

HANDSEAM

1

Backward-wind draws my path, uncertain.
A turn to what we have become
returns,
hollow.

Emptyer even than the string
drawn out between two parting hands.

2

An inability,
a righteousness—
sea-birds circle over the slow-rolling whale carcass.

Clench tendons:
you will feel them pulled,
as if by inanimate force.

The word of will is not the breath of God,
nor conscience:
only telephone wires,
only electricity.
Who is on the other line?

3

Unlike globes,
reaching their terrible round into the eye-black spaces
ringing with what I have become.

Night cramps with chimneys,
sweeps emerge from soot.

On their tongues
gold coins mark no passage
into anything but down.

Pillows fight the headboard.
Sheets arrange themselves into the emptying body.

Evening brings down the shades
not like eyelids,
not like death.

Moons sing lullabies to loosening planets.

Untitled (Motionless Jungles)

ASYLA

1. Richard Dadd

Lines are swirling swirling swirling from the background to the sky, we can see them flowing by trembling burning up the air which streaks from place to place but has no space in clouds or thought which haunt the spot where little fairies lay. Through the glens and ferns and flood the wingéd stroke and quick crosshatch which flowing back from glass to glass lends comfort to the property. No benches made of incurved root so painted down from top to toe, stroked neatly in the fire-spot where little ashes go. When through with blaming paces for the streaks that crack the bottom half, the painting on display in stairway deep beneath the window stark opens on mahogany wood so deep and dank and dark. Meanwhile, in smallest glen, beneath the bones of tiny trees, enormous boughs, the mouths of fairies drink the sap of stricken, bleeding stones upon which sit Titania and Oberon on rounded jeweléd thrones.

2. *Adolf Wölfli*

Bodiless birds arch Brancusi space and totter in uncertain pace from one long swirl to longer cuts which rut the paper flat with ruts made by errant pen in celestial stroke, the curling numbers of musurgical ark. A pear has seen the witches' lake, and stepped into the bramble-wood where numbers danced through paper megaphones and stolen cash from imaginary homes, calculating space-travel costs with lists made from wooden frosts that were the corners of a door; set deep into the mantled floor some frescoed cabinets upon which stay the splay and spray of yet more wings. Enameled things, absconded things, the houses in the corners from which stretch the eights of infinity lost, and masks' gain. Yet amidst these prayers the solid man, so short and tight in waist-lit trousers bulky wrapped in burlap threads, he glares from walrus face to spread the mischief fragment of salutary years spent reaching for another pencil, another mark, he pushes away the crease and the thought of another time which will pass till his death; unremarked, unslit, the tapers of imaginary dress. In balloons he rides from parliament place, and herds of birds make homage to no trace which survives of carousel-colored pencil-unblurred lines, carried across the garden on tiny, tiny tines. A line becomes a waterfall, a door becomes a tooth, and in the distance painted words are clouds upon their roof.

3. *Dr. William Minor*

Word by word the truncheon spoke, put into the wheeled spoke each repetition of a meaning known but never hence prepared for folk to know. He knew; others too knew but such a small fair that subscribers had to be found to support the rounded paginations now we glare at with a glass, and see diegetic, anodyne, ellipsis espouse. Now, his apartment was rather large, and overlooked no ash tree, but in the meantime he had circled his sickle gaze upon the trunk that grew between his legs. Luckily the surgeon know what would spout, as it has been determined by some that the Loch Ness Monster is no more than a great species of fish, sturgeon swimming up from unusual riparian climes, which would suggest most heartily that he thought his fish a monster to be split, as trunks are severed bit by bit with chainsaws, or lacking that, a knife. Likewise minor scales had called up from unspoken lakes to stream a thought that while we gasp at what we know's not there, while the surgeon saw hoaxes in his lens, we, we saw what we wanted to see: ripples of darker thought, huge frightening anatomy.

HELLE NACHT

Brooklyn bronchial night. Bridge's bride. Brick red through the window, dark blue sky perfectly blue, but dark. A silver '47 coupe, fattened by ancient attentions. The lone guard in his lit kiosk underneath the superstructure, trains blinking in the nightlight rattling the ceiling. Pale colors turn darker during the day. A magical toy, the moon over Williamsburg. It's easy to imagine streetcars through the ruts in the cobblestone roads. It's easy to stuff so many people into a car, blow past stop signs so early, though not yet dawn. Her birthday party breathes, the sting of cigarette smoke swirling away. Whirling. The shapes it makes in the caught light from above. Incurling, organic chemistry. Everybody writhing, jerking, sweating. Inscrutable metal things hang on bare walls. Pretty girls, not so pretty girls. None of them interested in me. But who cares? Look at the night. Such a bright night.

JOURNEY'S END

Stellar by starlight. Belles by barlight. Each ice cube an iceberg shard. Each woman, breasts buoyant in no bras, sea cows for sailors. When he stirs he thinks of the skies when they dug the grave for their captain, and the antler mounds like spoons or spars emerging erumpent from the snow. He thinks of whales beneath the hull when his barstool jostles, of shrieking birds in laughter. At home waits his wife and his notebooks. Already he has begun to forget one, or another.

ON THE NATURAL HISTORY OF LIGHT

1. Prelude

Oddballs. Circle the sun. Brilliant orbs. The sun spits cherries. That golden globe. Slit by oceans. A most viscous humour flowing to balance the melancholy, the saturnine. The vitreous humor. The eye wastes. Long vistas of sea and sand, fog and earth rounded and serene. We anthropomorphize the galaxy, with its arms, its central mouth, like a great slowly spinning cnidarian. Where are its eyes? Nebulas flare and relax. Stones throw from one to the next, astronomical. Whitish phosphorus burning in the far corners. Hesitations in motion. I am looking into the past. I am looking upward. There it is. The scrim of stars like milk. Flashing swath across the vastest blackest bowl. We may measure out the stars with teaspoons, but first we must see them. We travel from one place to another, but they all feel the same, you know? The lamplit diners, the neon signs, the damp illumination. Everything evolves not from brick but the tinge of warm sunlight upon it.

2. *Supernova*

Light splashes space, interstellar spume. Helium froth the whiteness of unmarked batik, but layers will form all bright and blue and red and so on. The earth spins through them to embrace each corner, touring the grandest tour of all. When Piranesi sat in the Coliseum's ruins, he perceived a history spelled in the stones, and began to idly dig and sketch. Beneath archeology lie the stones of an antiquity formed by flesh. Where minerals infect the void between bones, and bacteria eat the heart out of calcium vitrines, and the white cliffs of Dover form from billions of crushed ostracods all spherical in their multitudes, like little unseeing round eyeballs. This is the story of the eye, of how humanity fucked that most moist joint, the ball bearing around which all life spins, of the formation of suns in interstellar clouds, and the light spitting juice which contaminates the Archean eons and fills the rock void with incurling acids that grow and grow and make new little burning acids to wipe the scar clean with persons. We begin with the planets, no, the suns, just one, around which the Earth rotates most fearfully, held in the gentle but firm grasp of gravity. Weather has just begun, the planet has begun to breathe. We wait with baited breath, and life will swarm to eat it up...

3. *Snowball Earth*

Snow was general over the highlands, and the lowlands, and the frozen seas. Snowball Earth, belted by a garter of warmer water, cursed by impurities and the first small stirrings of being. Dirt and mud washed out where volcanos slumbered and perforated rocks let moisture be their guide. In the magma elevators lines were silent, and the crust switching-board operators moved more slowly, sluggish in the cool drafty places, and ropes holding barren crags to the sea cracked with frost like the sound of worlds breaking apart. Which were only icebergs. Which were only worlds. Snow steps on everything, as it will every so often, imprisoning mammoths, binding Neanderthals to caved tombs, snapping underfoot when I walk from my apartment towards yours, cursing the jacket which cuts the wind into ribbons to ice each vein on its own. Soon you will warm me by the fire with your cool hands. Whereas algae had less to look forward to.

4. Light Switch

Neon bleeds. From former light. Across the ledges, where the glass goes, alight. Strokes the cool death of gases. Like universes' end. But bright fallen out. Into the unlit corridor below, formed by molding. Filaments spurt last remarks, electric tongues lolling in iceberg breath: that's the light's sarcophagus. A cooling comes over. Scarred with a sort of frost. Breath on the bulb. Long bulb. Bulbous knobs where the glass will shard, or snap, or break. When tossed to the floor. A smattering of smash. Tinklebell. Cradle the cuts in your worn hand. Made by edges. Blood slips away from your hand: let it. That satin is no longer yours. Beneath the ceilingdark, razed by shadows but white underneath, the end of illumine. Like Undine. Caught beneath the slipshod waves. Light waves goodbye. Part the light with slits, mirror the ones it made in your hand. Palm desert. Fountains. Palm springs. A leak, wrap it in gauze gently going vermilion, like autumn leaves. The sound the new light makes when you slide it into those odd whitish hard depressions on either end is unmistakable, and faint, and hard. A sound like erosion. Flipping the light switch, a buzz like insects: hardened creatures begin to swarm across the deeper places, looking for new food.

5. *The Cambrian Explosion*

And the seas filled with things: antennae, filaments, stalks, tubes, ligations, torsos, mouths, plates, claws, fingers, chitin, exoskeletons, endoskeletons, raised bumps, gills, fins, flaps, flaws, teeth, tongues, rasps,

and eyes. A zophorus of animal parts which resolve into creature at the proper fossil magnification. We coat them with gold and place them under a scanning electron microscope. We make waves and pierce time like clockwork.

6. *Egypt*

Beneath the scalping sun of ancient Egypt, the Pharaohs with their halibut eyes squinted their noses into places from which to squirrel out their brains by means of thin metal rods. Amidst sundry wonders came the smallest legions, the blur of scarab beetles doing the bidding of Khepri: tunneling into the hardening stink and making balls to roll out. They glint opalescent in the superheated sunlight and bask in the stink and sweat of Jew-pounded streets. Joseph's many-colored coat was made from the skeletons of beetles, glowing green and blue and translucent from every direction, the original LCD display. He was the Times Square of his day. The beetles with their glinted snapping mouthpieces spoke for Ra, and made objectifications of his desire. Yea, even as Moses spoke unto Ramses or didn't, the one true God was everywhere in the dirt of the city. Yes: the balls which were the sun. Cats we know were worshipped, but why the scavenging scarab? Because he knew enough to make the sun.

7. *Heliopolis*

Note the angle at which angels play. The bursting of hearts. The placement of shields on the battlefield. All play with sun. Archimedes knew this and set sails afire, not with Greek Fire but natural phosphorus. Fish burst each other's eyeballs with well-placed rays, and turn and flash beneath the Amazon. Soldiers on Hadrian's wall bear polished shields, and present a face far wider than their own. The wind blows past and cobblestones melt in the supernova heat, but we regiment ourselves as the Romans did and force everything into perspective, which is a relatively new invention, don't you know. Converging lines of force, yes: magnetism, but to draw lines from our eyes in flattened space? I burn with envy.

8. *The Scientists*

Kircher made the magic lantern, but also hammered on cats. Leonardo made the camera obscura, but everything was upside down: Mona Lisa wore a frown. Barthes split the world in two with his camera lucida, but even the smartest critics couldn't put it back together again. The problem lay not with Descartes, who saw light originating within the raindrop which split logically into rainbows when twirled against sky, but Newton with his prisms and particle prisons. Young Young polarized the world, and Maxwell made his coffee with an electromagnetic field, but what had they accomplished? Science only describes. They sought the lapis philosophorum, but nothing would change into anything else. Except that it would, given enough time. And what we humans lack is time. The world breathes on its own schedule while we asphyxiate, dispersing as vapor. We seek the key. But we are the key. The stones live within us. The bone will be the stone, as it once was, and will be again. Sir Thomas Browne knew where to look, and how: in the ground.

QUESTION

Where will my bones go when my bones are gone? For they will not live on and on. True, flesh shirks the shape quick, bacteria spilling slick over sickly soul-yearning lawn, and bones be remaindered to the dirtiest lumber room—but these too will be spun on celestial loom until nothing is left but the tomb and space in the room. No, no remnants will be my trace, only my face in the mirror convinces me that once I was and once shall be: and the only true vestige of me, is me. But I cannot reconcile myself to no fate. I cannot relate to that most forlorn state where the nothingness creeps and no shroud is my home; I'd rather be corpsed in a mausoleum stark than my molecules dispersed into space and the dark. Even the energy that sustains all my worldly affairs will leak slowly, irrevocably into entropic airs, and all things shall stop, and earths cease to spin—this the sad essence of man: though he can't win, he cannot give in.

WINTER

The trees are turning white. Not with snow. The birches know
which way the winter goes...

The Compass, The Clock

THE COMPASS, THE CLOCK

Arpeggio

stars in a swimming pool

At The Conference Of The Birds

a murder of crows

At The Regatta

lovely scalene triangles

The Boats' Bright Flags

whispered to colorful shreds

Driving Home

I remember the beautiful wooden table

Emilia's Tongue, Like A Giraffe

delicately touches the tip of her nose

Fingers Raked To The Bone

trestles fall into knuckles' whirlwind

Generations

they could not forgive us what they forgave

The Great Lakes

hung with lampreys

Heavy Rocks

sink into the soil

Veins

sink into my hand

Her Finger On His Lips

slippers the words in a hushed mouth

I Will Give Up This House

I will give up this place

I Will Give Up This Heart

everything will be gone and you

It's The Same Picture Of Some Person Walking Out Of Some Building With A Vase

and you think, my goodness, were there that many vases?

Long Grass

swims wind's tide

Love Song

if I'm an oyster, you're my pearl

Matthea's Long Silver Eyelashes

"like taking a snapshot every time I blink"

Moles

stars underground

My Eyes Want To Close
trapping sleep inside them

Night Sky
desert's brilliant colander

The Radiator Knocks
heat wants to get out

According To Science News
roundworms need protons to poop

The Sea
pierced by islands and tides like needles and thread

The Sea
breaking against islands, imagines itself climbing mountains

The Singer, Sick Again
his throat, afraid of his voice

Summer
the picnic table crosses its legs

A System of Crabs
speaks against the beach

The Table
spreads its legs like a whore

A Teacup

contains the land of the dead

There Is A Certain Madness

in the opening of a window

The Train

lays tracks before it as it travels

IMITATION

after Du Fu

1

Man red in tooth and claw
batters strange customs.

2

Ten years in these
skyscraper gorges

emptied out like
a lamp sucked by moths.

But it was necessary.
What do we do that isn't?

Everything arrives with
equanimity.

3

I live crushed between walls
concrete's etched valleys

wandering sidewalks
picked apart by weeds

scratched at by dogs
laying shit like fruit at their feet.

ELEGY

after Rainer Maria Rilke

In Africa, men are buried in the desert beneath round clay pots;
how cautious Death must be as it steps among them.
There is power in the body, and immensity.
We press ourselves into the ground like old gods,
like words,
seeds broken up for bread.

If only there were some human place we might remain.
But our hearts exceed us, and our crocodile bodies creep up onto the bank,
gazing with furrowed eyes into the land
where, measured more gently,
the work of human hands finds no greater repose.

IN THE IMPERIAL VALLEY

Railroads' dendrites

Creep open.

In the fields,

Shouting. It could be daylight

Or it could be the migrants'

Refrigerator-hum stoop.

Mountain climbing,

Sunspots rage and retire

Amidst trees' telescopes.

Where purple horizons leak lead

And the soaked ground

Chews soil into rocks

Melons emerge like eyes.

Each grasping hand blinks.

Eyes open greenish.

The searing sun

Detonates birds

Into song.

TWO LESBIAN LIMERICKS

for Emilia

1

A girl loved a girl named Meaghan
Who had hips that banged like a raygun.
When she went away
She said "I'm not gay!"
But when she came back they made out again.

2

"Okay, I'm gay" she confessed
When finally pressed.
"You're beautiful!" she would howl
In her thin yellow towel.
Then she got undressed.

THE PASSÉISTES

Canto I

In a garden thick with ribbony smoke
A child walked and then awoke.
He'd planted kaleidoscopes in the ground
And waited a night until he found
A morning bright with thrashing yellow
That was not sun and was not mellow.
"Robert!" his parents shouted from above
And when he looked up toward parental love
They saw his eyes were moving,
Stingers emerging and soothing
His mouth as it opened and closed:
A slowly unfolding, black-striped rose.

Canto II

What flowers there were (they were not flowers)
Rose out of the soil a system of towers
Encrusted with a jittering paste
That flew and entirely went to waste.
No honey was produced that day;
Only parents and children in dismay.
His parents filled the greenhouse with smoke
And pushed through visions until they awoke
To find their son Robert naked and rung
Red like a bell where he'd been stung.
Welts rose from under his skin like bells
And rung each one a thousand funeral knells

As Dad told 911 “He fails! He fails!”
In the end of course there were only some scales;
Churches can hold many bees, but just a few bells.

Canto III

As Robert’s soul ascended into heaven,
His body fell like the untimely leaven
Left by Jews in the desert to collapse;
If his body was the nave, his soul was the apse.
He passed a stable of unruly clouds
That wreathed him wet and sticky shrouds;
He passed through into stars like ticks
To the city of heavenly mathematicks.
Suns swarming around him a hydrogen blur
He counted until the end of number.
Only then did the galaxy open
And a vast blackness envelop him groping.

Canto IV

It was the mighty and lonely Black Hole.
It had no name, for it had no soul.
So it sucked up Robert’s, and spit him out;
He passed the event horizon without a doubt,
Too young to know it was impossible:
It is certain because it is impossible.
That was how he returned to Earth.
He landed somewhere east of Perth
In waters foggy with tired sharks.
And that is how Robert embarks on

Canto V

A wise old shark who'd never slept
Told how he swum in what he'd wept.
He said his name was Clyde and sighs
"I've never even closed my eyes.
My nictitating membrane slides up sometimes
Unto a breath of warmer climes
When I into bliss for a moment come;
But that's only when I'm inhaling chum.
I turn upside and my mouth surfaces:
Am I to blame if I don't see they're surfers?
I cannot even count the times
Some meaty morsel has occluded lines,
And I've been dragged behind a chartered boat
Like knights pulled by dragons from a moat
Then carried to a faraway cave
Where some princess awaits a save
As if I were her closing pitcher.
I wait until it's dark, then ditch her."

Canto VI

Robert listened to this story,
Even the bits that were overly gory
And the parts that didn't make sense,
Until the tide brought him to a fence.
This fence was erected underwater
And provided plankton with easy fodder.
It surrounded a perfect manmade lagoon
On which any sailor would be pleased to maroon.

There were hotels and motels and Holiday Inns,
And if you hadn't brought one, you could find a friend.
The operation was simply called "Paradise",
And rented by bankers at a heaven-high price.

Canto VII

Robert, seeing this pricey abortion,
Decided to throw the sharks a portion:
After all, they hadn't turned him into a bolus
(He thought they'd smelled his soulless
Self and decided against making Robert stew;
Do unto others as they do unto you.)
When the water turned curtains of flowing red
He pulled them about his shoulders and head
Until he'd made a bloody cape.
With this he transformed himself from soulless ape
To Emperor of Earth,
And set about turning plenty into dearth in

Canto VIII

To be Emperor, first he had to rule a world.
So he got a potter's wheel and twirled
It into a sort of rounded shape;
This he populated with bald ape
And skinless grass that grew to the knee.
He called it Earth and Earth it shall be.
Then he baked it in a kiln until it hardened.
After that no one would be pardoned
For hardness of mind or hardness of body:
Really, for a world, it was pretty shoddy.

Canto IX

Cities rose up from flaking clay
Until he smoothed them all away
And only bands of hunters and gatherers beckoned.
A truly primitive place, he reckoned,
Would be impressed by mere technology.
He read them fascist poetry
Until some rebelled.
These he unblinking quickly felled.
All others fell then at his feet.
He quickly engineered a repeat.
When finally all to him unquestioning bowed
He bade them build at last a crowd.
Gathered thus, they elected a leader.
It was his mother, though they didn't need her.
Elevated not out of filial devotion fine
But blackhearted lust for the ultimate crime.
When he crushed her down into the clay
They worshipped him on that kiln-baked day:
For all men who wish to lead
Must annihilate what they succeed.

Canto X

Triumphant, he turned what was his in his hands.
All these scarred, man-smoothed lands
Created by him, yet always there,
Like a bald man who has all of his hair:
A toupee. This earth a toupee,
Rocky quaffs floating on a magma quay.

He turned the continents beneath his grip,
Careful, lest the tectonic plates slip,
To hold what was where it was and ever shall be:
A man, a city, a country, a sea.

Canto XI

It reminded him of sculpture.
The earth an artwork and him a vulture.
All that culture meant no more to him
Than a quick dip or a bracing swim
As he'd seen the stars and he'd seen planets,
He'd seen the universe and all its tenants
In a childhood long gone into eternity:
He held the soil and he held the sea.
Art it was not, yet as perfect as art,
It then pierced his mind like a well-thrown dart—
He'd seen something like this before:
Huge steel sculptures on a flat white floor.
One work was long and high and curved,
Voluptuously falling until it swerved.
An enormous ribbon of eighty-foot steel:
If Giacometti made scraps, this was the meal.
Next to it stood two huge metal surgeons
Wounding massively gaping torqued torus inversions.
The first was called *Sequence*: a motion of hands;
But the toruses were nothing like those incurving bands.
Instead they held the space. A mesmerism
Of hands holding: frozen dynamism.
To hold something is essentially a cubist impulse,
Like the maps of that strange ornithologist Tulse.

To hold is to shape an object with one's hands;
Holding wills an object into substance,
What we think once was but may not have been.
The past is therefore volume. Amen.
If a mass is the shape of a mass, being is shape.
So sayeth Robert, the ontological ape.

Canto XII

But there are indeed things that have no being:
They lurk and they lurk, see without seeing.
For example: Hidden deep in the galaxy's center,
One such thing picks up a star and then dents her.
It is the Black Hole
That stole Robert's soul.
Since what has no shape cannot easily manage fucking
It could not *be*. Thus: the soul-sucking.
But once it had his soul,
It still could not register for the heavenly dole
Because what you hold is not necessarily yours:
If you don't have a key, what use are doors?
Frustrated, the Black Hole decided
To return what was Robert's and elided
Galaxies until Earth was reached.
Then, of course, all reality breached
And was gobbled up.
The sound it made was a sort of blup
That echoed across space and aeons
And reduced all existence to one long seance.

Canto XIII

All could now communicate with all,
The Apocalypse concurrent with the Fall,
Every war fought under the same sun,
Every charge led by Napoleon.
Every politician gave every speech,
Every one sucking every leech;
Every painter sought Leonardo's opinion,
Every King groveled to by every minion.
Dinosaurs traveled the interstate,
Crushing wills into intestate
As men visited their own graves and visited mistresses,
Who heaped them with flowers and with kisses:
One body another body sensually found;
That same body moldering too underground.
Great-grandfathers gathered huge family trees,
As long-dead bacteria conjured new disease
That fell them again and they watched themselves die.
Lizards took to trees and found they could fly.
Moses spoke to Mani, Jesus with Buddha:
They agreed not to try again, although they should have.
For in a world with Paradise and Hell on the same facing block,
Made out of dust that is also a rock,
There are no consequences, no past and no future,
Time no longer a line, but a suture,
Morality needed now more than ever:
An ethical line Robert determined to sever.

Canto XIV

Alternately joining forces with Lincoln and with Hitler,
Is nothing no decent man could admit, sir,
But he did. Taking council from every great man
He made him a multiform Walsingham.
With stealth he could play Alexander off Darius,
Take council from both Julius Caesar and Marius,
Have Shakespeare speak to Francis Bacon:
Well, he could try to get them to talk, but he couldn't make 'em.
Out came his cunning, and his claws,
He broke all the laws. Truly it was
A grand and terrible human feast:
Every man a *passeiste*.

Canto XV

“There is no crime that is not also an affront;
What we steal is not necessarily what we want.”
So said the Black Hole as he began his meal,
Slurping up first the empty and then the real,
Eating himself into being and what he was not
Filled with stuff and nonsense and utter rot.
“It's not that I want to make a world inside me,”
He continued, “like an army be all I can be,
Nor make of myself a world.
Though that will happen, everything unfurled
Where everything was not and was crushed.
Down the gravid toilet of me all is flushed
And reassembled somehow,
Every man, every woman, every horse, every cow

Restored to its real and proper estate
(Just how I did this I will not relate:
Some things are impossible and should not be revealed;
Though only the possible is ever concealed).”

Canto XVI

“Some may ask, why did I move
From that central place from which I soothe
The galaxy, make solar systems rotate?
I will tell you: It’s Robert I hate.
He showed me what I am not, and fate
Reveals what we can’t be, we hate.
An awful state of affairs indeed,
And well-nigh impossible to concede.
Therefore I set about making right
What I was wrong to take a bite
Out of; in short, I propose
That what I did to Robert was something bad, I suppose,
And so it falls to me to untilt the windmill,
To plug up the dam once the land’s drunk its fill.
Undoing what’s done is never half the fun
Of doing it, which is why the Sun
Leaves night in its wake;
Darkness may be called the Sun’s mistake
And sticks be thrown at the sky when it falls
To burst those glowing pimples that litter its walls,
And starlight fall from its place in the skies
Like meteors whose streak enlivens what dies:
Wishes, and stone.
I have always been alone.”

Canto XVII

“I wish to take a bride,” concluded the Black Hole,
Who, though he must return his ill-gotten soul
Figured he might milk it a little
So long as he made neither jot nor tittle
Of immoral behavior be his wanton way:
He chose the Sun as his bride and Einstein gave her away.
As her general father, they were in a way related,
It was his special theory that they were fated
To dance together all night rolling round in furrows
Made in space by gravity like naked mole-rats in burrows
Till he stops them thence with his gravity-defying hair.
“You’re traveling at light-speed, so you’ve got time to spare:
You’re already there. You never left
This crazy-quilt of space, its warp and weft
Sagging under your conjoined weight:
And what of the terrible spate
Of terrible offspring you might engender?
I gave you away,” Einstein admitted, “on a bender
And did not think through my actions.
There are certain factions
That might not take too kindly to this merger:
The land, for instance, all clothed in verdure
Will be torn asunder
And all living creatures likewise plowed under
As you tear this from that and crush them into a singularity:
If every wedding’s a compromise, where is your parity?”
“You worry too much,” said the Black Hole;
“I’ll reconstitute you both well and whole
Once our combination’s complete.

Now stop your effete
Whining and give me and my wife
Some time alone to make new life.”

Canto XVIII

When the Black Hole and the Sun have sex
It's earth-shaking. Literally. Every ibex
Falls from cliffs to be crushed on the rocks below
Into white stuff that's everywhere and is not snow.
Were there children? Yes, there was one.
He was yellow in part but had no sun.
From his father he was black as sackcloth
And his mother gave him atomic froth
That lit up his back in rings.
She also gave him nuclear-powered stings.
He did not shine, but stung
And pricked the stars' bubbles, one by one
With his celestial stinger.
He'd pop one and then fling her
Into streams of atoms threaded through eternity's sea:
Stars, behold your new pollinator—and *BEE!*

Cinnabar

SWIM

1

Deep sound
of desire.

Think how radiant it is,
the storm drain
after a storm.

2

Soundless
and vibrant
the beach
undresses waves.

The encircled ankle
leaks foam:
porous,
whitewashed,
abandoned.

Sand wrestles a crab out of its tracks.

3

There are no homes here,
at the edge.

Under the palm trees
stripped by that lathe, air,
bodies start and stop.

What are they making,
those turtles dug into the beach,
laying round white eggs
like suns in the sand?

BURN

1

Wanton wasteland of stricken pine
needles, deciduous, undecided.

Sticks, spires, a pointing jumble
toward the vast distance of aeroplanes.
Guidelines sway and respire
in towering wind.

Beneath,
mantle's swimming cradle of flame
sings land's lullaby.

2

Cable cars dangle,
roofs shingle. Everything,
even words,
precipitously.

Especially words,
unbuckling themselves flickering from the tongue
where spit is no longer enough
to put them out.

STEP

Stone builds and unburdens itself,
a great weight lifted from those great shoulders,
dunes.

BURN

Moses in the bushes

couldn't feel himself burning.

All that water, and the vast tongues of hippopotami.

The feverish bush, the sunken rushes, the stone he struck with his own two hands.

A cliff, a sight blows him out.

WALLS

Stand up straight.

Lie down.

Not the wind,

but concrete's compulsion,

the terrible spaces

we walked on air.

H.C.

The chair where she sat
the chair where she sat
beige
blue
and her hair
long
short
in which she fit so perfectly
there was room for no one else

especially me.

UNTITLED

Your tongue
tiny haiku
in my mouth.

BONE

1

Do they rattle around inside,
the dark?

Is the night so vociferous
it shakes the seas
and dark creatures fall out?

They float there, teeth upward
pointed toward what falls.

2

The bones are smooth
and nerves above them like a knife.

One knife crossing one knife.
There is only one knife.

3

She fit into her bones
like a comfortable suit.
Everything inside her skeleton:
her brain, her heart there already, waiting.
She got a job as a fashion model
and still wasn't thin enough
so she broke herself over a train track
and under a train
and rose up at both ends like a penny
into the shape of a manta ray.

SHELTER

1

Streetlights ravel darkness around themselves,
darker than darkness
when they flicker out.

Along the road and the gas stations
trees stand and swoop at cars
when they pass,
fingernails scraping paths across metal,
words on rooftops no one can read anything in;
lines scoured in now deeply,
now shallow, as the river does alongside.

You can barely hear it through the trees and the road and the gas stations
and the streetlights
raveling darkness around themselves
darker than darkness as they flicker out.

2

In attics where old chairs molder,
gently ghost-rocked to sleep
by rain's sombrous lullaby,
her arms, fat as stoves, reach.
Her fingers plump smoke.

SLEEP

Eyelashes flicker
like fire.

The pupil
a stone
dropped into the eye's pool.
Those ripples are your eyelashes.

And the closing eyelid
sleep's mortar and pestle.

SLEEP

The death-word is a thousand syllables
and never ends. The dead speak
but cannot stutter past the first syllable.

Every word is a poem,
and every poem as many poems as contain it.

What translates them is impossible.
What's impossible is all this.