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The unnamng

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The Unnaming

by

Gregg Eugene Hodges

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English

Approved:

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privacy

In Charge of Major Work

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For the Major Department

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PREFACE

I

This is a testimonial, a statement of beliefs, of faiths, which I do not propose as unassailable truth for all time or for all writers of poetry. What follows is a record of my beliefs, and my faiths, such as they are, not an essay; what follows may assert no other truth than that of an accounting for the poetry which follows this preface. Some of what I say may strike the reader as patently, ludicrously false, to be readily vulnerable on rational grounds. I accept this possibility.

I do not intend, nor presume, to make critical statements concerning my poetry, either in terms of form or content. What I do propose to do is to uncover a few stones in the foundation of my work. I can only bring to light a few of these building blocks because I can only discern a few, and these imperfectly. There are many others, I believe, that I cannot now see. Some, perhaps, will remain buried so deeply that I'll never know them.

Such a condition, such an attitude toward self-criticism, is in keeping with my belief that there is a certain magic implied in writing poetry controlled by depths of the mind which are better left unstirred. I write out of a strongly felt need to create, out of an emotional imperative to make something. Poetry happens to be my vehicle for this, perhaps due to certain predispositions. I feel that to plumb too deeply would be to muddy this instinct, and after all, it is poetry that I see as my justification for existence, not critical analysis. More importantly, I believe that poetry is a methodology of knowledge, which is, at the very least, more interesting than criticism; not that I disvalue criticism, in fact I hope to be able to write a certain kind of criticism at some future date. But what I wish to know about self

and world, I wish to know poetically, in a revelatory and combinative manner:

Each of our perceptions is accompanied by the consciousness that human reality is a "revealer," that is, it is through human reality that "there is" being, or, to put it differently, that man is the means by which things are manifested. It is our presence in the world which multiplies relations. It is we who set up a relationship between this tree and that bit of sky.

It pleases me immensely to be able to do this through an act of the imagination; to order the world in even a minimal and personal way is necessary for anyone's continued existence. I manage the task through imagination manifested in words.

I do not write out of calculation, or dialectic, but out of intuition and emotion, coupled to whatever ideas or philosophies might be couched in these states of mind. I hold little in the way of formal theories of line, meter, sound, or image; or I hold them naively, unconsciously; and I prefer that they remain like this, at least for the time being. All I ask is that I, as the initial reader, find the result of the unspoken principles pleasing. If I am pleased then the thing made is justified. I realize I run the risk of coyness, but I hope that in outlining the foundations of my work, as I know them, the particulars will be both implied and apparent.

II

We all have reasons
for moving.
I move
to keep things whole.²

Writing poetry is a dangerous enterprise in a society which esteems comfort to

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, Literature and Existentialism, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1980), p. 38.

² Mark Strand, "Keeping Things Whole," in Selected Poems (New York: Atheneum, 1980), p. 10.

the degree ours does, for to write one is required to shun ease, at least a certain kind of ease, and court change and process rather than stasis and artifact. In this sense the poet must be a sort of traveller-- I have characterized this being as a tourist, the quintessential American traveller. To travel and never arrive, not a new idea by any means, is the nature of the poet's movement, and must be because movement is all we know of staying alive; to cease growing, to abandon the process of living, is to stagnate and cease altogether. This runs counter to the acquisitive nature of much of contemporary American society, where "to have" is much more highly valued than "to be." Wordsworth's "getting and spending" is still very much, too much, with us.

To travel well, one must frequently lighten the load, whether it be material goods or intellectual baggage: these provide comfort and comfort impedes progress along the way. Consequently, the poet must suspect any obsession with possessions and any one system of thought; he should hallow imagination and experience. Possessions are the easiest to identify and avoid; systems of thought are far less easy to slough, particularly those which seem most true. Don't mistake me as anti-intellectual or nihilistic. Systems are efficacious, but not absolute. Travelling is a form of rebellion, a rootlessness. By not staying in one place too long, by passing through a landscape or system of thought, I know I still live, physically and spiritually. So I sample, I taste, and I bring back only what is important to me -- my capitulation to acquisitiveness: a stone, a shell, the point of view of a phenomenologist, of a Buddhist, of a physicist. And then I put them in poems in order to pass them on to others.

I say that poetry is dangerous because it involves discomfort to be always on the move, either physically, emotionally or intellectually, because one is always

entering unknown territory, uncertain that he will find a place to rest, friends and lovers, something to sustain him, however momentarily; such movement is not especially conducive to stability; it does make for much confusion and doubt and an intense examination of self and surroundings. But like athletes obsessed with motion, the poet obsessed with his peculiar movements cannot give them up, cannot return to a sedentary life without running an even greater risk than if he were to continue: we stay healthy, well-toned, and whole only by confronting the empty and unknown. To stop would mean destruction, to plummet like a jet plane whose engines have suddenly failed, or drown like a shark that stops swimming.

III

There is one thing of which I have no doubt: that all human enterprises, whether in thought or deed, are just that, human-- constructions of the human condition. Poets could once claim to hear divine voices. I cannot claim such an outside force compelling me to write. To hear voices would involve the interaction of two entities, one of whose existence I can't with any certainty confirm or deny: that is, the divine. Of the second, I must say that I have only the vaguest of intuitions, or intimations, about it: that is, the soul. I have no direct evidence of the former (has anyone, ever?) and can only think of the latter within a psychological paradigm: "For many years poetry has been becoming more a vehicle of consciousness than of representation," according to Eugenio Montale writing in 1946.³ I speculate that for most poets writing today, to one degree or another, this

³ Eugenio Montale, "Intentions (Imaginary Interview)," trans. Jonathan Galassi, in *The Poet's Work*, ed. Reginald Gibbons (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), p. 67.

has become a truism. I also speculate that at one time poetry was restricted to attempting to describe the ineffable nature of the relationship between the soul and the divine, and while doing so it sought to demonstrate the coexistent, coeternal aspects of these two constructions. The Bible is an example of such poetry. The soul becomes increasingly secular as time passes until it reaches its current, contracted form: it is no longer coexistent with the divine, there being nothing to coexist with, and it is no longer coeternal, or even eternal. It is now a matter of psychology, and as such is subject to the determinants of birth and environment. I doubt, yet I long for some certainty beyond the knowledge that my soul is merely a description of nature, nurture, and their interaction. For the soul and the divine to be understood as they once were, as correlatives, would involve the nature of truth as I understand it. Such a condition would require belief in both soul and divine, and that these be validated by evidence, according to Bertrand Russell.⁴ But only faith enters to back the equation, and in this age faith is not possible for me, since I do not participate fully, without doubt, in the mythos of science. This is the age of doubt, for the poet in me at least, and doubt most thoroughly assails the validity of ultimate truths. One such truth is involved in the ability to perceive and name reality through an act of reason or rational discourse. I desire to know reality, yet I doubt the possibility of obtaining this knowledge:

Thus, the essence of the poetic problem, as I understand it, lies in the conflict between reality and desire, between appearance and truth, which permits us to obtain a glimpse of that complete

⁴ Bertrand Russell, Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1948), p. 148.

world that we know nothing of, the "divine idea of the world that lies at the foot of appearances," according to the phrase of Fichte.⁵

At the basis of such doubt is the awareness that even science (which I greatly admire and respect), the domain of "truth" in our age, is a product of the human mind-- a human construction based on limited knowledge and methods of acquiring knowledge. Science may allow manipulation of the environment to a degree that our ancestors might have found absolute, it may answer questions of how a process, such as photosynthesis works, it may describe which chemicals and how much of them are involved in this process. But science certainly cannot explain why a plant should exist at all. Ironically, what could have once explained this, religion, has been made obsolete by science, since there is no verifiable proof to the assertions of religion. I doubt, yet I am aware of mystery; science and religion can no longer account for my perceptions of this mystery. I am capable of reason, yet I believe it to be limited. Poetry seems to be my only recourse, and I agree with Montale when he says: "The task of the poet is the search for a timely truth, not a general truth. A truth of the poet-subject which doesn't deny that of the empirical man-subject."⁶

⁵ Luis Cernuda, "Words Before a Reading," trans. Reginald Gibbons in The Poet's Work, ed. Reginald Gibbons (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), p. 43.

⁶ Montale, p. 67.

There is a certain prison that no one can escape: death, and yet:

...certainly the poet is almost always a revolutionary... a revolutionary who like other men lacks liberty, but with the difference that he cannot accept his privation, and dashes against the walls of his prison. Today most people produce the impression of being amputated bodies, trunks cruelly pruned back.⁷

Death is what defines life and takes many forms as death-in-life: boredom, depression, insanity, scrambles for power and material wealth, fame. One rebels against, or acquiesces to, death, in one way or another, according to these themes or others. I cannot accept the fact that ultimately whatever I do will come to naught, that, in the words of Odysseus Elytis, "difficult, difficult is the passage on earth/and it doesn't even come to anything."⁸ But I simply cannot give in:

Man can allow himself to denounce the total injustice of the world and then demand a total justice that he alone will create. But he cannot affirm the total hideousness of the world. To create beauty, he must simultaneously reject reality and exalt certain of its aspects. Art disputes reality, but does not hide from it.⁹

The poet, like the scientist, like the believer, is thrown back on his own resources in this world; that is, the resource of his imagination which facilitates, and indeed makes possible, the ordering of a reality. I cannot place my trust in science because it does not go far enough; I cannot place my trust in religion because it

⁷ Cernuda, p. 44.

⁸ Odysseus Elytis, "The Poet's Song," in Maria Nefhele, trans. Athan Anagnostopoulos (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), p. 48.

⁹ Albert Camus, The Rebel, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1956), p. 258.

seems unfounded. I end by trusting the thing which allows these to exist: the human imagination.

v

These days in poetry, at least in the poetry I admire and respect, there seems to be a great distrust of the rational faculties so dear to science. The language of a contemporary movement in poetry reflects this development. One need only look to the proliferation of surrealism, dream logic, the so-called deep (psychological) image, and other similar literary styles and devices to find the manifestations of the distrust of discursive language, of logic. I believe such styles and devices, or perhaps more accurately, such methodologies of thought and perception, constitute a form of rebellion, a metaphysical form of rebellion against the language of a science which has pronounced upon us ultimate death and nothingness. This language seems a child-like jargon designed to baffle those who tell us they know best, but at its root is the loss of faith in our age and the acknowledgement, begrudgingly, of the finality of death. But one cannot rebel without a corresponding affirmation.

Death, by separating us from the world and those we love, serves to illustrate the otherness of our existence: we are ultimately alone, ultimately individuals, each to our own particular degree. Our poetic language reflects this, and finally, since we have scant little else, our poetry celebrates this.

Mark Strand's father says in "Elegy For My Father" that "the truth lies like nothing else and I love the truth."¹⁰ Truth is relative; it is conditional; it is a

¹⁰ Strand, p. 86.

matter of convention. Finally, it becomes personal. Humanity is constantly in a state of somnambulance, perhaps with the exception of a few enlightened individuals, such as the Buddha, for instance. Occasionally one gets a glimpse of the true, waking world, but more frequently one must be content to be a sleeping gypsy, awake yet asleep in his own life, content to describe the degree of wakefulness attained and desired. Poetry acknowledges this by its subjective language, its difficulty and inaccessibility: difficult thoughts require difficult language. Yet I believe this is not an entirely fatalistic viewpoint. I do rebel; I do struggle to lift my head off the pillow occasionally:

In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it, and the construction of a substitute universe.

The result is the construction of a personal universe where the process, the journey, in keeping with the metaphor of travelling, is the goal. To maintain this universe one must enjoy the fray, in spite of impossible odds; one must enjoy the rebellion against the reality of the semi-dream state, and the inevitability of death-- the absolute sleep. Wakefulness is an ideal never achieved; in fact, to arrive, to no longer struggle, to no longer move, is to slip into complacency, quiescence, death. I require this struggle; I require the sense of otherness implicit in existence, the knowledge that "the self in a sense is all we have left."¹² Let me travel and never arrive and I will be happiest.

Through acts of the imagination I hope to create a unity in which is revealed a sort of momentary sense of the eternal. This is the best I can hope for: it is at

¹¹ Camus, p. 255.

¹² Mark Strand cited in Wendell Berry, "The Specialization of Poetry," Standing By Words (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), p. 8.

first glance a manifestation of self, and a promulgation of self; one individual self which I hope, by my participation in the human condition, reflects the human condition. I believe that life is matter's ephemeral triumph over the process of entropy, and that consciousness is life's attempt to know and expand its parameters. This is the supreme movement, and I feel compelled to add my voice to those who might also wish to sing along the way.

These are some of my beliefs, perhaps my solipsisms, now I offer the supporting facts: my poems.

June, 1985

I. THE SLEEPING GYPSY

The Sleeping Gypsy

after Henri Rousseau

I know I sleep. I know I sleep
in a desert. It seems a season
since I walked. I have been sleeping
a season, it seems, in a desert,
under a moon, under a blue sky.
The star snaking through says so.
I walked. I forget from where.
The wind moved away, the map
of stars spun. Where have I come
from, where do I go? The moon
drank the ocean from my body.
I am filling with sand, and my
mandolin strums an arid tune.
I cannot move. I cannot move
in this desert where a lion waits.
I sleep and wait. My footprints
are gone. The lion is here from
a jungle, here a phase, a fortnight,
a thousand craters of the moon ago.
Its tail a comet. Its eye a nova.
Its mane a shower of dust falling.
We cannot move in this desert,
under this moon, beneath that star.

Rendezvous In The Forest

after Henri Rousseau

We hunger in the trees that ripple
hunger, bare ribs pushing through.

You and I do not know how
our bones move, how our breasts
rise or fall.
We know they do.
We know we find our way
in the forest, that it speaks
for us what we cannot bear to speak.

We are still as the one cloud grappled
by the skeletal trees;
the digits of the wind pull
at the elbows of leaves, at us;
tug us deeper.

We are eaten alive in the green shadows,
under the pale sky,
that conspirator--
the spare canopy of our leafy bed.

You in your red cloak,
me in my fool's cap,
both in the cage of our lives
where trees weep
a thin light
and we are soaked through.

The Wave

At an odd moment the sea
shrugs like a friendly man
in a crowd and drowns
fourteen men fishing.
One hundred and thirty-one
years later the village
remembers, and a man walking
on Glasson Rock
rubs vacant shoulders and knows
the island is a misted eye.

Its sadness comes from over the sea,
curves in with the gulls.
In the market a mother
ties her scarf with it.
In the pub it mixes with pipe smoke
and stout, burns in the gray sleeves,
fumes in the speech of the men there.
In the hotel it settles on a desk
and seals a letter.

A man may come to find himself
often near water, near white seawrack
clinging to the edge of rock and wave.
He may think beneath the surface
lies a familiar thing, like a wish
he tossed with a coin.
He may go to water to find

his absence, to know he is no one else,
to fill an empty coat of air
weighed down with surf,
or turn back inland.

The Tooth Dream Cherished During The Day

Last night the ghosts of family dogs
were welping pups of fog in the trees.

Morning came wearing a spider brooch
and a necklace of wings snipped from yellow moths.
The yard light clicked off; dark went away.

Animals are on the move today.
Two possums are really dead by the road.

Behind the barn someone dropped a tooth
and now it hovers on the cusp of wind and soil,
cutting and oracular. The rafters are quiet

where last night the moon slipped through
and moaned with the dust of stillborn calves.

Across the road the wind shuffles the sun
through trees that look like widows in green,
and the graveyard is a splendid suburb of mirrors
stolen from bathrooms the world over.

Discovering I've Been Slipped A Devil's Ivy

Yes, I'm still on good terms with your ivy.
It flourishes; it grows and grows,
but I keep hearing your footsteps outside.

This death-dancing, household Shiva
vines well in your absence;
its green hands shake in the window's draft.

Yet you persist in the stems, their branchings,
the leaves that scoop the shaft of light
plunging from the window to the floor.

With the undersides of things you linger on
like the white spider's spun out webs,
pulling together a network of signs.

And I expect you to come back to claim
what is yours
and make all my lessons obsolete.

There are many movements to this dance,
many heel-and-toes I must learn.
Please, stay away until I'm done.

Fragments On The Road

The driveway dust swelling,
clouds, the sky falling,
a glimpse of the windshield
flashing with traffic,
the highway lines, hay,
the tails of horses,
the small town slowed for,
the bridge, the withering
corn, the graves, radio towers,
the hot wind at sixty,
the dead bugs, the flatness
of the golf green, the absurd
game, the players moving
from hole to hole,
the butterfly tumbled
by the dumptruck,
the brown house back
in sight, the door,
the stairs, the room,
the bed, the sleep,
the waking the rising the eating.

Wild Horses

Men who speak control
and management
on the western ranges
are selling wild
horses again
to keep from killing
them. Buy the child
a foal, they say,
get a mare for fun.

I'll buy a stallion
to fix runners
to its hooves
with glue and screws,
braid red ribbons
in its tail,
brush and curry
its dark coated muscles.
I'll carry a crop.

When the light fails
I'll draw the shades,
lock the door
and ride in place
like hell.
Finally,
a horse of my own.
Such a horse,
galloping, such a man.

We Wonder Where You've Gone, Jimmy Day Boone

When you stop your car, when you
wade past the vacant swings,
the drifted merry-go-round,
it is a night going nowhere
you step into, lie down in,

and when Frosty the Snowman comes to sit
you are caught ready to compromise yourself
with the dark woman with mangoes
in her hands and her breasts loose
in her yellow dress and who speaks
the rum-scented language.

She wears a broad ribbon in her hair
like a strip of moon
hung in the shelterhouse rafter.

While she listens to the snowman's
logic, a tide of snow breaks
on the roof and he leans and chuckles,
winks his hard coal eye
and wiggles his button nose
as he bows and tips his top hat,
offering his winning hand.

And so you dance with your warm
arm in his cold across the baseball diamond,
through the trees and gone,
just when you were making out
that black madonna's slow tongue.

The Sleep Walking Wife

Junebugs cling to the slow
air, now latching and unlatching,
now rowing their red wings

through the drowned light
breaking on our bedroom screen.
The moon slips a white hand

through to her, and she rises
by nearly visible, silver cords
into the room. Marionette

to her own purpose, she slips
on her robe. Each night
it is easier to leave, to find

the door, the smooth bannister,
the trunk reaching down to the roots
of our house. Even I grow

accustomed to my slow terror
in watching her descend and leave.
Just ahead I hear the porch door

open, its spring creak, the slam.
Crickets scrape out a chorus.
Dissolved stars blink in the dew.

She moves toward the stream,
a pale hollow in the black draw
below the house. There she secrets

smooth pebbles in the open pocket
of her robe. Like ancient eggs
they warm in the folds of her body.

Her eyes are open, though she
does not wake when I call. Around
her toes sunk in the black mud

of the stream bed small fish
thread dark bubbles, and the spikes
of rushes brush against her thighs.

Fat Man

No. No, I have no thin man in me
wanting out, no weightless
smile of another, a doppelganger
turning up the corners of my mouth
at any morsel. Anyone can see
I've done nothing to be haunted.
I can't help but fill the slow
balloon that I am. I move with
the ease of emptiness through
doors, over pavement, past windows
and rooms, devouring mote and moon,
views of the smooth earth from space,
arctic blue whales, whole canyons
of desert and sprawling families.
I cannot stop them. They become me.
But at times I hear a reed in
the wind or the moan of a rusting
wire in a fencerow, where neither
can be seen, and I wonder if I don't
overhear a thing I can never get inside.

Glasses Are Useful Even In Dreams

I choose to wear them when the moon
searches in the clear window. Yellow
and lovely when crisp, its light spills
over the barn's weathered planks.
The shingles tremble with love of rain
on a moonlit night. The owl's eyes
and talons and cries are sharper.
I can see the mouse hug the ground beneath
the tree posing a more precise pattern
against the blueblack sky. The wind
is steady on the wire running through
the circus of my room, and my reach
toward certain visible stars stretches.

Odysseus And The Mast

There is some logic in all
this, I know. The wine must turn
the green of the sea if the sea
turns the blood red of wine.
I will check the hold later.
Fish are leaping on the deck:
a lone curlew drops black
feathers in the riggings.
We have come upon a horizon
beyond our wooden rails,
an island of stone,
a voice in the blood. The wind
is ripe with clouds the color
of pomegranate seeds.
My crew sees nothing
in the wind but an empty
body filling the skin of sails.
They are obsessed with the port
behind or the port to come
while tossed in the passage.

I am safe in my boots, dry
and warm in my coat among them
as they measure earfuls
of wax, work their sane arms
at the ropes, their legs
steady on the deck. I
am ready to court madness alone,
from afar, tied to the mast.

My crew, deaf to my shouts,
deaf to themselves and the island,
thinking the voices come
from the rocks, are lost,
steering by stars. Orion
and the Bear are real
to them, while I, become
the organ of another's voice,
wailing, drinking music
with my dry mouth, plead
that they hear the island.

These are not sharp rocks, these
are not cliffs, they are flesh
and mouths. If only my crew
would be seduced on the couch
of ear and tongue, steer to the island,
abandon the wreck of their lives
on wooden ships and swim.
Or trust me with the oars.

II. MANGO REINCARNATION

Small Sacrifices

The proud women are American.
They kick up spray in the surf.
Only shadows cup their breasts
and after rising from the waves,
small Pacifics pool in the tropics
of their breathing, lifting bodies.

Children build them villas in the sand.
Girls preen, toss their heads, bring
the women sea grasses and sand dollars.
Young men offer shells like burning coins
stamped and dropped from the sun.
The wind is for them salt and oranges.

The women extend their hands,
wet, shining like the sea's noon,
accept the fire of men, gifts of girls.
The women are gracious and draped in gold.
The children bow. The women smile.
The waves applaud in low blue lines.

Fit Subjects

The world is rock
and wind.
It is ocean and sun.

And you come streaming
ocean in the hot sun.
The wind will cool you.
And when the sun sets
the heat of the rock will
warm you like a lap.

The sound of the wind
in the waves and the waves
collapsing on the stone
shore will find your ears
when the moon rises
pale as a river pebble.

And you will slide
into the ocean as a stream
does off a mountain.

The ocean fills.
You drift upon it.
The wing of wind
fills your hair
with feathers of foam.

And God or the gods or just
the sky smiles and turns
to look at a vacant place.

Refusing To Translate Lobster

One loud woman across the beach,
at the other cantina,
speaks lobster at the bartender,
while in the bar I'm in,
the Castilian immigrant owner
boxes me with the bill
I'm too drunk to remember
running up. I'm certain
the lousy foreigner cheats me,
and I say so as the woman
speaks lobster again loud enough
that the flap of cardboard,
my bill, hovers over me
in the man's hand like a small doom.

"Lobster. Don't you know?"
She's yelling now. The guy
she speaks at fidgets. Even
the Californian surfers here
to drink the country's best
beer and sun, and sucking down
freshly stolen turtle eggs
(for their manhood), notice
the woman for the first time.
The family from Boston,
staying at the fine resort,
hears and starts toward
the other bar. Surfers,
our Castilian
and I, follow in a single pack.

The woman after lobster
says something about a filthy
mouth, while her victim
suggests iguana or tortuga
or cerveza. We circle around
the woman who sobs her word
again. She founders in her limp
language, and we draw closer
like sharks ready to open
a fountain of blood,
hoping in our frenzied rite
to feel less alien than she.

Guanacaste Landscape, January

A stream laughing with dark boys
loose from the fields at noon.

A path worn by the progress of peasant sandals

feeding the broad reservoir of dust.

An ox cart rumbling on red and yellow wheels.

Green eyed flies preening by the dung.

A sky of pale tissue crackling like a ghost kite
in the limbs of unnamed trees.

The sun rising and setting exactly at six

through the passage of any given year.

Iguanas rattling their fossil tongues and scorpions
waiting to hide in the cool shade of an empty shirt.

The Iguana

Its greenness becomes the eye I must hold.
I'm quiet.
I say nothing of it to you.

The names of places I must go
are dropping from the moist tip of your tongue.
The floor is littered with cities and chalets
and the small glittering shops of Rome.

It must be a painted iguana in the rafter,
not moving either eye.

You drift at the edge of your bed,
out of reach, in a place you speak of.
You are drifting at the edge of your bed
in your nightgown while the dust of the room
slows and stops, then sleeps.

And the iguana will not move.

You are talking.
You are in your favorite lagoon.
The corals fan you.
A devilfish dangles its tentacles.

Outside the night rocks above us as the surface
of the sea rocks above the trenches off the coast.

This drowning is why the iguana will not move,
why you move slowly toward me.
This is why I came here,
a body falling through the ocean to its black bed.

Mango Reincarnation

Most fall,

their stones puckered over with names
of twigs,
white tongues of roots

and the edges of leaves.

But if they have perfected their mangoness
their stones are smooth

and they ascend
like small blank balloons

past the wombs of trees
through the speech of birds

to the place skin can no longer contain flesh.

And they burst

into the purple mouth of the sky
that lives above
airplanes.

So when I see the carnage of a thousand mangoes
at the feet of trees

this is what I watch for.

Pinata

The fiesta by the sea nears its end. Caverns open below us and we, falling from ourselves, find that we pause, stand and move among tables and pinatas, dodge the slap of wood, fill with the joy of children, the thump of the stick on paper, the tear, the scramble after trinkets. It ends and I leave by the road where the new spills out from the cobbles of the old.

And now the moon swings like the censer the boy carries Sundays in the church at the edge of the village. I find myself, awake to myself, tasting each breath drifting down the evening side of the mountain -- awake as from a dream between the rows of pines, their moans blending with the dark incense of the road.

And the moon seems to wait at the end of its arc in the garden of white stones flowering old names, while the earth butts against the sky. And the night opens, spills its stars, the scents of banana and ripe coffee, the piping of a frog in the water-filled crook of a tree.

Calypso

I have known real witches casting spells,
burning herbs beneath the beds of women
abandoned by their husbands when the rains
came and there was work only in the ports.

They guard their sisters and daughters
this way, with the lemon and mint smoke
curling through open windows into dark
hollows of night and orange groves.
It was the start of the rain, and the roosters
scratched beneath my window where the stars
had gathered to wake me before the crowing
woke the old woman like crackling thunder.

And I slipped from the room
where I had brought with my hands small items
to positions of their own, a jar of centavos
on the windowsill, shelves of rough planks
to hold my books, shells and stones I hoped
would save me, so far from home, from fears
as vague and far away as clouds. And I slipped
into the cold and slow night to breathe
the sweet smoke of the very lonely: of you
I went dancing with Sundays, going up the mountain
to Santo Tomas, rising into the clouds of your home.

I drank rum and tried your language
and everywhere I moved you moved to let me pass,
the floor whispering of feet.

Unpossessed and unpossessing, a samba
still curling around my ankles
like smoke made to bring someone back,
you blend with a low window above the walk
and a peeling turquoise wall with ovals
of bare wood for eyes always staring.

The World May In Fact Be Meaningless

The sun falls behind
the crest of a wave.
The flat dark of land
opens down the beach.
The sea is only sound,
sand, a place for it.

My fire reaches out
to where pelicans
dove through air into
water, dove to gulp
barely seen bright fish.

My fire reaches back
to the scrub it came
from and takes long strides
down the beach. And where
it can no longer
walk it sends out arms,
hands, and finally
fingers curl around
the last dark and cool.

I begin to make
my day what it should
have been, altering
my speech, direction
and gait of my walk;
and so these are all

true, I choose to see
ripples and tree limbs,
tidal pools and boats
just as I saw them.

And I spoke perfect
wind; I recited
the poem a parrot
thought. I walked a yard
beneath the sand, a
heaven above waves.
My bones were breezes.
I saw everywhere.

I saw everywhere
dawn flaming open
and crumpling to earth,
body and feathers
spreading as easily
as singing or words.

Working

I practice walking all day,
 my craft, towing myself from
 end to end, tide pool to wave,
 breaker to beach, dune rambles
 to away beyond the rise. Here

I keep record in prints, pour
 myself from my feet through
 my soles. Later, caught snug in
 the cotton web of hammock I
 swing, evening slung between

lemon branches and spinning
 stars: pole star, the seven
 sisters, red Mars, always a
 world turning away, turning
 towards, and the wind wraps

around my work, my hours, me.
 It touches and draws bodily
 into the house, the shell it
 carries to be quiet in. Knowing
 I finish for the day night creeps

out of that same shell, makes
 dark murmur of my progress, reports
 from the falling dawn, suggests
 what to gather to fill the vessel
 I've emptied of myself, says go on.

River Of Clouds

The river blends with the cooler
current of the sea, smooth
into the conflicts of wave.

A walker can feel it in his ankles.
There is a sudden shift
to one clear direction,

and he must stand straight,
to not be carried out,
to stay in the sweet motion

rising to his knees,
curling around his thighs
like a tousled sheet

gone astray at night.
The gulf begins here.
The trenches off the coast

point their longest fingers
and send them through the jungles
into the hills, into the mountains

where golden frogs mate in a square mile
of cloud forest.
And then the fingers curl back to sea.

Here at the edge
it is rank with fertility.
One with a sense of balance

can even stand here at dusk,
count the four breaths it takes
for the sun to hiss and drown,

sink toes into time,
hear clouds in the open cones of limpet,
the smiling mouths of cowrie.

Land Of Fire

All morning I have been walking in the sun.
I have not discarded any of my things:
the knife, the water bottle,
the small tins of tuna nor the stones or shells,
because I never owned them, though they are close
to me still.

I have walked past the tracks of turtles
that beached themselves in the night to lay
the leathery eggs that will become their future eyes,
and snouts, flippers and green shells.
I walked past the thin line of the black man's bicycle.
I watched the tide.
I passed even the black man himself,
his sack full of eggs.

I have been walking to Tierra del Fuego
because it was the last territory to fill out my dream
of the night before this morning,
and I knew, as one does in dreams,
that I would not be consumed there as I am here.

And I walk past the fenced in faces of cows
that stare at the nervous sea with a hint of the memory of wave.
The conches are filling and emptying with the sea.
No where is there anyone.
Even the high bluff I pass is vacant and in its mass
I grow tired and sleep.

I sleep and the wind sleeps in my ears, the sun
in the dark shells of my eyes, the waves in my belly
and my loins fill with the steady trickle of sand.
And then I wake, and then I walk, and then I walk,
always into the sun, looking for the land of fire.
And I find myself here again, at dusk, burning hotter
than the air, where I started,
my hammock and bottle of fresh water,
the tins of tuna,
the stones,
the shells.

Expecting To Leave Soon

The wind breathes me, swings
first in then out. Door to
breath, I can sit forever, sit
a minute, and the sun has little
to do with calendars; suddenly
I have a place not to go, any
place, one step from my left,
a mile in front. Amber light
fixes what stands, what sits,
all the same in this light.

At midnight moon shells
strike sleeping waves, skip
flatly and join numberless
shells on shore. The cove
stretches out, curls around
the shallows, takes no trips,
no pilgrimages, hurried or slow.
This slip of beach, moon, wind,
seaweed, and sand are staying
home; tamarindo trees grow.
Palms fan and pelicans bob.

At dawn I exhale airport lobbies,
glints of steel, old blood,
and bonds of love. They ring me
on the sand like pioneer wagons.
They burn. I wait for the rush

of each shaft of sky, of parrot,
the blue and green whoops of wind.
They wait just out of touch.
Like tomorrow the waves slap.
The sun hangs. A single breath
arrives to fill me up.

III. A FLOWERED PATTERN

A Flowered Pattern

You had to go on each year
covering the old flowers with new.
Never content. Always up at five.
Always in the cold milk mornings
off to the barn. Sweet cream Sundays
at your house, your husband built
home, half vacant and becoming still.

Bones thin, hips full of air,
you had to go on, the treadle
on the Singer flapping like one
black wing. Later, the need to be
generous with time in your old skin.

You washed your feet each night,
water and cloth cold as rain
running off stone. The pale lamp
glowed. It seemed your bed would
always hold the faint curve of your back.
The sun hesitates like a stranger
in your room now. No more fields
of zinnias added, no sunflowers
for the thrushes, only a rustle.

And you wanting to peel that paper
back. Find those first swaggering
flowers. Petals of clear sight,
black hair. Violets my grandfather
gave you. Love-me-nots exchanged.

Baby's breath pasted up when digging
the well. Now tulips and irises
peel back on themselves unassisted
in this room that once expected
a greenhouse season of flowers.

Mandala For A Gift Of Keys

There are things I love simply, that are without want of return or nod
of the head, like the bird in the morning whose call sounds like
Burrito! Burrito! And small mushrooms surrounded by thumbnail toads.

I am in love with the world but don't know how to tell it; for this
I need a new language to give back what it gives me. I know
this is stepping into a dark room hoping the light turns on.

And I don't know who controls the light. And I think no one truly
knows my name, or me, and I fear being always unrecognized.

But you are in your room with your apron and your breasts free
in the afternoon sunlight, sitting at your desk, lying on your
couch, cooking. And you begin to know me, and words for you
are beginning to rise and drift together like the filaments infant
spiders ride to other fields.

The Wind In The Magnolia

The wind, when
it stills
and the branch
springs to its first
place, is like icing
on the petals--
a glaze
we have felt
on the surfaces
of things
when walking hand
in hand,
in summer,
our palms moist.

And when the wind
loves,
plucks and flings
the magnolia,
luminous and purple,
we never dare
ask if we
would have it otherwise,
though the leaves
come on
and the petals
unhook
like hands.

Morning Impression

The knife's edge, the edge of sleep,
the calling into dawn of the wind
unbidden at the frost covered window,
frost spreading like ferns or lily pads
across the surface of morning.

There is a bird I can't quite forget
and goes unnamed, wings small flames
to lift its blue head into the blue sky,
its black eyes, droplets of obsidian,
the crystal of a gypsy, pariah
even among her own, predicting oncoming clouds,
the hangers on of mountains with trees
that from a distance appear smooth as moss.

I grow closer and the trees grow distinguished:
the thin limbs of girls, the thick trunks
of trolls carrying them off, leaves
the fans of dancers enthralled by wind.

I rise into morning, a swell of flesh,
the movement of desire, and press my palm
flat against the bedroom glass and push,
and the view opens in the melting,
the shape of my hand imposed, my five fingers
reaching beyond the white bark of window trees
to their dark counterparts,
the clear streaming of my heat
freezing over into smooth unveined ice.

The Candlelight Dinner

White linen hovers like a phantom in a low room.
On this our table, our time together is set.

I've laid aside the best of years for this occasion.
The light glistens like dew on the glass.
Your fingers curl around the stem
as you lift the fruit to your mouth.

The smooth flame of the wine trickles
down your throat,
rises and ignites something behind your eyes.

The candles flicker in the knives.
The bread is sliced with borrowed light,
the butter spread with illumination.
We feast against the coming of dark years,
spooning away our soup.

The centerpiece drops shadows of flowers.
Its bouquet, stirred with candlelight,
holds back the walls.
The night is long
and we expect this meal to wrap our bodies
as tight as fire clings to dry wood.

Fire Escape

One girl will not open
books

there will never be a chance
to close.

Another child
is afraid

to lift his feet
from the smooth

floorboards
the building is so high.

And another still
in terror

pulls his own
hair

for the change.
They have learned

the route
children flee down

is just as fearful
as what

is fled.

Down

the cage of air.

Down

the baffle of wind.

Out

clinging

like soft white monkeys.

365 Days Running In A Little Known Theater

Penultimate scene where we
act out all the leftover parts
of this odd play:

Bedroom sets are skidding
across the boards reluctant
to join samovars
or log chains in any sort
of meaningful configuration.
Some masters of a world
we've turned out to be,
though I'm a terrific person
in your repair manual
of dreams.

Anyhow, the tolerances
of the deus ex machina
in our company exceed
acceptable limits.
The thing rattles
like a Rambler backstage
and we hope
the wind comes soon
offering some conclusion
to this house.

Sidetracked

It makes sense, finally.
He knows he belongs
with the oily ties
of the trestle,
the red steel
of the long
unused rails
that leave razor
stropped welts of rust
across his seat.

Lessons below, too.
Darkness crumbles
and reforms
on the water.
The moon would like
to flee downstream,
but its constant
double
in the sky
pins it in place.

It winks
in the flow,
a friendly eye
in a flood,
as though in a crowd
of strangers

there was a woman,
leading, lingering
for him, perhaps
to drown in.

There is nothing,
despite
the folding
and unfolding
of the water and moon,
going on here
except enough silence
for a distant,
oncoming train
to pierce through to him.

Grace

Two blue jays have flaked away from the sky
and are now anxious in the oak tree.

A cardinal adjusts her feathers of rust
in the corner of my eye. Fine cracks
spread through the clouds as when
turtle shells are fired.

Today I caught dry winter berries in my hand
as though they had been flung to me.

The crooked bush looked all fingers,
and the berries, globes of purple light,
augured other, unseen fingers, nearby.

But who can believe such things?

The sun sends down roots of light.

Birds are not nesting in dead trees;
knotted oaks gather the songs and squawks
of birds and pump this warm liquid
through twigs and branches, through trunks
to roots to soil.

And the stream is melting from its middle.

Arriving

There is no better time than this
to leave. I am always leaving
and I wonder if I ever arrive.
The books, the canisters of film
not yet developed, the aquarium
with its fish that will never
grow larger than the clear walls
will allow, the boxes left unpacked
from the last move -- they will
all be thrown together in that timely
disorder known as relocation, again.

And then I will arrive to leave
at some other almost memorable
group of rooms. Eventually, most things
will find their way to some place
where they will become to belong.

The film might be developed to show
what the mind often refuses to remember
or hasn't the time to include:
details of picnic tables
with friends who will never write,
the texture of bark, the unusual
shade of orange in a sunrise
on the face of a woman I had hoped
to love, the bend in the back of an old man.

But certainly the books will be dusted
and shelves found. The glass cell will
be filled with clean water and the fish
poured back in. And again, at night,
swimming in confusion, when the movement
it has seen as the drift of a broad leaf
was really only me, and thinking it thrashes
again in some brackish pool, the largest
of them will crash against the clear top,
believing it has leaped at the Amazonian moon
when it has only seen the glow of a cigarette
in the new and larger room.

Lost Words

We know the old neighborhood grows
new children, that pet dogs probably
remain buried in the shrubs. We are
certain the carpets have grown thin
in that house by now, and strangers
sleep through our nights in our rooms.
Someone else is a child across the hall,
and unfamiliar meals are served at night
on a table that is neither wood nor round.

Back then we found we could talk,
borrowing whole phrases from here
or there and just as easily giving
them up again, exchanging them
for others or waiting until an eager
word would show at the door.

I can see the both of you, and me behind,
sitting on the small cement stoop.
There was greater strength in your arms.
And you -- the lines you call the cracks
of smiles were not so deep. We must
have said something as the first dark
of the junipers stained the air beyond green.

IV. OUTSIDE YOU

Outside You

From outside looking in
at the initial of your
first name, dark and back

turned to the street, the
letter in the glass warm,
glowing in the frost that

fans like prehistoric flora,
of voluminous ferns caught in
the clear strata of evening

sifting to the street like
the buzz of a streetlamp,
like chirping night birds,

the shakings of iced trees,
cold, I give to you the
night, the still cold night,

your continental creeping,
the frigid drift of glass,
interiors, frames moaning

in low registers, the boxy
songs of one night motels,
the anxious reproach of

your home: I give you
one moment once what it
must look like looking in.

The Tourist's Meal In Galway

A pitcher of water light as the mist on the moors,
on the bogs in the long twilight of the north,
settles at table center as the waitress moves
away in a drift of green and the evening gathers
in drooping eyes of dew on the pitcher's cool surface.

A long slant of sun falls from the blank windows
of the building across the street and spills
over the table to where the waitress
bends to adjust the silver in this restaurant
of haste and union and escorting and procuring.
Here above the street that leads to the park where
Kennedy's speech echoes weaker with each surge of pleated
cloth and brown hair moving in swells like the sea.

This is Galway where the dust of cathedrals season
meals or gather about the eyes of youth. Here where
there is much love of church and many churches
hugging coasts that thrust stone shoulders
to the green hunger of the Atlantic. This sea mingles
with all the waters of the world, lapping at cliffs
and undermining islands where to survive men make soil
from kelp and the bones of their grandsires.
And the wind and waves blow these mist-cloaked people
to this port and to this place above the street.

And I am here at the window table hoping the pert
girl is more than the appearance of virginal,
as she smiles and explains the menu beyond its worth

as food into the realm of need and want of her ruddy
skin and dark hair. I drift in her ebb like seaweed
in the tide, while liquid Gaelic vowels peer
through her English like the mischievous children
of a pagan race alive long before the age of trains
and ships and easy passage from place to place.

Bridal Shop Sealed By A Rainy Night

In the union of manikins
she would accept the ring,
manage a wooden home,
give birth to perfect children.

She is the bride of possibility,
oblivious in her showcase
of streetlights or red wagons.

She is the model of engagements,
pattern of brides to be,
ideal.
Anyone's father would be sad
to give her away.

Her smile is fixed perfectly,
her waist bound in white lace,
and her desires remain her own
as she always waits for
the breathless hold of her groom.

She offers her soulless hand,
her knee bent toward the window's
sheet of rain water,
as though she could wake
from her sleep and step
from her display
and walk with me
beneath green awnings.

The Drill

Father, when it slipped,
almost on its own, and dug
into your wrist like a lance,
you grinned in pain,
loving me all the same.

I prayed I could bring
clues of how this happened,
how I turned the chuck
too far in the ignorance
of strength children have.

For you to unlock steel
from steel, for the white
ciphers of your eyes
to open and be answered,
is all I hoped for.

Again and again you spun
the bit's spiral of blades
until like tendrils spinning
they drilled the air.
You showed me the cutting eye.

It was the chill bud-end.
Again I prayed you could unfold
blooms of steam from your hands
and melt what stabbed,
what grew between us.

Stories You Never Told Me

When you speak of childhood
your words stand apart
from you and themselves

like the feathers of small birds
trying to keep warm.
Crows, you say,

chant the same word
again and again
in different voices

as they gather in high branches
like refugees
safe from unstable countries.

You say, trees suffer
the whims of wind,
wind the lacerations of trees.

Cars are drawn by headlamps
into the dark each dusk
because absence loves more,

and we are what remains
of each other
when we say goodbye.

When you say these things
I know your love is a blindness
added to your other sights,

that your speech
is an empty shell I must examine
for hints of your life.

Your Poem

I woke up today without the poem
I promised you, did have Raisin Bran
with white sugar and fat milk,
but still no poem.

So, outside I poked in woodpiles
thinking I might have stashed one
there, but found only the straw
of a nest and a bright object or two.

I turned up rocks, found pillbugs
and centipedes, and the track of a worm.
I waved around in the air
and came upon the wind I had forgotten,
but still no poem.

I went into town --
couldn't even buy a poem.

So I shopped windows for faces I knew
and saw one, a fossil
everyone thought dead -- a coelacanth
with stiff fins like legs
and a worried look like he knew
the sea would never be back
and he was going to drown
in a crosswalk if he didn't
find a poem soon.

An Immolation

Early on you started to travel for your living
I know why you left often
Much undone
It was shadows speaking
A rusting can we left there
Even a minnow
Swallowed by the mud and turning blue
It was a game you left behind

I'm in the room you left like a task
I can find anything here
Even when it's dark
And the light from gray candles steps back
From heavy drapes
The doorbell not quite loud
When you come to visit
Your point of view given often to be mine

At the bookshelf I draw a large print volume
Leaves pressed
Between pages
Old hard to read road maps
To a place
We pass every day
Where water flows under ice
A sad milkiness of sunlight goes some feet below

There was a canopy of black birds cracking up and down
Their cries
Gave the trees teeth
Your hands drifted snow cold to the back
Of my neck
I rose in your arms
You tossed me again and again into the air
Hoping one time I would not fall

The Mute Angel

You have fallen and need purpose.
You might buy an earthly city
and motion all its citizens to leave.
You could make your paradise and live
in your anguish like wheat in the sun.

Many years might pass and cars would rust
in the air and rain; lawns would grow luxuriant.
Weeds would grow in the gutters
of the finest houses and you might smile.
The wind would be free to step through any window.

Yours will be the heaven of decay.
You will walk with all the fallen spirits.
You will measure fields of clouds.
You will tend the garden that always leaves.

And its rows will creep order into your soul.
Its vegetables will overtake your heart.
Its vines will twist through your veins
and push out the black blood.

And the people might come back.
And children might smile.
And the sky might come to live with you again.
And your voice might return from a far away place.

Closing In

In you is the brass
precision of a fine
dead-bolt thrown against
the scraping at your door.
You practice the muscled

closure of the south sea
oyster that covets the grain
the blue-black luster
of its prize grows around.
Even when you swing closed

the green door of your car
it is as a boulder
before a cave where the scree
of your history drives safely
on through a night winding

of highways and thieves.
You lock in or you lock out,
following the rich
their fear of a secret poverty.
But when you forget, as in talk

moving as the flanks
of a lion in its brief burst
after the gazelle of woman,
you are the animal of openings,
the devouring mouth, again.

V. CORNUCOPIA PILLOW

Cornucopia Pillow

Sleep has your face nervous,
responsive as a weather vane
turning its iron cheek

with the smallest nocturnal
breeze. You come around
in the flat cotton cloud

of our bed, now with daylight,
the prophetess, in your wild, driven
hair, of a column of local sun

wrapped in a local wind.
We who live in these squalls,
these flurries of leaves in bright

light, are often mute about it.
What need have we of highs
and lows, of rising and falling

pressures or systems
against which there is no earthly
defense, when in our end

all seem as inevitable weathers?
Fahrenheits or Centigrades
measure little in our private

climates of glacial or tropical
ages which play their ices
and leafing seasons beneath

our planet's surface, beyond
the gauges of our knowing.
Our heads are cradled in sleep

on air or pillows, almost thoughtless,
while rains percolate and snowflakes
bloom on our faces, and we bear

ripe fruits laden with moons
of dew that orbit on this, our
difficult, inaccessible harvest.

The Dog Dreams Prophetically In Late Afternoon.

They hear she runs alone,
without them, after a small
thing. The family curves
down to her black coat,

like gravity, unseen funnel.
She hunts through a blank field
filling with snow. A hill
and a tree fill with snow.

The hill envies the sky
its freedom like the family
the dog at their feet.
They lock their gray

cracked hands in a slow ring
around her dream. For a moment
longer her hind legs churn.
Her nose finds the black

future of a thing about to die.
They want the future
left alone. They want it
to happen, but not to them.

They chant the soft croon
babies know; the tones fall bread
on water. She lifts her head, turns.
The tongue that licks the hand

still loves the tooth.
Her nose flares in the dark
forgone scent beneath the tree.
She dreams spreading red vines

on the hill. She dreams
the family. And in their fear
they look towards each other
for the weakness that would doom

one or all,
each snuffling in the snow,
their teeth small
immaculate tombstones.

The Day Of The Insects

Eyes of splintered green glass and mouths
sucking like soda straws had the day.
Drained and left to collapse in a husk
by the slough, the mulberry scrub,
the day began to die weeks ago.

Evening is the only time we're left
alone, when the road cools,
and the crunch of boots down the gravel
sends up bone-colored puffs of lime.

But given sunset,
the orange light thin with dust,
the gravel road to walk to the river,
the buzz of a billion wings stilled,--
given the sunset itself,
the rest seems not so bloodless now:

the noon and its large carp
floating like leaves in the stunned water,
the blackbirds dancing like paper kites,
the crayfish holes
in the blue clay of the ditch--
even the carcass of a deer by the bridge,
its hooves, tail and hair steadily
unraveling from the belly--

all seem as though they were sleeping dogs
hidden beneath the swing
on the porch
and just now beginning to tremble in a squall,
each hair on their necks standing apart from the others,
with heat lightning spreading across the sky.

Agnostic Crickets

These are the chirping
chirping the blue burp
of a live drunk who's
found matins in his best
catholic moment his one
best only final fleeting
moment paused between
gulps tasting of lingering
smoke dusk fulminates in
the slanted shadows only
small cities cast before
they explode in blackness.

The last of the summer's
lilacs spill their discounted
scents at night like children
milk at their first fifteen
cent gymnasium lunch when
so afraid pee runs down their
legs across the floor iced
smooth with wax through doors
swinging into dawns of simple
simon and O so red rover lives.

The crickets will not
cease their bleating
their rubbing legs like
fire sticks against night
one moment since clouds

came in crowds like galleries
to view dark pallettes
of ash and lovers they
fiddle to the ten
thousandth going out
of light to the tucking
in of the pouting moon.

Turtle World

Dilation of water, sinker
sinks, bobber bobs; trees
laugh their leafy notes.

Green brook whistles of
thin flutes for our lust
after turtle, his strange

bones like no others, his
life in a hat. You, father,
cut bait. Line and water

are gametes meeting, each
melding with the other to
breed turtle from ripple

into our world of gravy
boat and meat. We'll pull
him from the live water

if we get him past snag
and leaf, but if he drops
again under sight he'll

go locked in his faceted
egg, womb of pool. We won't
bear him and all live too.

After The Image Is Over

You left.

I said: watermelon bones and hermit crabs
on an apricot stone beach.

You returned.

I was fool enough to say:
parrots flown from the sun mating like green spoons
at the synapses of mango trees.

You uttered some neutral sentiment:
orphaned whiskey bottles used to snare fresh water.

That's not what I said, you said.
I don't understand you any more, you said.

I just came for my things, you said,
you said, you said:
eyeliner, milkcrate, jadeplant, tablelamp,
tree of hats, pillow of tears, comb of sorrow.

Listening To The Silence

I try to prod words from trees.
Even when wind furrows
through the limbs and leaves

they respond in whispers
not their own.
They remain green and rapacious

and seem on edge,
their small hands waving,
set to clap,

to clap a thunder through me.
They are quiet
as mice at the foot of the bed

ready to gnaw a sleep ridden leg.
Quiet as ice in a river itching to crack.
As a slap before it slaps,

as the curl of a finger
leading into a strange room,
as dawn's first light-drenched bullet.

The Unnaming

Names fall away. Stones
through space, always, not
moving, so far they wait black.
No stone to see, novas to look.

Sand, lime, the fixed motion
of cups, are not until in
your hand, electrical, the copper
wire bare, the icebox biting.

Kisses willows papayas
mica comets blue trembling
The eye opens and these collect.
Tooth marble paperclip wan

The unspeakable name wind
pours in your ear; the shell
held in sun; its empty
spiral twisting into yours.

The names slip away, though
you hold to them, keeper
of names, the blank
sounds that wake to ice, red.

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