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These poems often aim toward resonance rather than reference – issuing not necessarily from the representation of any event, but the event that an (often) rhetorical voice must create for itself in order for the poem to "happen," and which must somehow become anthemic to a number of selves. The voices of these poems confront the possibility of meaninglessness, and do so in various stages of commitment, embodiment, and potency – measured, too, by laws, geographical boundaries, and other demarcations external to them.

STRANGE MUNICIPAL

by

Michael C. Peterson

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Approved by

Committee Chair

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[for my mother]

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at the university of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance By Committee

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Constant, you're hourly in inconstancy.

• *John Donne*

LOCAL ANTHEM

Winter rising from the orange tree
Juking thought now leaves this:

what a man accustomed to the thought
of leaving yet does

nothing, gripped by the complete
spin of citrus to

his nose. (As a boy he ate and
flat as his hands were

to the table, set back and up his eyes
led him up and out

alight beside them all beside them
like light beside them:

the family disappeared, faint and
his body lifting off like death

palms in ballast below his belt
consistent, rising

for some hours now.) This earlier story
modulated, though

by forementioned tree, fruitless now,
amending that consistency.

FOR MY SARCOPHAGUS

The forthcoming spring you must
remember not these pains to sing

or each eye upon step the field
from home displaced its shallow

ringing weeds replaced (your own
false breathing) So many

holes to give one's feet to
among the spare single prayers.

ERRAND

When you fail to make contact I will leave
to take artistic photographs of a city I may hate.

The flour mill, the security building pinholed
into what must be the imprecision of

day gone south so late. Dilation, saturation
of opaque, bogus tones, the task a needed feint

anneals itself. The new subject rendered in
the exact state of these disregarded shapes—

shop scrap after shop ruined, foundries foundered,
shipping docks, rotted, receiving nothing but flowers

blown up against them. The tracks imply
our fever and its lapse, the near history

of their work, and this is where
I hear response— low and barely humming

bed of sepia, freight of gamma.
A wealth of lines, should they ever function.

THE AUDIT

Fall comes excising old thinking
not even of this year, but others, elders,

the mind's dead union, particulars
announcing a hard and novel grief –

a leg under a sheet, a pelvis lifting
and no response. Tell me again

about work. There are unfamiliar trees
moving outside of me. Watch them move.

FOR MY SARCOPHAGUS

Eight days after Christmas Otis Redding gone missing in drawers,
our pale tablecloth weeping for these arms these arms of mine.

Impatiens in the mouth then nettle.

O my words, given me
by my mother do not let my heart stand out of me or bear witness
to a second wreath I torched and doused, the bonehouse of a slow field.

THE OUTAGE OF FEBRUARY 25TH, 2007

In a dark room, my chest pulled through its own resistance.
I could not tell if it was moving but saw instead my consonant self, repeated.

I was a father carrying a boy. On my shoulders, inexpertly.
Shoes so small they fit into the pockets of my mouth,
a bag of almonds, unsteady coffee.
The street on which I walked
all I'd ever done.

Then rain. Or season. The message that resolution came.

A circuit closed into itself, uncertain and unreasoned, stormed,
left leaves like barges into barges, me
and the city, for both occasions,
assuming a larger wave.

Insatiable breaker –
The room already without light, without peace –
when some slight movement cut the field:

I was rushing and tripped.
I cried for restoration but did nothing for the child.
I only watched it fall.

PETRARCH 266

(A variation)

All this thought pulls at me to see you,
though I see you often enough.

My bad luck is the thing that stops me, pauses
everything, turns me senseless like a wheel

turning toward a death I never recognize or see.
Days and nights without exception,

broken up by broken breathing. No calls
are made, these beacons out of range.

My master.

My dear.

This is the labor and these are the restraints.
I made them myself, if you can imagine:

laurel grown into a house, competing like years
against the heart – *years* I say.

SYMPOSIAC: PHAEDRUS

And as such could be
considered automatic but

with some recognition
of fault: forget: young

men forget: a pleasure
to meet you, discourse

uneasy (unlearned)
dear eromenos, a

revision, to see men put
wings on them, a hearing

rehearsed nude, new
god, ask who is who is

Silenus. The best is
to never have been done

second best, to fly as
capable as permits to

hear your counterpart.

SYMPOSIAC: SOCRATES

And your war? You must
ask is it someone

or is it no one? What law
laws it to go outside yourself

before *this* war, aside from
who javelins in your name.

What you like is time
semblance, beside you

known as you as you
go forward over distance,

over gossip and rivers: free
carved into relief, unfrozen

turning your foot back over
the stones. Is that mock

return, *that* revision, your heel
healing mid-air, is that really

the best of what you do?

IN VIRGINIA, TO MY FATHER

On my nautical map, continents are buckeyes peeling off from watery bodies,
stiffened cardinal knuckles hung hard from a page's center. Jerusalem at a center.

But here there is no harder water my father
than the once fishable Rivanna softened down to weed-gallows.

The sister wrote once *Egypt* and then again minutes later *Egypt* again.
An arid house, a tune we recognize, the sphinx's best kept question.

Perhaps nothing more than a familiar tree droning loose in new silt, but
here I am: chest opened up like fire, centered between the San Joaquin and Nile.

AT THE MUSEUM OF THE CIVIL WAR SOLDIER

Now closed.

The eye become a globe.

The lid becomes the splinter by its flight and all the head rehearsing our last summer,
ringing.

Now closed, locked down earthworks shake by my direction.

I mould and prime

I right myself toward abatis, I fidget in my uniform and justify the time of travel,
wind and send and arc and interstate to you,
unraveling housebound by a river.

•

The last evergreens shiver as if to mean the last momentary bareness of a moment
meaning –

a tourist en route, on selfless course outside the bounds and kept year by year from union,
I must believe

a copse will be cleaned from canopy to ground,
all things will clear by register of round
of my eye, bore through muzzle.

FOR MY SARCOPHAGUS

In a row, or rather, back and forth for months, the skin beneath
one eye reddened until, in summer, it traded to the other side and into fall.
Those around me spoke of it, but it resisted them. I slept with a stomach
pushing through to box-spring, I built a hive of all my death-thoughts.
Summer went into fall like gods, back and forth, a rash of talking.

ON SEEING ROBERT CREELEY THREE NIGHTS AGO

You an ordinary man you go under ordinary trees again.
It's what to make of it. It's what I saw that saw me

or you in the parking lot tonight, you made
it feel like that you felt it in that way. It was nothing

special made for anyone. It was rust. I was grinding toward
a younger answer which is what, of course. Similar.

OF COURSE I WENT LOOKING FOR YOU IN THOSE ROOMS

where you've been known to go and where
indelicately, I've slept before. There isn't a task
which can improve us. See yourself in my position –
I have been awake for hours.
The antique shops have closed and
every consigned apple crate bought up
or up in flames by reservation.
What the barista said was true.
They'll give you what they have if they've got it,
Though decision is only what makes
a bride against a university gazebo
answer to the dreck of that photographer's idea.
Outcomes are subject to the structure of a figment
like a cistern gone dark inside your mind.

PETRARCH 189

(A variation)

Your cargo was an oblivion on bitter liquid
at midnight, midwinter.

Direction ruled by some master
toward pointless hazard,

and at every oar the same mind,
ugly and attentive to its quiet.

Complaint began instead as a wet sail failing,
then wishing its load again

into the sudden mistake of itself. Fog
like thought, thought like tired lines

between two stars which
having seemed usually aligned went back

under waves, beneath thought. You knock
to wake, taut against the post.

FOR MY SARCOPHAGUS

Despite a last bright month my feet went whiter than before.

The throat narrowed to a channel empty of all but arrows.

The teeth honed themselves to awls.

That night my head tried to shut summer down. It wouldn't happen.

This is what the bed's other body could perform:

a folio sheet halved and folded

a sluice knocked over, solutions pouring out

a lathe next to me, turning over.

But I kept the world up with my raggedness.

Fleas in the mind or the painting with several equal parts,

all red and blazing up but one white acre closing down into itself.

TO MY HANDKERCHIEF, LOST AFTER THE DOCUMENTARY

Equivocal wing, that parted and flew from me, startled and drowned,
what casement blew out, what hinge allowed the film of a film we just saw –
the Danube long into summer, silting its way through my town known
for nothing, aching for tourism, reactor shut down. Tea and mosquitoes
as Toblor the Classic, our last hope for grace, composes deep water
on a crippled Hristova, hammering in shit. Mutable thing, taken from me
how did you go, o blessed necessity, to a town beneath water,
lifting to the jaegers poling above me, pilgrims to boar-grounds,
engineers gone, ambitions subsided. The ministry nodded
and Kozludney was crowned the *Pearl of the Dunav* to our consternation.
Preservation began. The Cuban ex-patriot played his guitar.
The sentry remembered her checkpoint by photo, and those she had beaten –
grudgingly, light – not in the manner of party superiors. Restless young men
washed dishes while singing, plates with a fading nuclear logo.
The prison, the island, the shape of a wishbone, work camp and tavern –
revocable things, thing most deserving, where did we go, how did I happen?

TO PHAROAHS

death was fair and simple.

There was both a soul and a self's duplicate,
a leaner thing that wanted staying
and that which, blackish, loved its going:
a soul now sleeping and on foot by morning,
rest its fortune—
and doubling back and forth,
its nervous clerkish diplomat, the nightly half,
that quivered every holy bolt it found.
Eternity meant each knowing the same body
and returning.

Just as either of us go halves
into a place for either's owning,
be it for coming or for going.

TO PAUL BLACKBURN, GONE ABROAD

But Paul, you lose your luck too quickly and the trees harden into casks.
Young men in your apartment, flies on your ears,
you should brush them out to sea.
The madeira's gone bad in any case.
Whoever made those red tiles knows nothing of an exile from alpine things,
a life inside a cursive wave
of hills made from sea and shade and heart.
Spanish trains will run all night. This is all you ever want.

Okay.

Jacked and splayed, the bridge widens its mouth to have you,
the corona corona, others say, the doubled dream shuttling
through a railtown faster than it used to be.
Doubled at the window, I now cross, I jump my line to tell you,
there are things that use me better than I use myself.

FOR MY SARCOPHAGUS

Bottle after bottle I woke in a field gone face down into a seed
of your face coming up at me

my funny valentine played.

It was all in an ampitheater we were trying to leave.

Lights.

Lights.

Imagine what they'd think to find you your voice said.

I'll have something to do with my own sounds I tried to say –

wet blades pushing the lip inward to its hot cave, lit up

old first thoughts best thought first thought best.

ON BEING IN OUR FIELDS

A field composed by rain now sings not of new matter
but something measured, thrown out, released.

In this city the leaves are lit and if not, branches
like junk, turned out by storm through scuppers to the street.

A county law ensures what proverb also wants to prove—
those objects burned, are objects rarely missed.

The weirdness of the fields is their plantation history:
the sense of seasonal clearing, that wreck and wrack

of parts of parts gone missing. Each kept thing achieves
position. But a highway pasture, transposed by smoke,

is not its past and is not plainly speaking. Its great heaps
are going up like cherry-fisted children misbehaving.

In the act, either under hand — or by no hand (seems
by now I've seen and other drivers surely seen it too) this

woman now rampant through high grasses wants
control, brings water, secondly, to what she started

minutes ago, almost as if the choice had changed so:
what is the ritual — or, what is the emergency?

THE TRANSCRIPT

says she
(overheard
in a grove)
to leave to
move up
north the
best scheme
for her if
she even
loves him
and if no
well, then
nothing lost

DEATH RIDES A HORSE

Up to my neck in something which preceded us, spurred.
That which I proceeded to ahead of you. I sun-turned, idiot son
eastward facing, your copper buckle slipping back and forth
from hip to hip, crossed and doubled by pistols which meant: father.
So I came west to bury myself in any case but was thrown.
You found me right beside the trail and stole my horse, rode past
slow, let the wit roll gently off its ass to let me know the race
was lost or at least wasn't fast. We went revolving and repeating.
Tearing forward to arid claims on hours of packed grass,
doubling back to meet again the other, forward toward the same.
I walked in counting steps to the bar by the pianist. I went ahead
and turned the joint upside-down, at that point when the song began
in an unlikely way, to sing of a wife and mother, sick to death.
You bit a bronze tongue and watched my arms going off,
making others make information. And this is why you had
not left but over a slight hill, had not stolen but only moved
a horse that, as between posts, must trade from man to man.

FOR MY SARCOPHAGUS

The spinning mineral healing in my hand.

The race that made me fall and set it there.

The too quickly, the dark church lawn, the hole.

Figment, folly, the color of my true love's hair.

AN ANNIVERSARY

All these weeks, the jessamine
swallowing itself.

And come from myself

the watershed that thins the thorax
beats the blood and asks if summer
could have made this.

To know oneself
is not the heat-foundering I once believed but tender
declination, rendering

demarcation:
each and every evening, my pan-armed flight from that
historical dark room to you.

My luck fulcrum.
You make me sleep,
you say my rosary.

Ivy begetting ivy.
Straw wrapped heliotrope
gone water-facing.

It does not matter.
My foundation,
gravel litanies, that travertine

you've read.
Not this.
Not that. I am here incapable

and time bears

the word from you which

shakes the bricks, breaks my hands

on task at their relation.

Water come in

sun come in.

TO TONY, ABOUT THE CONTRACT

Revise me says the locomotive locomoting in a field to which
it does not now belong, nor we, the ones who wrote it there.
You must believe in spring, the old song goes, the song we
always want to go. Cylinders, drivers, engine empty of oils,
facts, go forward. You must see now there is no anger in it.
There is nothing in a month that wants anything from us.
You see, maybe, to see the trees for the fruit up in them.
Not instead of anything but, steadily, the way the hand shapes
anything can be explodingly. Barely much is needed.
Know me says the friend in my kitchen, but I say to him
instead, to run on one's own will. Then we, the undersigned, agree.

EPIGRAM (WORK)

In circumstances one makes with
what is made and doing so delays
all sensation for day's ambition's sake.
With what is made I make a wreck and
dealing so address the wreck I break.

FOR MY SARCOPHAGUS

I marked out space under furious light
sound makes the world go round in rhyme

I sent up a flare I was quite lost I

found Troy

This takes a number of syllables,
the better part may

and this was quite serious

I made a bell with such delicate

my brass throat wanted Tunisia but

on a burning, dismembered vessel okay

which is not to say

that any part may be quite lost

and this was quite serious

LIST AT MIDMORNING

The figure of last
 night's troubled sleep
is showing her arms
 through the diamond port
of bathroom,
 letting her garments
drop to feet
 of evergreen
sisters there
 there is more color
to their shyness but
 wind still wind and
abundant wind
 claims and reclaims them.

What we thought
 of night's glass rattle
pipes dry opening
 was the sole stark speech
of our stark rocking
 maple now become
red motion
 of day-lightened limbs
the gross display
 of familiar land
seen again
 from steerage of house.

THE GIRL (AT LENGTH) TO PAUL BLACKBURN

Whichever, whatever.
What quick build, what hod on me.

Whosoever's incoherent register rung sidewise,
slicktoned strung against and up and
in to me.

You're scrapping at – you're deciding through your hat. Your lying.
Maximum are and be trying, that kind of thing,
All that *okay*, *okay*, your monophony and shame.

Rarnbaut was himself terrible with sex
and sunk like an orange tree, fruitless in heat.
Bernard could point to its branches
dry as your eyes should be.

De Born gets his own line from me,
but only that he might hang his lantern by it and leave.

And fat Vidal. The shit. The tongue slit. The planh come of it.

Only Coucy makes his case, spice-rubbed and broken open,
chambers too small for even a young girl's hunger. Good fruit but finite,
still bigger than your loans could ever cover.

Did that hot tongue ever escondig– or, once woken,
flesh cool, would those tunes ring proletariat to you?

Whichever.
Dansa, feint or pastorella.

I'd sooner honest – a plumber, a mover – than your eye
roaming two floors higher than where it really wants to be.

ROBERT LOWELL

Like flies, quotations lift. Not then
but still then's marks on me, my appetite
near thirty, your good reception not once
received by me. And what voice begins
that I go hackles in the wind, cave in
cursing birth-states that cannot re-begin.
That I preferred a college mausoleum and so
ignored the membrane of the hive –
wanted nothing but local flowers,
soft and principal, and low
on unspecific asphalt, some unspecific sickness.
The lesson at foot rather than at hand. There,
I thrown under, as cells by cells release.
There is new work. I have not earned anything.

PETRARCH 67

(A variation)

I swayed on the brink of a sea it seemed.
I saw the wind route waves to me, and dying

I threw myself to a branch, dead already.
I remember that.

I climbed out wet.
I and shame and wilderness and just so

I could know the distance—
I fixed her bright name to its leaves.

I since then have changed my clothes,
I please myself in doing it so

I am changed.
I am not as

I remember
I am only ever in that little river.

IN THE DREAM OF THE ATTENUATOR

the speaker would not move.
The vacuum tubes refused to break
the loud anodal fact played
by an instrument full out –
the pale mineral voice
past my omission, in cold fidelity.

My lost attenuator, ridiculous
and purple, useless
like an animal's small brain,
enclosed in your fist
and pushed into my mouth.

TO AN IMAGINED PAINTER

It would have been
interesting had you said

contrast but you
made contrast and snow began

like so many
heavy organs or damp chords,

recalled small birds,
four poor spades in bleating fits

on boughs in shifts –
winter's silver hammer gang –

without without
not images, those things, but

an arrangement
for guitars and drum and voice.

FOR MY SARCOPHAGUS

I thought myself a lyre hung high inside a tree.

My gravitas, et cetera, my head loading.

But each new thing began as the old began.

Thou flower, thou thistle, thou thicket.

What I meant was gravity.

METHODIST COUNTY INVITATIONAL (PROLOGUE)

I.

Consistency is not the campus pear
truncating before fruit,
but the hand's equipment resting.
Not things, inevitable, inevitably angling
to the mind's relation. But historic
muscling of rigid earth, sumac
rushing forward or back, ecstatic
born into this or that anthem
of undressing, or her flesh come
ahead of itself, into itself, like time.
Our pasture, dear pasture,
fallow black district, rolling to—
we grow paratactic, irreducible,
anxious to begin.

II.

The image, not thought, of a prow
heightening into a wave's taut drum,
this readymade church, this single orange
hung beating at the edge of another county's hull.
Nowhere near the sea,
but you are made to see it.
Sea birds, alighting. Salt farm and harbor,
or derelict jetty shored up by lumber.
We are lightened
by nameless, unremembered acts —
Christmas still suspended in the eves
the building gently heaving,
pared chaparral, hewn spire

the transom yawning,
far inland, cracking under wind.

III.

And from a saltbox dormer a voice extends
to something knocking in its pen
breaking then recoiling.
The voice is like your voice –
the bell-ringing spicate self
increasing, shiftless,
to a body stamping in the weeds,
far from spigot and basin.
Names go yawing to the dust –
a bottle listing, label to rut,
wasting in the mineral trough,
face down in its failed event –
draught into draught,
empty and bright.

IV.

Brick and scrap, work of a name –
wood fuel stacked between the frame-
posts of a roof, woodwork against the wind.
You, advocate, ride by. You say:
That is good work there.
Seasoned and adequate for months,
Ordered forward to a month's end.
Cold smoothed things, the horses
hardening in the deep track
of that field, carved, one gabling
against the other. Your mouth opens

its louver to them. You want
your pockets unpacked,
your barn-head, load
hung from the hook
of your cold hand.

FOR MY SARCOPHAGUS

Inheritance from no one –
I, fountain, run my head – crowd
my loud head with month by month
concatenating – milkweed and rivulet,
bark and quinine down the aqueduct –
I too run my mouth until an early blossom.
New pocket stitch I rip and fill
with coins and chestnut – acts
against the year. The year's act back –
the voice pulled off its fulcrum falls to work –
to working in the world again –
to working up the self it fell answer to.

AND WHOSOEVER MAKES

waves inside our city whosoever.
Whosoever lends himself to
passion's readiness at hand, durable
enough the city aldermen won't contend
for any good financial reason
coitus beneath the safe trees,
the sincere ball gone into the street
milk abandoned in the midst of things,
or the path scored through an arboretum,
power lines lapsing toward
the law chiseled high inside a dome –
our faces press harder into the daphne,
as the neighbors rip into applause.

FUGUE

My father says do you hear the music it's haunting.
And it's not the hospital bat-winging through a holiday

but something in the t.v., a digitized forest, a theme,
and what we get is peace from it. Each time you blink

a nurse retrieves another needle from your wing. Then
we go to prison, it's what the house at home waiting

wants for us, it's like any solitary thing in that way.
As we speak the decommissioned fleet goes singing

down into the shallows of the bay. My father
gets up to go to work near them and sees them do it

without our style of hesitation. We believe in
healing, persisting when the war is over, consistent

resumes of solitary things, the silver tray of instruments,
or two hulls rubbing, or that music up there, shaped like leaves.

IN THE DREAM OF THE ACTORS

there is no line,
only the rambling around a town you know
in limosines. Four and four men, three actors,
chasing in a scene, you are in the angle of the seats and wondering
how anyone fits into such luxury.
Over the tracks and to the left,
always cutting perpendicular over the tracks left across the luxury before.
You are in the movie and know why.
Or, at least, you were in a room where the girl you've always known enters
with two friends in khakis, maturely dressed and satisfied,
knuckles reviving you like a fuel hose
when the train stops in the middle of the night.
You drink with the engineers between the cars,
black against the black brained fields.
The drink is called *concrete*,
but you aren't staying in Hanover.

A FORMAL INQUIRY

Until I find a line
adrift in one of many
nights of this revising –
the evening, this flare

the helico'd stairs,
strange, municipal
quay into my mind –
passus, passing.

Pressed to stone which
makes me homeless,
into town –
brought to walk,

is too much for me.
Records and papers,
files belabored,
black mines of presence

or presence leaving
late-shifts –
a waste of belief
of all things, in home

or where you are –
or what you
off your clock
have ever done.

AH SUNSET AH SUNRISE

Can't you hear the sunset unfolding in its references?
It's there and red sky, dark scarlet as you describe it

there too. It's getting vague in you and me, you understand?
It's there that something is to be said about something or other.

Can't you see the sun unfolding into you, in a manner which
seems unreasonable, like a plank falling from great height

into an ocean as blue as you describe it, or a naked boy
falling too into that sea? Isn't that exactly the moment we

were talking about, when you described your retreat from
the world to a group who had always seen the sky

buckling in the peridrome, rendered as they say
with different values – not as its instant but as its duration.

I wrote all this once to me or you in a kitchen on my stove,
and went to a reading later where something like it

was read but that didn't make a difference. No. I had
written it on the air before I came here or there, wherever

being a favorite term of mine, which wasn't mine as it
turned out, as it turned inside out again the sunrise.

FOR MY SARCOPHAGUS

I grew, mown under sky, barred from buildings
while my father grew a factory in his head, friendless, exactly
what I ended.

I lie.

I went always running by the fence that made the family
known to other families. Its slats became a period style,
like a name, ditches, citrus, mustard scrag. My eye
abiding them,
ridden by.

I knew a canopy that dropped its rhyme –
it pined me up
I woke up coniferous,
lying where it landed,

grown still under sisters who made my law,
my time, the face planed
patina set with seed, hardly
I ended.