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EITS: COMBINATORICS, POTENTIAL AND GENRE

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

David Wirthlin

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Adviser: Selah Saterstrom

Author: David Wirthlin
Title: *Eits*: Combinatorics, Potential and Genre
Adviser: Selah Saterstrom
Degree Date: August 2011

Abstract

Eits is a work of fiction, a non-traditional novel whose structure is largely determined by an Oulipian-style constraint. The constraint in *Eits* is culled from the album names and song titles of the band Explosions in the Sky. Each album corresponds to a chapter in the novel, and the language of each album title must be used in some way as an introduction to each chapter. Within each chapter (album), song titles correspond to numbered sections where each title must appear as is in the first sentence of that section. This not only dictates, to some degree, the direction of the text that will follow, but, looking ahead, the title of the next section will dictate where this section must arrive. From this, a narrative naturally takes shape. Albums/chapters appear chronologically, according to each album's release date, and within each album/chapter, songs/sections appear in the order they do on the album. This is, perhaps, the most straightforward way of ordering the received language of the constraint, the possibilities beyond this exponential. *Eits* is a novel that shifts in form, providing a texture to the space and reading experience of the novel, all in hopes of creating a space in which content and form inform and push each other to new limits. *Eits* is never satisfied to settle on one form for too long, and it is in the movement between forms that the narrative develops in interesting ways. *Eits* demonstrates the combinatoric possibilities inherent in

language, and this exploration of potential highlights the reciprocal relationship between writing and reading. As *Eits* builds upon a limited language set, it explores and exploits the combinatorial possibilities that language allows for both writer and reader. It demonstrates that all combinatoric potentialities, visible or not, always co-exist in the same time and space, and in this infinite space, individuals are invited to be writers and readers in simultaneity.

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Introduction

To say writing is a combinatory art is redundant and obvious, and yet, at the same time, something that needs be spoken because so often it is not. It's easy to look at a story or poem and say, Yes, this is made of language, and the meaning of this language depends on the order of its linguistic elements. It's less common to consider this combination a mathematical function. Combinatorics is a branch of mathematics that studies configurations, and as such provides a tool to look at the configurability of language. Simply put, combinatorics allows us to look at language at a level fundamental to why there is potential inherent in any word, and further, it allows us to see how literature is a continuation of this function.

I'm not a mathematician, so I won't delve into producing formulae to express these ideas. If the mathematical aspect of combinatorics feels left behind at any point, its only because I'll instead focus on some basic concepts applied to language. If combinatorics is concerned with configurations, there is little, outside of numbers, as configurable and reconfigurable as language. If linguistic configurations develop meaning, in each word there are a number of potential configurations of letters that determines the trajectory of those letters. As an exercise, we can look to the title of this project, *Eits*, and utilize its letters to develop this concept.

To start, we have four letters: E I T S. They appear as I've configured them, but as an inborn feature of language, there are a number of other configurations that use these

letters, and which each shift the meaning shifts. In addition to EITS, we have TIES and SITE as potential word configurations using this language set, and these are only the options if we are limited by using all the language of the set. We can also mine these words to expand our word base:

| | | | | |
|------|------|------|-----|-----|
| EITS | TIES | SITE | | |
| ITS | TIE | SIT | SET | TIS |
| IT | I | IT | | IS |
| I | | I | | |

In a short span, and with little reconfiguration and mining, we have gone from the four letters that comprise this title to four letters that can become eleven discrete words (excluding repeats). This point of this exercise is to demonstrate that within all words there exists:

- 1) Other words that already exist within the word.
- 2) Other words that can be built out its elements, if reconfigured.
- 3) Other words that exist in the reconfigured elements.
- 4) And finally, that all words function this way, that within every word choice there exist n other word choices, and that as a feature of language itself, words house potential for meaning other than their own.

When a word is chosen amidst the possibilities for the configuration of its letters, we begin to pin down meaning. When that word is combined with another word, meaning moves toward an ever more concrete realm, but even as the meaning of language materializes, something else is working behind the scenes. The words that are chosen carry with them all the other words using its constituents not chosen.

Literature, for its part, moves us in a direction toward meaning even as it builds up another language set unused, a language set much larger than the one we read. This is a

simple matter of more elements equaling more combinatoric potential. Words themselves always carry the dual identity of the meaning intended and the linguistic elements within not utilized. A combinatoric study of language helps us begin to understand how literature both means and does not mean simultaneously, how a word is both itself and all the things it could be, how literature is able to find meaning outside of the text on the page.

However, looking at the combinatoric function of words is only a part of the picture when discussing the potential of literature. Raymond Queneau, in “The Foundations of Literature,” discusses this potential, stating, “Between two words of a sentence there exists an infinity of other words. Every sentence contains an infinity of words; only an extremely limited number of them is perceptible; the rest are infinitesimal or imaginary” (Foundations 13). If we look first at numbers, where between each number exists an infinity of other numbers (if we go half the distance between two numbers, repeat, etc, we will never reach the second number), and second look at how lines function, which themselves contain an infinite number of points, only some of which are made visible. Each written line, then, only makes visible a very limited amount of the language it actually contains. Writers and readers have the responsibility, on one hand, of making visible specific sets of language, and on the other, they must be aware that all possibilities of language also exist on each given line.¹

The constraint in *Eits* is culled from the album names and song titles of the band Explosions in the Sky. Each album corresponds to a chapter in the novel, and the language of each album title must be used in some way as an introduction to each chapter. Within each chapter (album), song titles correspond to numbered sections where each title must appear as is in the first sentence of that section. This not only dictates, to some degree, the direction of the text that will follow, but, looking ahead, the title of the next section will dictate where

this section must arrive. From this, a narrative will naturally take shape. Albums/chapters appear chronologically, according to each album's release date, and within each album/chapter, songs/sections appear in the order they do on the album. This is, perhaps, the most straightforward way of ordering the received language of the constraint, the possibilities beyond this exponential. This serves as document one of *Eits* – the constraint and the ordering of the constraint. This first document contains, in its primary state, *Eits* in its entirety, even if only in potential state.

This *Eits* is a limited set of received language that provides a starting point of meaning and understanding, a visible language set (which includes all possible configurations) surrounded by all possible (invisible) expressions of language. It may be strange to say something resembling a table of contents has within it all linguistic possibilities, but what is a table of contents but something that points to a container for just one possible representation of that table? A table of contents provides a map, and the text that follows is merely one route through that map. Document one of *Eits* is the map (in essence, document one *is Eits*) and document two of *Eits* represents one combinatoric iteration out of an infinite number of potential language routes through that map. Document two is the novel I call *Eits*.

Not all potentials are the same in terms of quantifiability however. While we can say that all texts, according to Queneau above, contain the potential of an infinitude of language, we cannot discuss the specifics of that potential. It is only in the study of specific (visible) language sets that we can discuss the potential of a text in concrete terms. So while document one of *Eits* contains as much potential language as document two, it differs in terms of the quantifiable language therein. In terms of combinatorics, document two of *Eits* is

exponentially more configurable than document one, so it contains more combinatoric potential.

Language is the baseline for a combinatoric study of a text, but it is not the only thing. There are certainly other factors to look at here, like form and generic expectation, two interrelated elements. So interrelated in fact, I'll discuss them as one under the umbrella of genre, all with the understanding that they are not de facto the same thing. Also, while these are built out of language, they function on a macro level, while the language discussed above is micro (until it extends to the macro field of genre). The use of one stable genre in a text comprises a single set of expectations for approaching that text. It has limited configurability from a combinatoric perspective and therefore has limited potential. Speaking of genre here, I'm referring less to the general sense of it (say, poetry) and referring more to the specific (say, lyric). To simply call something fiction or poetry does carry with it readerly expectation, but it is too general and almost never remains on this general level. Fiction quickly becomes literary fiction or science fiction or detective fiction, and so on.

The use of one stable genre produces an inherently finite species. While genre itself is a slippery notion (literary fictions vary widely, as do lyric poems, etc – so much for stability), a text of a single genre provides its own expectations according to recognizable patterns and categorizes itself accordingly. In combinatoric terms, genre functions much in the same way as the single word: it contains a small measure of configurability on its own, but when added to this increases exponentially. Let's say we take a piece of detective fiction and add to it the genre expectations of a romance novel; all of the sudden we are presented with more elements of configuration. The text could oscillate between genres, or they could intermingle, but whatever the case, it is more configurable. All this under the umbrella of those general

expectations of fiction. If we took this same detective-romance novel and added to it an element of confessional poetry, we've not only added another specific genre element, but we've also brought with it all the general expectations of poetry. This is all unquantifiable numerically- suffice it to say this is an issue of multiplication rather than addition.

Combinatorics is interested in the crossing of genres because it increases the ability to configure its elements, which in turn increases the potentiality of the work.

To this end, *Eits* shifts in form, providing a texture to the space and reading experience of the novel, all in hopes of creating a space in which content and form inform and push each other to new limits. *Eits* does not mix forms for the sake of crossing genres; it does so to increase and emphasize its own combinatoric potential. I would prefer to not use the term cross-genre in describing *Eits*. Instead I want it to exist in the space between genres. This interstitial space seems to be where the actual work of the mingling genres happens, that is, where the text is not squarely in the fiction camp, the science fiction camp, the poetry camp, or whatever it may be, but instead in the non-genre (or all-genre?) space where all the generic elements of each co-habitate. This is the space ripe with combinatoric potential, but this may also be the space most impossible to wedge into.² However, combinatoric potential exists not in the achieving of something, but in the trying to achieve. Achievement is the space of potential realized, trying the space of potential still not fully tapped. Even in failure, or perhaps especially in failure, potential works its magic.

All this assumes combinatorics and potential to be a good thing. It might be tempting to just want to write something without worrying about its potential, its alternate ways of configuration. It might be tempting to do that. Combinatorics and potential are part of the complex functioning of literature, though, and this is true whether explored or not. It is why

writing is a combinatory art, if not *the* combinatory art. So even if the writer chooses to ignore this all in creation, even if the writer is ignorant of how this works, that it works, and all, even if. It doesn't matter. Combinatorics, potential and genre are the unavoidable, defining characteristics of literature. *Eits* is a text that chooses to use itself to explore these characteristics, a text that recognizes these will happen without it, and has decided to become entrenched in the conversation, rather than being blissfully ignorant. Perhaps the most important comment to make is: first came *Eits* and then came this introduction, *Eits* providing the requisite space to explore these notions, *Eits* housing the introduction already within its own potential.

Eits³

One

(How Strange, Innocence)

- I - A Song For Our Fathers
- II - Snow and Lights
- III - Magic Hours
- IV - Look Into The Air
- V - Glittering Blackness
- VI - Time Stops
- VII- Remember Me As A Time Of Day

Two

(Those Who Tell the Truth Shall Die, Those Who Tell the Truth Shall Live Forever)

- I - Greet Death
- II - Yasmin The Light
- III - The Moon is Down
- IV - Have you Passed Through This Night
- V - A Poor Man's Memory
- VI - With Tired Eyes, Tired Minds, Tired Souls, We Slept

Three

(The Earth Is Not a Cold Dead Place)

- I - First Breath After Coma
- II - Only Moment We Were Alone
- III - Six Days At The Bottom Of The Ocean
- IV - Memorial
- V - Your Hand In Mine

Four

(Friday Night Lights)

- I - From West Texas
- II - Your Hand In Mine
- III - Our Last Days As Children
- IV - An Ugly Fact of life
- V - Home
- VI - To West Texas
- VII - Your Hand In Mine

VIII - Inside It All Feels The Same
IX - Do you Ever Feel Cursed
X - Lonely Train
XI - The Sky Above, The Field Below
XII - A Slow Dance

Five

(The Rescue)

I - Day One
II - Day Two
III - Day Three
IV - Day Four
V - Day Five
VI - Day Six
VII - Day Seven
VIII - Day Eight

Six

(All of a Sudden I Miss Everyone)

I - The Birth And Death Of The Day
II - Welcome, Ghosts
III - It's Natural To Be Afraid
IV - What Do You Go Home To?
V - Catastrophe And The Cure
VI - So Long, Lonesome

Eits⁴
(One Possible Iteration)

ONE

How strange, you think. How strange to come across innocence. For it to be presented to you in such a way for you to think, How strange. It might not be innocence, except I'm telling you now it is, but it might not be. To which you might respond, How strange.

I.

This is a drawing of flightless birds trying to fly, a song for our fathers, the way hair grows sporadically, repetition without knowing, a history written and rewritten without human intervention, the time of the Intercessors and starless nights, Profi and Yasmin, mud, snow, trees, houses, and light.

Above all there is light. Natural and artificial, bright and dim, pinpoints and floods.

In the birth and death of the day, there was light, an explosion, and Jasmine was there.

In the birth and death of the night, Profi was there, above the pine jacaranda maple aspen trees.

Even in the glittering blackness of the starless night sky, there is light.

Light makes blackness glitter.

—

There's Profi and Yasmin the Light.

One is trying to sleep on a couch. The other is trying not to sleep.

One had a problem, unnamable, undecipherable, perhaps not a problem,
but no better way to describe it. The other making dreams about
swimming.

One spills cranberry juice. The other feels getting restless.

One wonders about starting. The other has started. Both have started then,
and there is no starting early, no starting.

One cannot stop weeping.

The other sees weeping. The path it travels, slipping across skin, can be
seen, and from this is weeping.

Infer sadness. Perhaps joy. The picture is not yet complete enough to
accurately see, but this does not stop it.

One says it is impermanent. There is no explaining the problem. There was one. Name the problem. It likely has everything to do with it.

One is having trouble sleeping on a couch. Last night had trouble with the couch. The other one is not in the daily habit, but barely in the weekly habit, in no habit.

The couch is badly water damaged. Neither one or the other have any memory of damaging it. What if the swimming becomes drowning?

One wakes up in the morning and doesn't. One continues throughout the day. The other not a habit person, no matter how many efforts are required. One simply doesn't.

One is trying to sleep on a couch. The other is trying not to. Both are a problem sleeping.

II.

Profi stands mesmerized by snow and lights, naked except for boots, fully mature, but hairless from the neck down, scar on the left side of his torso.

Snow falls in large clumps and collects in a dome atop his hair. He's never been up late enough to see snow, so he stands still, allows it to collect around him, up to knees now, but still not moving.

Tonight represents a significant shift, no longer asleep before the snow comes, wakes up long after it melts and muddies the roads.

The snow falls in silence, insulated against outside sound, and streetlights cast an orange glow, reflect off the snow, illuminate the immediate area, bright as daylight. Beyond the lights pitch black.

Yasmin the Light stands in the snow several blocks away, also mesmerized, this her second time in the snow, also naked and hairless from the neck down, equally mature, but with a scar on her right side and not wearing boots.

They are in close proximity but haven't yet met. Think of them together if it's helpful, even though they're apart. After they meet, they'll always think of each other together.

They are warm, the snow insulating individually and collectively. Even when the snow is waist deep, then neck deep, they don't move, and won't until long after the magic hours.⁵

Snow clumps get larger, snow piles deeper. Trees uproot, lift, and fall from the sky, all still in silence.

They land around Profi and Yasmin, displacing snow, building into larger piles until eventually they are completely buried. After all the trees land, the houses collapse.

If they weren't buried, Profi and Yasmin the Light would see other now, but it's not yet their time.

Magic hours nearing, they fall asleep, and will wake without snow around them, standing fully clothed on muddy roads, surrounded by rebuilt houses and replanted trees.

III.

As the magic hours⁶ near, everyone drifts off to a sleep that no one has yet been able to resist, and they do not awaken until long after the magic hours, long after things have settled.

The Intercessors tried to chemically force their bodies to stay awake for the magic hours.

Many have no idea they even exist; others are simply content to know their world is restored.

Even after a night of heavy snow and uprooted trees, or whatever the night may bring, the magic hours will come and bring order.

There is no death in the night, no death that lasts, no death in the night the magic hours can't overcome.

There is no carry over; the magic hours erases all just the same.

Profi stands in front of his house, Yasmin in front of hers, just waking.

Profi wears his turtleneck and corduroy combination, Yasmin dressed in her pink sundress. They have no recollection of the snow.

It's hot now, and already the muddy roads are turning back to dirt.

They've both moved from their spots.

Profi thinks the roads are naturally muddy in the morning, not a remnant of what the magic hours took away.

Yasmin doesn't think much of the mud. She has a car to drive her over it, doesn't have to walk in it like Profi.

She drives past Profi trudging through the mud, but neither one notices the other because they have different concerns.

She won't notice him until she too has to concern herself with mud.

Or they'll meet in the air somehow, uprooted like trees, then collapsing like houses.

If this happens, it will happen often because it will be night. The magic hours perpetually erase the experience. They might have it every night and never know it in the morning.

Even if they meet in the night, it can't won't last, so the only real meeting will be in daylight.

Profi's feet are buried in mud, drying to dirt. As he walks, the dirt cracks, falls off, settles as fine dust on the dry dirt roads of town. Now he's kicking up dirt with each step.

He has nowhere to go now, but walks anyway, toward the grocery store. The ground underneath him rumbles every ten or fifteen minutes, kicking up more dust.

In the grocery store parking lot, still muddy, his feet sink into the mud as he walks along an aisle. Yasmin is there, driving slow through mud, parallel to Profi.

He notices her, but her not him, and he again is mesmerized.

IV.

Look into the air at Profi up higher than trees against the black, starless night sky, where there's less friction and freedom from the trees.

There are only flightless birds⁷ here, and we eat the flightless birds. The others don't come around anymore.

Naked again, no boots, drifting over the tops of pine jacaranda maple aspen trees, knowing full well the starless night means it won't snow, but not knowing the role the Intercessors have played in it.

He thinks of his drawing of a flightless bird trying to fly. Blue and green plumage, short beak, sharp claws, bright yellow eyes, drawn as a sequence.

In the first, the bird is on the ground.

The second, a pair of hands hold the wings out.

Third, the bird drifting vertically instead of the preferred horizontal.

Fourth, the bird landing headfirst.

The picture was drawn from experience, not imagination, but Profi doesn't know it, doesn't know he's drawing from the residue of memories built up through repetition.

He drops to the ground, picks up the blue-green bird, returns to the sky.

Bird on his lap, he manually flaps its wings, working the joints, training muscles to move from memory. Profi holds the bird's body, lifts it.

The bird flaps its wings a few times, slowly, but still flapping, then he works the wings a few more minutes.

Movement not yet totally ingrained. Physical residue accretes much slower than mental. The bird has been a participant for weeks, and will be for some time.

He holds her out, and while she flaps, lets go.

She drops vertically, headfirst, wings flapping in vain, straight toward dirt, landing beak first, snapping her neck. A faint sound, barely noticeable.

Claws in the air, legs twitching, small body convulsions. Life melts out of her, limp on the ground, beak buried in the dirt.

The ground vibrates, loosens dirt around the beak, sets it free.

Profi props her against the jacaranda, picks up the yellow-orange bird, long beak, immense wingspan.

This one doesn't flap, but keeps wings out, glides horizontal, landing softly in a bed of pine needles, and falls asleep there, wings still out.

What he doesn't consider is maybe the birds don't want to fly, and if they did, they wouldn't stick around.

They might follow the example of other flying birds and never return, and there would be no meat left for us to eat.

He sees what looks like a star in the starless night sky and drifts toward it, but retreats to the safety of treetops when it explodes.

V.

In the glittering blackness, no birds, no trees, Yasmin explodes.

There is Yasmin, a scattered mass of intelligence and light, and there is Profi, above the pine jacaranda maple aspen trees.

A band of light and several hundred yards separate them. Shifting in color, prismatic, it never sticks with one color long, blue right now.

Yasmin starts the process of reconstruction.

The band shifts to yellow, moves closer to Profi. His eyes tell him this is still the explosion, that it's moving toward him, but he's not threatened.

When the band changes to orange, he thinks his eyes are still adjusting.

The light is green and Yasmin is fully reconstructed.

Explosion and reconstruction are the two things she does deliberately, with full knowledge and skill, whenever the sky is glittering and black, starless and calm.

The one thing she's been doing long enough the magic hours can't reclaim it.

The band, purple now, is itself problematic, a product of the Intercessory research agenda, a prismatic symbol of the artificiality imposed upon the night.

Consider the stars, moon, explosion, snow, birds, and band of light.

Consider the Intercessors.

VI

Time stops, courtesy of the Intercessors and me; Profi and Yasmin stuck in time, inches off the ground.

I left the Intercessors after they abandoned their research into ways to get in the magic hours.

Call it a difference of opinion, though it runs much deeper than that. More of an ideological rupture.

We thought if we figured how to stop time, we'd be able to use the stoppage as a way into the magic hours.

Intermittently stopping and restarting, fractions of seconds in between, hoping to creep up on the magic hours.

Start and stop until we land on the transition between our time and the magic hours. If we found this spot, the assumption went, we'd be able to move freely between the spaces.

We (the Intercessors) never found the spot, but I (alone) continue the work.

The band of light initially shot up in the sky as a warning that time would soon stop, running through the prism before the first stoppage, but now the band operates independently of time, magic hours, and the Intercessors.

It only precedes a time stop when manually activated, and I currently stand as the only one capable of doing so.

We also thought freezing time might be able to hold off the magic hours, but it's not sustainable, only designed for short bursts of freezing, so Profi and Yasmin the Light unfreeze in time and land on the ground softly.

Yasmin looks at Profi, says I'm Jasmine. Who are you?

VII

Remember

me

as a

time

of day,

he said.

If not

me,

then the

time,

he said

My mom

taught

me

to hate,

she said.

In the

sky,

at night,

I explode,

she said.

We all,

they,

won't

remember

each other.

Not as

a time

or

as

explosion.

Not

each other.

TWO

Those who tell the truth shall die. Some of impalement. Others poor health. Some lightning. Others work related accidents. Some in the ocean. Others by bullet or knife. Some inexplicably. Those who tell the truth shall live forever. Joy, hope, happiness; weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth.

I.

Greet death Yasmin whispers in her mother's ear. She lies behind her mother in bed as she whispers, then rolls onto her back. Her mother silent, still, pale. Yasmin rolls forward, leaning over to whisper — I remember the beauty contest — the new bathing suit — the chair wrapped in foil that became the beauty queen's throne — the hose to wet me down so I'd glisten for the judges — your smirk through the whole thing — I was the only contestant — but you told me there had been others — on other days — all the finalists would be judged separately — I the last of the short list — you hosed me down — ice cold — I stood shining in the early morning sun to be evaluated — other judges couldn't make it — six-volt batteries usually used in lanterns — and wires running to the chair throne — you announced me the winner — a bit premature perhaps with no input from other judges — but they're sure to agree — I couldn't suppress my smile — you crowned me with a tiara — wires connected to the back — and seated me in the throne — electricity ran through my little body — you laughed — I stopped allowing people to see me smile.⁸

—

Her mother wakes up, screaming, Too much too much. Cut me cut me cut.

Yasmin pulls up her mothers pant leg, slices her inner thigh with a blade.

Blood straight without arcing, shot up in two thin streams. Her blood hits the top of the pale walls, even the ceiling. Then two more streams.

Yasmin puts her arms around her and tells her she's going to take care of her.

Blood drips down her mother's legs, off the bed, pools on the floor, off her fingertips.

Thank you Jenny. Thank you, her mother whispers. She quietly sings,
Blood will lay on the cabin quilts / blood will flood the hold / blood slips
along the bridges / old blood / stinking fish in the new bright sun / blood
lifts into the winds / droplets of blood flowing everywhere / our newborn
sun glistening red / blood being everywhere does what it likes.

—

I remember vividly the morning her tears proved too much, and I began to cry. I felt horrible attention would soon be helpless. Worried about the neglected.

Greeted by a glossy eyed slumping child with a happy heart and plans. Her eyes half shut and wizened with a caution slouched so deeply with dirt, the morning heart shaped face, a blood curdling scream.

Cells corrupted but dividing rapidly.

Jenny whispers, If there's a chance for you to make amends, let it happen motionless.

She lay as still as possible to rub fuzzy or tiny. Hurried calm plucked straight from one mouth. Not the tender one.

Quickly her turned orphan birthed a best friend.

Wake up dressed together. Eat breakfast together. Wink from separate tables in the hallways. At night struggle to quiet long enough to stop dead and stare at each other.

II.

Yasmin the Light, dripping red hair, clothed in baggy sweats, barefeet, mother sleeping in the next room, ear pressed to the front door, says,

Hello?

Do you have access?

Access? No.

No access?

That's right.

Isn't your house blue?

Blue? Yes.

But no access?

No. Sorry.

Lots of blue houses with no access.

Yeah.

A blue house with no access. Has it always been blue?

I don't know. Since we lived here, it's been blue.

Did it ever have access?

Not since we lived here.

Have you thought of painting it?

No. Don't think we can.

Have you tried though?

No.

I felt like there should be access. When I was walking up.

Feels like it sometimes, yeah.

Lots of blue houses along here. Do you know where the nearest access is?

No. Sorry.

Five minutes later, ear still pressed to the door, after a knock, she says,

Hello?

Do you have access?

And on like this for an hour.

III.

The moon is down, but stars glimmer in the cloudless sky. Moonless, cloudless, but starry. Snowfall imminent.

Profi lays on the branch of a leafless oak tree, naked, armpit and pubic hair, but otherwise bald, looking upward, waiting for snow.

The Intercessors, meeting in a field, all side by side in an equilateral triangle, ten on each side, all different heights and weights, but no variation in shoulder width, and a bucket directly in the center.

I've been to one of these meetings. No talking is allowed. The Intercessory Triangle means silence.

Snow falls, small flakes, no clumps, melts upon landing. It likely won't stick tonight.

The Intercessors motionless, watching the bucket slowly fill with melted snow. Profi with his mouth open, allows it to fill, swallows, then opens again to refill.

Not all Intercessory meetings are silent – just the triangles – and not all Intercessors are invited to all shapes. Shoulder width is a primary consideration, but not the only.

Tenure's also a factor. Triangle meetings are only for the newest members.

Profi's mouth full, magic hours sleep forthcoming, eyelids heavy, he loses balance, falls from the branch, tries to grab a branch but slips on melted snow.

Nearing the ground, eyelids heavier now, slowly rotating in his descent.

Bucket almost full, Intercessors still in a triangle, watching, waiting, bucket filling, magic hours nearing, new members unaware of the reason for meeting.

He lands on his side, dislocated shoulder, compound fracture in his ribs. Before the pain registers, the magic hours bring him sleep.

The Intercessors wake in their individual homes, no memory of the meeting, but a lingering image of a bucket.

Profi wakes on the subway, exits at the next stop at the top of the highest point in town, his consciousness now a bumpy road which is plunging where a few shacks lay scattered in deep burning sands:

an unending, unstoppable road;

at its bottom it quicksands into a pool of clumsy houses, including his own; a road foolishly climbing up, recklessly descending.

In his house, a carcass of wood comically perched on paws of corrugated iron that exist in the sun like skins being dried.

In the dining room, nail-heads glisten from the rough floor, lines of pine and shadow run across a ceiling, chairs are phantom, light leaks out gray.

IV.

Have you passed through this night, Jenny? Yasmin's mother asks,
panting, mouth dry, dark circles around her eyes, wiry hair.

Yasmin sleeps, mother rubbing her shoulders.

Her mother, muttering,

How'd you steal into the world?

What seed, what root did you grow from?

Who's doing this?

Who's killing us, robbing us, mocking us with the sight of what we
might have known? Does our ruin aid the grass to grow, the sun to
shine?

Where does it come from?

Is this in you too?

Yasmin wakes, kisses her mother on the head, asks, Did you say
something? but her mother is back asleep, hair still wiry but with less,
mouth still dry.

Yasmin the Light stands, shuffles squeaking bare feet on the

hardwood. In the shower, tries to scrub off the scar on her torso,
scrubs until it bruises. Tiles covered with wiry hair.

Her mother sleeping, but mumbling. Head itching for days, refusing to
turn off. Regretting bed each night, every dirty look.

—

The magic hours are neither night nor day, but an interstitial space, named by the Intercessors, possibly discovered by them. No record of a time without the magic hours, but no record of a time without the Intercessors either.

V.

Profi, receding hairline, in the bath, ice-cold water, closes his eyes,
with a poor man's memory, dreams but doesn't sleep. The night starry
but turbulent.

When young, not yet fully mature, he climbed to the top of the tallest
pine, next to the only orange house. No one was supposed to climb it,
but rumor said there was a tree house at the top.

Profi climbs slowly, reaches the top, sits, shouts There's no house
here, slips when the wind gusts, caroms off branches on the way
down.

He lands on his side, capillaries broken on his legs face torso, blood
dripping from a gash along his hairline, compound fracture in his ribs.

Even younger, running from a friend in a game of tag, looks back at
the friend getting closer, turns forward, runs into a cactus, spines
embedded in the side of his face, scalp, ear.

He pulls away stunned, gets tagged by the friend, cries until his mom

gets home from work a half hour later.

Over the course of two hours, she pulls out each spine with needle nose pliers, places them in a small wooden box.

Once finished, she runs her fingertips lightly over the welted holes.

As a child, in a recurring dream, he wakes to a girl, about his age, torso wrapped in gauze, small blood circle on the right side, in the foyer of the house.

His mom, also awake, concerned grimace, ushers the girl in, wraps her tight in blankets, makes up a bed on the couch, strokes the girl's hair until she falls asleep.

Every morning he'd wake, expecting to see her on the couch, but never did. Mom, I had a strange dream, he'd say. Me too.

He sleeps in the cold bath.

The girl, fully mature now, no gauze, scar on the right side of her torso, on the other side of town, next to her mother in bed, knife in

hand, slides it along her mother's bare chest.

No stabbing, no quick movements, only light tracing of her sternum and breasts.

Circle around the left on the top side, cross at the sternum, underneath the right, circle around the top, back to the sternum, and underneath the left, the blade lightly grazing the skin.

After several minutes, the skin is irritated, bleeds, then she's tracing in a groove.

With too much blood to trace, she slides the knife along her mother's stomach, a figure eight until she bleeds. Blood covers the bed, her torso, drips onto the floor.

Yasmin goes outside, up in the sky, explodes.

—

Waking from his cold bath, dripping water, no towel, Profi stands in front of a mirror.

His face not upside down, but eyes and mouth have switched positions, the appearance of upside down.

The nose correctly oriented, mustache and soul patch as well.

He could have a squared scalp and round chin, or a round scalp and squared chin.

Could be upside down or not.

Hands in place of his ears, including a bit of the wrist.

Ear-thumbs on the bottom part of the hand, the part closest to his cheeks, appear correctly oriented.

Mustache in the right place, but possibly upside down, and there's hair on the sides of his head, surrounding his ear-hands.⁹

VI.

With tired eyes, tired minds, tired souls, we slept, independent of the magic hours, and while we slept, the Intercessors met.

Seated at a table in the shape of a trapezoid, three Intercessors on the short end parallel to the long end, which seats seven, not yet talking. No one sits on the other two sides.

In a circle around the trapezoid, the remaining Intercessors stand.

Profi's mother sits on the short side, long brown hair, dripping with shine, long, slender arms legs fingers, short, squat torso.

His father on the long side, also short squat torso, also long brown hair, no shine, and stubby arms legs fingers.

Profi, unaware of their participation, at home sleeping in a curled up ball on the kitchen floor, cereal scattering the floor around him.

—

This morning, Yasmin the Light and her mother, girls with sad eyes, not knowing or sharing, speak of something else, but always think about it. Girls laughing, uplifted, a baby girl with green and white polka dots in a stone walled heart. Gorgeous and vibrant, no doubt a twin, not in the body but already in the heart. They will develop a baseline and always hurt.

—

The roads in Eits are dusty and unpaved; formed, not made. Morning mud turns to midday thick dirt turns to afternoon fine grains turns to nighttime smoothness. We've been asked to call them streets.

The subway system predates the roads. The project started at the edge of town and worked toward the center, instead of at the center then outward.

The Intercessors want us to believe the town is a relic, but also believe in the benefits of modern technology.

The roads sprout grass in the spring, but they quickly get worn back to dirt.

It's not a relic. Once construction of the subway system completed, the Intercessors realized they'd dug it too shallow to build streets above.

There are very few animals here, and even less cars. The animals graze on the grass while it lasts in springtime.

When the trains run underneath, the dirt above vibrates.

There's no map of the subway system. The subway tubes follow the path of the roads above ground, or rather, the roads above follow the path of the subway tubes below. If there is a road above, there is a subway line below.

There is no concrete in Eits. Everything is made of wood, metal, or granite. The granite too heavy for streets, the metal too slick when wet, too hot midday, too reflective in the sun, and the wood not durable enough in the elements.

It's possible to get across town within ten minutes by foot, car, or train, depending on time of day.

The subway tubes are supported by petrified wood. The Intercessors had a process of rapid petrification that has since been outsourced, and subsequently outlawed.

There are no marked stations for the subway. To enter the subway, find a blue house, knock on the door and ask if they have access to the tube.

If no one answers, or if there's no access, try the next blue house in the direction of travel.

Originally, all blue houses had access, but in an act of rebellion against the Intercessory research agenda, many without access painted their houses blue.

As punishment, the Intercessors allowed this to happen, and blue house owners without access must now respond to all inquiries concerning access.

The subway was built because the Intercessors surmised road travel, if they built roads, would be impossible in the morning.

Once the roads started forming, residents realized this wasn't true.

THREE

The earth is not cold, not dead, not a cold place, not a dead place, not a cold dead place, but still a place, this place. There is warmth in this place, warmth from the proximity to the sun, light from the sun. There is another warmth, not from the sun, but from somewhere else in this place.

I.

Profi inhales deep, exhales long, first breath after coma, up and about, then sitting, then standing, sitting, standing, restless from inactivity, sunlight refracting through the windows, fully clothed and pacing his house.

Pacing, exits the house, finds a blue house, asks for access, but is denied. Wanders more, to another blue house, denied again, another blue, another denial, back to his house, also blue, enters, finds access.

On the subway, nearly empty, drawing a picture of a flightless bird on the floor, Profi thinks about flying himself.

He draws a picture of himself trying to fly, high above trees, at night, stars in the sky in one drawing, no stars in another, snow falling in large clumps in the last, wipes the drawings away with his bare foot.

A man leans against the train wall, on the opposite end. Profi barely notices anyone else is on the train, perhaps not aware he's even on a train, underground, when he only wants to high above ground, but there is that man, watching.

The man, an Intercessor, knows these drawings are a product of accretive memory, and knows Profi is still unaware of this fact.

As an Intercessor, I too saw Profi create these drawings, but we were always told not to intervene.

Profi exits the train, at the next stop, the highest point in Eits. The man stays on, examines the remains of Profi's drawings, wipes them completely.

Off the train, vantage of the entire town, Profi kneels in mud.

All the inhabitants of Eits are out, on the streets, in front of their homes, on neighbor's lawns, on roofs, most holding a sheet of paper.

A man shows the paper to his neighbor, the neighbor walks to his front door, retrieves the paper posted there, shows the paper to his wife.

She takes the paper across the street, compares it to her friend's.

One man, down the street, crumples his paper, drops it on the ground.

His son picks it up, smooths it, takes it inside to show his mother.

She shows it to her husband, and acts like he's seeing it for the first time.

Back on the train, returning home, arrives at access two blocks away, Profi exits, walks home. At his house, no paper on the door, and then inside, no paper there either.

His mom, short hair, up in a bun, purple dress, sitting on the kitchen floor, eating cereal.

When Profi enters the room, she smiles, says Good afternoon, and Profi nods.

You were out for a while, she says, and he bends over, picks up cereal, puts it in his mouth. Was there a paper on the door? he says. No, she says. Seems like everyone had a paper. I never saw one. Maybe someone stole it again? Maybe.

In the corner of the room, cans of orange paint stacked high, deep, and wide.

—

Citizens of Eits:

We wish to relay concerns weighing heavy on our hearts and minds...

We find disconcerting the widespread usage of a term intended for internal usage only. This term refers to a phenomenon not understood by many (not to mention the legion of individuals unaware even of its very existence). The term was coined as a light-hearted reference to the phenomena in the early days when it was hardly understood as a phenomenon. Its genesis was innocent: one of us made a joke and the rest of us laughed. From that point on we used the term now in common circulation as a tongue-in-cheek reference. We never intended for the term to escape the confines of our little group. However, it has escaped our group, and now that the phrase has become the vogue terminology, we wish to officially distance ourselves from the nomenclature and its myriad implications. The connotations of this term do not exemplify our values, nor do they accurately reflect the true nature of the phenomena. We additionally find it disconcerting when what was once lighthearted is taken out of context and appropriated as something serious, particularly when the

terminology fails to illuminate. We understand this proclamation will, or potentially will, raise awareness of a phenomenon not heretofore widely recognized, and while we anticipate this being problematic for some, we also respect the inquisitive nature of the citizens of Eits and hope this inquisitiveness will only lead to the advancement of our mission and culture at large. Effective immediately, we request that the term referred to no longer be used, and ask for patience as a satisfactory replacement term is procured.

We additionally request that all blue houses be painted orange, and all others be painted any one of the various hues of green. This of course will necessitate changes to the manner in which access to transportation is acquired, and we ask that all affected parties adjust their routines accordingly.

Thank you in advance for your understanding and compliance.

△ ∞ ▼

II.

In the only moment we were alone, Yasmin the Light, Profi, and I formed our own triangle.

Yasmin and Profi a block away from each other, moving closer, and me at the highest point in Eits.

Clearly not equilateral, more isosceles than anything, no right angles. My angle getting smaller as they approach each other, theirs slightly larger.

They don't yet know they're approaching each other, don't yet know they're on the cusp of meeting again in the night, only to have the moment erased, but also allowing residues to accrete.

Yasmin, wrapped in heavy gauze, shoulders to waist, arms tight to her body, slips as Profi comes into sight.

Profi, pants but no shirt or shoes, correctly oriented face, full beard, but otherwise hairless, walks faster, leans over, props up Yasmin.

She tips, he catches, pulls her to a tree, heels dragging in the dirt.

I remove myself from the triangle, Profi and Jasmine¹⁰ a simple line now. Propped against the tree, neither speaking, Yasmin struggling to move her arms.

Profi slowly unwraps the gauze, Yasmin's torso exposed to the night, snow starting to fall.

Profi fixated on Yasmin's bruised scar, runs his fingers along it, lightly.

Yasmin doesn't wince, move, make a sound, and he re-wraps her torso with gauze, arms free and rising involuntarily, muscles attuned to downward pressure.

Snow falling in large clumps, Profi working Yasmin's arms back and forth, working out the kinks until she moves her arms on her own, snow now up to their knees, they attain a sort of speech.

Your scar

is

like

my scar

except

for

the bruise,

he said.

My mother

with

a knife

just

before

dinner

when I

was

young,

she said.

I

fell

from a
tree
bone breaking
the
skin,
she said.
Said it
was
my fault
an
accident
but
my fault,
she said.
We have
this
if
nothing
else
in common.

—

Snow covers their heads and they stop talking.

No trees uprooting, no houses collapsing, houses and trees soon buried in snow. Profi and Yasmin the Light, no hope of moving, fall asleep.

In the morning, both awake, each in their respective homes, Profi awash with sunlight, Yasmin the Light still in darkness, each lying in warmth, neither with any memory of each other, both unable to shake the feeling of commonality.

III.

After six days at the bottom of the ocean, Profi decided on three more.

If Yasmin had a turn, she would likely shoot for ten days. Profi's father gave up after three days. Both Profi's mom and myself stopped at the prescribed six days.

Most people go into it expecting the challenge is to stay in as long as possible. They feel anything over the six days demonstrates a certain amount of commitment.

What it really demonstrates to the Intercessors is an unhealthy level of competitiveness. The high-level Intercessors are not interested in competition.

Those who make it six days, but do not exceed six days, are put on the fast track. Those who do not make it six days are generally offered positions commensurate with their perceived commitment. Those who exceed the allotment rarely become Intercessors.

Profi entered the ocean at the invitation of his mom, unaware of the

purpose of the invite. Nearly all are unaware of the purpose when they enter.

He stayed at the bottom of the ocean longer than necessary strictly out of enjoyment, not because of competitive drive. It's possible he doesn't know competition exists.

—

At the bottom of the ocean, feet buried in mud to keep from floating away, Profi watches fish with great interest.

Nearly frictionless, he thinks, able to move up down side to side diagonal in any combination they choose, unrestricted by the ground, not burdened by feet and legs.

He'd like to move freely with the fish, like the fish, among the fish, but his breathing tube doesn't allow movement of any sort.

He stands nearly motionless, only able to see the fish that cross his sight line. He can't tell the difference between the reds, the blues, the greens; he sees the colors, but doesn't know what they signify, how they differentiate between different types of fish.

I, for that matter, don't know what these colors mean about the fish.

Full beard, full head of hair, hair also covering his chest torso back arms legs, as much hair as he could muster for insulation, no strand of hair on his body shorter than three inches.

A week before entering the ocean, his mom told him, Grow it all out.
And he did, without asking questions, without even wondering why.

A green fish is larger than a red fish, but the blue fish is larger than them all. The blue fish comes into Profi's sight line. From the opposite direction comes a green fish.

The green fish and blue fish approach each other, meeting directly in front of Profi's face. In one gulp, the blue fish devours the green.

Following closely behind the green fish is a red fish. The blue consumes this one too.

A few days into his stay, another red fish comes along, this one inexplicably larger than the blue, but despite the size, blue eats red just the same.

On the ninth day, he decides to join the fish, forgetting his breathing tube won't allow it, pulls one foot out of the mud, breathing tube still attached, one foot floating above the mud, unable to get any traction to free the other.

He puts his free foot down, pushes off and lifts the other foot out of the mud, but as he pushes, as the other free slips out of the mud, the other is buried.

Profi repeats the process several times, believing it's just a matter of timing.

The Intercessors above, believing Profi's movement to be a sign he'd like to surface, sun setting on the horizon, pull him up by his breathing tube.

Both feet free, being pulled to the surface, drifting upward away from the fish, he removes the breathing tube and swims freely.

The Intercessors pull the tube out completely, Profi not attached, leave the scene to avoid implication.

Profi, underwater, free from the mud and tube, swims up down side to side diagonal.

No sun above the water, no light in the water, fish no longer visible,

Profi finally out of oxygen, he stops breathing, stops moving, floats to the surface.

IV.

The memorial is already planned and takes place the next day. All the citizens of Eits attend, except for Profi's parents.

His parents don't believe Profi is dead, don't believe that can be determined without a search.

Intercessory protocol stipulates memorials should be held immediately upon suspicion of death.

Prior to anyone entering the water, a memorial is planned, ready to be put in action immediately.

The official Intercessory report indicated Profi's separation from the breathing tube was voluntary and occurred at midday.

The citizens gathered at the highest point in Eits, Yasmin there, feeling a loss she can't understand.

She felt the loss before she knew she was at a memorial, when she was just joining a gathering crowd.

She awoke feeling the loss, and it compounded when people referred to the gathering as a memorial.

She never knew who the memorial was for because the Intercessors, according to protocol, never announced the name to the general public.

Yasmin does not stay long, loss too much to bear, but even harder to bear is the concern she has for feeling this intense loss.

—

Profi floated, naked, face down and dead, in the dark all night, hairless, moonlight reflecting off the back of his head.

He bobbed in the water until the magic hours came, until they removed him from the ocean and placed him on the subway, still hairless, but clothed now, sleeping in a ball on the floor between seats.

—

Leaving the memorial, Yasmin finds access to the subway, immediately feels whole, no more loss, no more concern. She feels warm, though she was never aware of being cold.

Profi, on the floor, wakes, warm now also, stands, stretches. Yasmin notices him, says, Why aren't you at the memorial?

Memorial? I didn't know about a memorial. Whose? Don't know, she says. We never know. Well, maybe I should go. I'll go back, she says, if you go. Okay, he says.

Then they are silent and walking, off the subway now, not toward the memorial, not toward anything in particular, but definitely moving away from access.

The sky cloudless, blue, deep blue, pouring rain without clouds, drenching Profi's suit and blue tie, Yasmin still dry, but not for long.

Holding hands, unaware they're doing so, with fingers interlocked, Yasmin the Light's green dress now saturated with rainfall.

V.

Why is your hand in mine?

We're holding hands?

Yes.

Since when?

I don't know – that's why I

asked. Did you notice?

No. That's why I said since

when.

Was it on the subway?

I don't think so.

Was it me? Or you?

Don't know. Maybe both.

I wonder how long?

Maybe forever.

No, not forever.

Can't be forever.

It could be forever.

But, no, it's not, right?

It didn't just happen though, right?

I just noticed when you noticed.

Maybe we noticed

because it just happened. Our hands are

too sweaty for that.

Were your hands sweaty before?

I don't know when

before is. Or was.

Why are your hands sweaty?

Probably from holding hands.

From holding hands?

Must have been a long time.

I'm thinking maybe forever is making sense.

Yes. Making sense.

I like it.

Holding hands or making sense?

Yes. You?

Yes.

FOUR

1. On Friday, maybe this, but also any
2. Once, at night, maybe more
3. It is lights

I.

From west Texas, Eits is a three day walk, a two day drive, impossible to reach by plane, but not by boat.

Profi and Jasmine walk, neither toward west Texas nor away, holding hands, fully clothed and barefoot, small pebbles sinking in the soles of their feet without puncturing, each step a new set of dimples, and soon pebbles remain embedded in their soles, and soon their soles are pebbles.

Full sun, no clouds, but still a light rain growing harder every second, intensity increasing at a steady rate until the downpour dissolves their clothes, first at the shoulders, then gradually down their bodies, no residue on the ground, no trace on their bodies, the rain even stripping away their hair.

Their pebble soles slosh in the mud on the road, the rain steady, their feet now immersed, continuing to move with their heads pointed forward, not looking at each other, not talking, content with the contact their hands are making, water up their knees now, then thighs and waists.

When the rain water is chest deep they start to swim, still holding hands, bodies close together, Profi's left arm up out of the water then digging deep, fingers slightly apart, pushing through the water as Jasmine's right arm raises up then down, punctures the surface, pushing water with a cupped hand.

They swim until they're tired, try to stand, but can't touch and float on their backs, a current now moving them along, on their backs, hairless, naked, a few feet apart, connected at the hands, their arms in a V, afloat, no more rain, drifting along wherever the water wants them to go, slipping under the surface after a while, still on their backs.

Under water, not breathing, not worried, slipping to the bottom, touching the ground with their backs, large rocks embedded in their skin, sunlight breaking the water surface, not moving anymore, water now receding, draining away from around them, receding into the soil until it is dry.

On their backs, still wet on dry soil, hairless, resting, sleeping until the sun bakes them dry.

—

There is a rupture between Yasmin and her eyes and fingers, a longing of her mother's feet for her heart, legs for lungs, arms for head, part for part:

an insufficient physicality of scale that only pushes the world further inward

What is, what if, or, will her body ever teach the world that contains it?

and wonder about the act of containment, only to see it manifest in the smallest act of silence.

They took what was simple to the building, and then to its top. She felt her mother's physicality next to her as a full stop, a definitively provisional measure: her in the building as the silence in an empty and silent building.¹¹

—

I left the Intercessors but never told them. Part of leaving the Intercessors involves leaving Eits, and no one is willing to do so.

I know of one man: he tried to leave the Intercessors, but was unwilling to leaves Eits.

After weeks of standoff his family moved without him to another house, an unknown house, and he was cut off from all correspondence with the citizens of Eits. He lasted a month before he left.

All this time the Intercessors have been under the assumption I've been working on a secret research project, which is true, but it's not for them.

There are too many Intercessory tendrils for anyone to have any certain idea who is doing what for whom.

Though I haven't shown my face at a meeting in some time, this is not out of the ordinary. This way we keep each other close.

They think I still work for them, and that at some point there will be something to show for my research, which is true, and I get to continue my research in Eits.

If I can get into the magic hours, I might be able to wipe out the Intercessors altogether.

II

Put your hand in mine — Mother — your hand — I'll put mine in your
hand so cold — thin like nothing — is hollow — stained with — veins
— and the shape of bones — afraid to rub — and peel back skin —
and reveal — what — what is underneath that tissue skin — certainly
no muscle bones veins blood fat — definitely no fat — can be that cold
— though a slight pulse — I worry no blood is pumping — from your
heart — to this hand — if I peel back the skin — will it all dissolve into
— already a vague hollowness — is the cold what preserves you —
keeps you — however partially — intact — restricts warm blood —
that would melt you — how long has it been in you — as a child —
was it necessary — or a defense — when I was young — what did this
cold do — is this coldness — if not to the touch — at least underneath
— I'm afraid to touch your face — and feel reassured — and feel my
mother — not understand — but — a touch — however initiated —
your feet — long gone — would be as cold — but are now somehow
warmer — when you are gone — will the warmth return — to skin —

—

I will be a heart a little, and no longer really miss. I wondered
neglected showered, and rid her of a temperament.

I sat on her help.

I coaxed.

Jenny shook her head and bit on a pink and white trim. The chewing
wailed into my chest.

Contagious and dry, in the dark, between thought and thought she will
offer hints of lavender and everything curved into green across light
barely noticeable to count.¹²

III

In our last days as children we were the fire that consumed Eits.

Willful and organized, we burned, and our decision to burn saved us.

It started with us, the children, then on to buildings; houses first, spreading to retail and parks, following roads to get there.

Not being burned or consumed by fire, but being fire, we devoured all around us. We followed a path according to plan.

Start with the abandoned houses, let smoke signal our plan to other citizens, and let any leave that might be inclined.

The parents of Eits, the early Intercessors, had no idea the fire was coming, and when it came they panicked.

Though we remained calm, our calmness, according to plan, heightened their panic, and ultimately destroyed them, unprepared for the fire Intercessory research made possible.

When the fire left, we the children remained, but the buildings of Eits

were only charred framework and piles of ash.

In the absence of Intercessory guidance, we became the Intercessors and moved Eits days away, rebuilt it as we became adults, modeled it after the original, but never let it become it.

Profi and Yasmin, holding hands still, naked still, hairless still, lying on their backs, baking in the sun, only one day away from the original Eits.

They could, if inclined, find it without trouble, if they decided to follow the sun.

Only the Intercessors responsible for the destruction of the original Eits have any idea it ever existed.

Old city plans from the original map out exactly what the new Eits looks like, and no one has reason to question any deviation from those plans because there isn't any.

—

Screaming fire! fire! fire! all in one panicked voice, surrounded by it closing in, several hold hands, out of breath, hearts beating so fast they've almost stopped.

What is this fire?

The children.

The children are on fire?

They are fire.

What can we do?

We can leave. We can burn.

But we can't leave — we're surrounded by fire.

We will burn.

Why are they doing this?

So we burn.

That's my son — burning that building.

And my daughter igniting that one.

They will come for us next — a fire circle tightly around us.

It is already tightly around us.

They are smokeless fire until they find something to burn.

We are smoke.

We — are —

—

There was a window once, and it was then, during that time that the bird flew into Profi's hands.

The bird carried a message in its beak, part of the beak. To unroll the scroll, to unroll the beak, it is all the same, and all the same impossible.

He held the bird in his hand, palm open, feet lightly in the creases.

To unscroll the beak and the message, to peel back the bird from the tail feathers to the front, the tip of the beak to the tail, and read her message in its entrails.

IV

Yasmin the Light does not think her mother's death an ugly fact of life. She was there to feel the body warm, the pulse race then slow to nothing.

There on that bed, Yasmin lying asleep behind her mother, she woke abruptly with a message from her mother flashing through her mind:

Blood will lay on the cabin quilts / blood will flood the hold / blood slips along the bridges / old blood / stinking fish in the new bright sun / blood lifts into the winds / droplets of blood flowing everywhere / our newborn sun glistening red / blood being everywhere does what it likes.¹³

She held her mother's hand, like she had every night for months. She worried about how it felt in her hand.

Her mother wasn't conscious, but Yasmin talked to her about her hand, about her body, about whatever she could to prolong the afternoon, hoping to make it til nightfall, so they could sleep together and wake together, as they had for months.

Yasmin stopped short, mid sentence; it happened, and the body got warm instead of cold, and Jasmine was grateful instead of sad, relieved instead of bitter.

V

Since his near death, Profi's parents have not left home. Profi and Yasmin the Light are two days from home.

Profi's dad mostly sleeps. His mom mostly calls Intercessory contacts, trying to gather facts.

Profi and Jasmine still walk with fingers interlocked, both fully clothed except bare feet, full complements of hair, and bleeding scars. They veer off the path to west Texas and return to Eits, but do not return to their homes.

Yasmin the Light's mother dead, but still able to speak.

Mom and dad maintain the Intercessors are wrong, but aren't overly vocal about it. She makes her calls discreetly, and he continues to sleep.

Yasmin and Profi find the mud fields, pack it into their scars to stop the bleeding.

VI

In Eits, far removed from the path to west Texas, Profi and Jasmine stand mesmerized by snow and lights, both fully clothed, but Profi without underwear and Yasmin in barefeet, both hairless except for eyebrows.

Snow falls in large clumps and collects around their feet, one-inch clumps and occasionally three. They stand still as it piles up to their knees

Tonight represents a significant shift, no longer in the snow apart, but now holding hands, no longer with scarred torsos.

The snow falls in silence, insulated against outside sound, and streetlights cast an orange glow, reflect off the snow, illuminate the immediate area, bright as daylight. Beyond the lights pitch black.

They are warm, the snow insulating collectively. Even when the snow is waist deep, then neck deep, they don't move, and have no reason to.

Snow clumps bigger, snow piles deeper, trees uproot, lift and fall from

the sky, all still in silence.

They land flat around Profi and Jasmine in a triangle, displacing snow, building into larger piles until they are completely buried. After all the trees land, the houses nearby collapse.

Profi and Yasmin the Light see each other, hold each other, in a pocket deep in the piles of snow.

They face each other, both hands interlocked, Yasmin rests her head on Profi's shoulder, falls asleep. Profi sleeps too, and will until they've had enough.

VII

Jasmine wakes, head on Profi's shoulder, still buried in snow,
whispers, I have your hand in mine, and Profi wakes, says, Both hands
in mine.

Around them, outside the snow pocket, trees still uprooted, houses
still collapsed, the sky is cloudless, the sun high but the snow does not
melt.

Profi and Yasmin don't talk, don't move, warm in the snow, release
hands because they've started to sweat.

Yasmin the Light would like to walk now; Profi would like to walk too;
they are stuck and have to wait.

Profi digs at the snow around them, impatient, but he can't move it.
Jasmine screams, but it only reverberates inside their small chamber.

Yasmin with her full head of hair, Profi with his too, waiting for the
sun to melt the snow, or sleep to come, for something.

—

One trying to sleep. The other trying not to.

One had a problem. The other making dreams about swimming.

One spills the other getting restless.

One wonders about starting. The other has started, and there is no starting.

One cannot stop weeping. The other sees the path it travels, slipping
across skin, and from this is weeping.

One says it is impermanent, and no explaining the problem.

One is having trouble sleeping. Had trouble in no habit.

The couch is badly water damaged. Neither have any memory of it.

What if swimming becomes drowning?

VIII

Inside it all feels the same to the flightless birds lined side to side
underneath the pine jacaranda maple aspen trees, yellow-orange first,
blue-green next, then variations down the line;

Profi and Jasmine nearby but not directly involved, fingers
interlocked, on the ground, in a field, mouths open skyward, but no
snow to fill them;

the birds, motionless and expressionless, combust, an act of
immolation, willful and serene, soundless at inception, then only the
faint crackle of singeing feathers;

one by one, down the line, birds burn to nothing, no ashes or smoke
residue, Profi and Yasmin waiting nearby for snow to fill their mouths
to no avail;

the last bird completes the burning, disappears, and all traces of
flightless birds in Eits vanish along with it;

in the field Yasmin the Light and Profi, both fully clothed, not wearing

shoes, holding hands as usual and not moving, do not notice the demise of flightless birds;

under the pine jacaranda maple aspen trees, frost develops, followed by a thin sheet of ice which thickens, spreads to the field, around Yasmin and Profi's feet, then up to knees;

Profi and Yasmin, neither with any intention of moving before, now with no choice, ice up to their waists then necks then overhead, submerged in cold, but warm inside;

mouths pointed upward and open, packed with ice, no tubes for breathing, but not concerned, Yasmin and Profi will wake tomorrow at the bottom of a lake once a field;

they may close their mouths, deep underwater, and spend many days there, or it may be short lived, but they will continue to hold hands, and whether intentional or not does not matter;

when holding hands, they move through the world differently, the world moves around them differently, but holding hands or not, inside it all feels the same.

—

Citizens of Eits:

We wish to relay concerns weighing heavy on our hearts and minds...

We find disconcerting rumors and voices of dissent concerning a recent memorial. As a matter of policy, we cannot reveal specific details concerning the events preceding the memorial, nor can we discuss identities of those involved. We can however confirm, also as a matter of policy, we never proceed with a memorial without gathering all necessary facts surrounding the pre-memorial event. Only when we are certain a memorial is called for will we move forward with memorial plans. In the case of the memorial in question, we categorically deny all rumors and assure the citizens of Eits policy has been strictly followed. In this light, we feel the need for further discussion superfluous.

Thank you for your understanding and support.

△ ∞ ▼

IX

Do you ever feel cursed — not here — always — with his hand in mine — what is different — not love — nothing magic — do you ever feel cursed — can you — answer — how is it possible — you here — him — you dead — us not — but in this snow pocket — how are you here — do you ever feel — the opposite of magic — nothing magic — what is opposite — and all the while you sit — unreachable — of your own accord — of necessity — still — the loss immeasurable — do you ever feel — as though — a distant memory — but not far removed — things requiring forgiveness — remain — unforgiven — do you ever feel cursed — small pieces put together — between a foolish — frivolous — disgraceful past — which never dies — small pieces between the fingers — where you place yourself — innately — has warmth returned — to a vagueness — peeled back — of my mother — do you ever — stop allowing people to see you smile — electricity through a little body — a bit premature — what is different — with his hand in mine — from mine in yours — when inside it all feels the same — do you ever feel cursed — ice cold — wrapped in foil — between the fingers — do you —

—

I had a dose of every day created by the elephant we might be better off knowing.

So inadequate and unsure, barely getting out, dreading every night, and shuffling all of the sudden.

She lay still to rub fuzzy and tiny.
I coaxed.

Eyes half shut and wizened with a caution slouched so deeply with dirt, the morning heart shaped face.

She never really grieved, all scared and nervous and lack of control swarming in.

Hurried calm plucked straight from one mouth. Not the tender one. If there's a chance to make amends, let it happen motionless.

X

Underground, I circle Eits on a lonely train all night. I the only train inhabitant at this hour, but remnants of others remain. Loose sheets of paper strewn about, blank sheets of white, some on seats, others scattered on the floor, occasionally crumpled, but mostly crisp.

I pick one up: blank but smells like ink. There was once an Intercessor working on disappearing ink. Another sheet, and this one smells like ink too, but it's perfectly blank and white.

At each stop I exit one car, move forward to the next car, and still find blank sheets of paper, virtually the same scene on each, the stench of ink more pervasive as the night wears on.

I reach the front car of the train, work my way backwards, reach the last car, work my way forwards again, car to car, front to back, as the train circles Eits.

I reach the front car once last time, no paper on this one now, and work my way back on the train, all the way to the back, no more paper on any cars, taken before I could retrieve one for my research.

XI

Profi and Yasmin the Light, holding hands, the sky above, the field below, drifting upward. Both clothed and bald, but not entirely hairless, in the glittering blackness of the starless night.

Yasmin rises up, pulling Profi behind, far above the field, not far from pine jacaranda maple aspen trees. Up in the sky, resting now, waiting.

Profi looks to her, eyebrows up, opens his mouth to speak, but she quiets him.

Jasmine and Profi in the sky above, but they do not explode. She tries, but they cannot explode.

In the glittering blackness of the starless night, not exploding, but in the sky nonetheless, drifting with the wind far away from the pine jacaranda maple aspen trees, snow falls and collects in their open mouths.

—

Yasmin the Light, next to her mother in bed, no blood running in those veins, knife in hand, slides it along her mother's bare chest.

No stabbing, no quick movements, only light tracing of her sternum and breasts.

Circle around the left on the top side, cross at the sternum, underneath the right, circle around the top, back to the sternum, and underneath the left, the blade lightly grazing the skin.

After several minutes, the skin is irritated, but no blood, then she's tracing in a groove, dry and brittle. Thank you Jenny. Thank you, her mother whispers.

She slides the knife along her mother's stomach, a figure eight; the groove deepens, the knife breaks through, air escapes in a slow leak.

No blood covers the bed, her torso, drips onto the floor, but air escapes, fills the room, makes it difficult to breathe.¹⁴ Yasmin puts her arms around her and says, I'm going to take care of you.

XII

Yasmin the Light and Profi, close together, fingers interlocked, moving in slow circles, a slow dance.

Jasmine, wrapped in heavy gauze, shoulders to waist, arms tight to her body, but hands free. Profi, pants but no shirt or shoes, full beard, but otherwise hairless.

She tips, he spins her, pulls her back up, heels dragging in the dirt.

Yasmin not struggling to move her arms, but her gauze unwraps, torso exposed, snow starting to fall.

Snow falling in large clumps, Profi working Yasmin's arms back and forth, working out the kinks, snow now up to their knees.

They dance for the better part of the day, slow circles, holding each other close, fingers interlocked, bodies touching occasionally, dancing until their fingers sweat and are forced to let go.

There is Yasmin the Light, arms free and rising involuntarily, muscles attuned to downward pressure.

There is Profi, still nearly hairless, but fully clothed now, kneeling in snow, mouth wide open, filling with snow, but only briefly.

Yasmin spins, arms over her head, a V in the air, returns full circle and Profi is gone, no tracks away from where was kneeling, and no sign of him in the sky above, the field below.

She digs in the snow around the spot he was just kneeling. She finds nothing, and snow soon fills where she was digging.

Jasmine opens her mouth to the sky, lets it fill with snow, rises in the sky above, explodes, scatters intelligence and light across the field below, pieces falling through a band of light, shifting in color, prismatic.

FIVE

This rescue,
 like all,
is destined to

Day One:

No technology currently exists to pursue such a rescue, and though the rescue is a charismatic scene, it is often not enough.

At some point, we will reach the limits of our technology, only to realize we've surpassed them.

Yasmin confers with me to discuss this possibility; she thinks I alone have the wherewithal to surpass our current limits or help people realize it's already been done.

She asks, What will the new technology look like, so I can look for it?

It will look like no other technology; it will create its own look.

How will I recognize it?

You won't.

The rest of the day is spent lamenting the limit to our current technology.

—

I've been about, picking people on the street, asking questions:

(Have you heard of the Intercessors?)

Intercessors? No, I don't think I've heard that before. Who're they?

Are they a they?

Day Two:

Profi's parents are involved now, and they've asked me to join the rescue effort. Yasmin unaware of my research history, but not Profi's parents. They know.

They tell me everything they know about Profi; Yasmin the Light does too; none of which is news, Profi and Yasmine deeply ingrained in my research agenda.

Yasmin doesn't know where Profi is; Profi's parents do: the magic hours. Neither position is helpful.

Jasmine: We had been holding hands for days and let go because our hands were too slippery, and he vanished.

Did you fall asleep? I ask her.

No.

Did Profi?

He didn't have time.

When did you last sleep?

While we held hands.

Profi's mom: We knew something was amiss when the Intercessors
declared him dead, but what could be done?

—

(Where do the letters come from?)

The letters?

Letters?

Oh yeah, the letters.

Yeah, I'm not sure who sends them.

We get them and they make sense.

Day Three:

Everyone involved with the rescue sleeps except for me. I use the time to pursue advanced technology, but since this technology will look like no other, I'm not exactly sure what to look for. I'll know it when I see it because I won't know it.

—

(Have you heard of the Intercessors?)

My father used to talk about them, yeah, but not really. He used to say the name. Quite a bit, actually, but nothing else. So yeah I've heard of them, but no I don't know anything about them.

Are they still around?

What do they do?

Day Four:

No one is sleeping, but I'm no closer to discovering a new technology.

All these technologies look the same.

How do you recognize something as recognizable when there is no recognition? or Is there a way to not do that?

Yasmin the Light and Profi's parents don't really leave the house. I do occasionally. In the house, they generally keep to themselves.

Sometimes Yasmin and Profi's mom will hug on the couch. They try to do it when no one is watching, but I'm always on watch. I have to be.

Profi's dad has not only not spoken to me, he hasn't spoken at all.

In hopes of accomplishing something, toward the end of the day I suggested we call this a search instead of a rescue, and they all laughed at me.

—

(Do you know what the Intercessors do?)

No. What do they do?

What is an Intercessor?

Day Five:

Our first productive day. We returned to Profi's vanishing point, re-enacted the moment. Profi's mom slow dancing with Jasmine, me taking notes, and Profi's dad being.

They danced for the better part of the day, slow circles, holding each other close, fingers interlocked, bodies touching occasionally, dancing until their fingers sweat and are forced to let go.

So that's when it happened? I asked.

Yes, Jasmine says.

Just like that?

Yes.

I don't think this is the magic hours.

—

(Do you believe in the Intercessors?)

What is an Intercessor?

Is that like some religion?

Day Six:

I don't think this is the magic hours, I tell the group.

What else could it be?

There may not be a magic hours, so we have to rule this out.

Profi's parents trust me because of my research; Yasmin believes me because she'd never heard of the magic hours before.

Ruling this out helps us get closer. We just need to discover that new technology. Then it will all be possible.¹⁵

—

(Have you heard of the Intercessors?)

Have you?

(Yes)

Are you an Intercessor?

()

Day Seven:

Yasmin is frustrated and tired of waiting. She wakes early, heads to Profi's vanishing point alone, wanders the area.

Profi's mom asks me about new technology.

I haven't found it yet, I say.

Is it possible that means it's already been found?

Yes, I suppose so, but I think I'd have recognized it by now.

But if it's unrecognizable, wouldn't it always remain so? If it's recognized, it's no longer unrecognizable, and so it can't be new technology.

Yes. I think you're right.

Yasmin stays away all day, into the night, and we fall asleep without her.

—

Are you?

()

Should I say, Are you still?

(Who are you?)

This is exactly like we thought.

(Who are you?)

Day Eight:

Profi and Yasmin the Light wake us in the morning, but their presence is fleeting.

I found a town just like Eits, but charred in ruins, Profi says.

The adults look at each other, smile, and don't respond.

That's where he was. That's where I found him, says Yasmin.

Everyone in Eits thinks you're dead, Profi's mom tells him.

And what do you think?

I never thought that.

What should we do?

Nothing.

I can't do nothing, I say.

We split up, conclude the rescue.

SIX

In all of those sudden moments I know, everyone tells me I will miss them, but this has never happened.

I.

In the birth and death of the day, there was light, an explosion, and Jasmine was there.

In the birth and death of the night, Profi was there, above the pine jacaranda maple aspen trees.

Both above the trees here, together, the birth and death of night and day, fingers interlocked after a brief reprieve.

No band of light sent up as a warning sign, no ability to explode, but in the air nonetheless, together and hairless.

Time stops, Profi and Yasmin the Light suspended in the starless sky between night and day.

While there, time moves for everyone else, but not Profi and Yasmin.

When time moves again for them, they do not fall to the ground, rise up higher, or rotate. Now the sky is starless and calm, glittering and black.

They release their hands, de-interlocked, and in the glittering blackness, no birds, no trees, Yasmin explodes.

There is Yasmin, a scattered mass of intelligence and light, and there is Profi, enveloped in her light, unaware of the explosion and unaffected by the light.

Yasmin starts the process of reconstruction around Profi, particles of intelligence and clumps of light move toward the center of the light.

Profi and Jasmine both the center of the light, attracting intelligence and light, Yasmin the Light partially reconstructed, Profi passively involved, particles moving through his body.

Yasmin is fully reconstructed, deliberately, with full knowledge and skill, the sky starless, calm, and without snow.

There is no band of light, no prismatic symbol of artificiality imposed upon the night, but Yasmin and Profi once again with fingers interlocked.

Consider the stars, moon, explosion, snow, birds, and band of light.

—

air higher than trees

against
black starless night

sky
less friction

trees

II

Welcome, ghosts, former Intercessors, inhabitants of the original Eits,
mothers, fathers, siblings, welcome, please join me over here.

Then voices, sounds, and murmurs:

We let you destroy Eits.

We wanted to leave the Intercessors, but remain in Eits.

We let you destroy us.

Welcome. I've asked you here, to leave your home, to come here to
Eits to discuss exactly this. Please visit with me.

Let them destroy you.

Leave you.

Eits was never destroyed for us.

Only for you.

We let you think it was destroyed so you'd leave us.

How can they destroy me and still remain in Eits?

In a little town known for it's bright green and corn silk, panic

collected sick and greedy.

We developed technology you could we knew you could not resist.

To use against us.

To destroy us.

I have a new technology, but no one knows how to use it. I do not wish to leave Eits. I believe the Intercessors know I've left them.

They could use this technology against you without using it.

Do you ever feel cursed?

If it is new they will use it.

There were papers, on the train circling Eits, blank but smelling of ink.

I don't have the papers, and they might not exist.

All technologies are old, though they might seem new.

Would the flightless birds leave, like all other flying birds, if they too became flying birds?

I don't want to leave Eits. I've asked you here to discuss this. Who is with you? Who?

What is more unpredictable, fire or people?

We are all here.

Do you ever feel cursed?

Who is with you? I don't want to leave Eits. How can I not leave Eits?

—

Only
flightless birds

eat
flightless birds

others don't come
around

III

It's

natural

to be

afraid.

Is it

natural

to heed

the

letters?

I can

no longer

read

the letters,

but

we always

listen.

I have

never

seen

them.

Have

there

been

many?

No, not many.

Enough,

but

not many.

We will listen

mostly

not totally.

They always

seem to

work

out, but

we will

not go to Yats.¹⁶

Naked drifting
over
tops

pine jacaranda
maple aspen

trees

knowing starless

it won't snow

IV

What do you go home to, where do you return, when home is no longer?

Profi and Jasmine walk, holding hands, fully clothed, full heads of hair, and barefoot, small pebbles sinking in the soles of their feet without puncturing, each step a new set of dimples, and soon pebbles remain embedded in their soles, and soon their soles are pebbles.

Full sun, the sky cloudless, blue, deep blue, but still a light rain growing harder every second, intensity increasing at a steady rate until the downpour dissolves their clothes, first at the shoulders, then gradually down their bodies, no residue on the ground, no trace on their bodies, the rain even stripping away hair.

Their pebble soles slosh in the mud on the road, the rain steady, their feet now immersed, continuing to move with their heads pointed forward, not looking at each other, not talking, content with the contact their hands are making, water up their knees now, then thighs and waists.

Rain water chest deep, they start to swim, still holding hands, bodies close together, Profi's left arm up out of the water then digging deep, fingers slightly apart, pushing through the water as Jasmine's right arm raises up then down, punctures the surface, pushing water with a cupped hand.

They swim until they're tired, try to stand, but can't touch and float on their backs, a current now moving them along, on their backs, hairless, naked, a few feet apart, connected at the hands, their arms in a V, afloat, no more rain, drifting along wherever the water wants them to go, slipping under the surface after a while, still on their backs.

Under water, not breathing, not worried, slipping to the bottom, touching the ground with their backs, large rocks embedded in their skin, sunlight breaking the water surface, not moving anymore, water now receding, draining away from around them, receding into the soil until it is dry.

On their backs, still wet on dry soil, hairless, resting, sleeping until the sun bakes them dry in the middle of the original Eits.

—

What looks like a

star
in the starless

retreats to safety

explodes

V

This is a song for our fathers, a drawing of flightless birds trying to fly,
repetition then knowing, the time of the Intercessors and starless
nights;

the way hair grows sporadically, mud, snow, trees, houses, and light;

above all is light: natural and artificial, bright and dim, pinpoints and
floods;

even in the glittering blackness of the starless night sky, there is light;

there is mass created in between spaces, lubricated by sweat and its
consequences, intelligence scattered, withheld and returned;

this is exactly what I'm afraid of: the bones and flesh of Eits turning
cold forever;

Yasmine the Light and Profi are gone, together, evacuated from this
Eits to another one, the first destruction of my research agenda;

the first Eits destroyed by us, but not for them, and this Eits a symbol
of our artificiality, imposed by us on us;

contagious and dry, in the dark, between thought and thought we will
offer hints of lavender and everything curved into green across light
barely noticeable to count;

this song for our fathers is both the catastrophe and the cure.

In glittering blackness
of no birds

trees

a scattered mass

intelligence and light
above

pine jacaranda maple aspen trees

VI

So long, lonesome, former Intercessors, inhabitants of the original Eits, mothers, fathers, siblings.

So long Intercessors, inhabitants of Eits, mothers, fathers, siblings, friends, Profi, Yasmin, Jasmine, Yasmin the Light, Jenny. Establish yourself in Yats.

What is more unpredictable, fire or people? Yats, Eits, original Eits¹⁷, former Intercessors, current Intercessors, citizens or what? What is unpredictable?

So long everyone, as you leave. Yesterday, in the night, you will leave. You will pack up and walk out while I slept.

You were quiet as you walk to Yats, some in bare feet, pebbles sinking in, some carrying possessions, others none, all holding hands with someone.

In this night, where I will be excluded, while I slept comfortably in bed, the mass exodus will carry on. Tomorrow morning, I found

provisions to last me years.

Last night, you will leave me here alone for transgressions against you. For trying to leave you, and not believe in you.

Tomorrow, when I wake, Eits was silent and empty. No birds, no flightless birds. You all have left.

First thing in the morning, when I wake, I found a note, nailed to the inside of my front door, crisp paper, ink disappearing fast, telling everyone to evacuate to Yats.

Tomorrow, in the morning, the ink disappeared before I read the entire letter, but there is residue and odor, the paper crisp and blank. What did they tell you so you would leave?

Many years later, when reflected on this night, I feel a mixture of joy pain satisfaction helplessness hunger, not at the same time, nor consecutively, but at some point they all feel the same.

So long Intercessors, Jasmine, inhabitants of Yats, mothers, Jenny, fathers, siblings, Yasmin, friends, Profi, Yasmin the Light.

Light band
shifting

color
prismatic

with
reconstruction

sky
glittering and

black

starless and
calm

—

Yasmin the Light and Profi's consciousness is now a bumpy road
plunging where a few shacks lay scattered in deep burning sands:

an unending, unstoppable road;

at its bottom it quicksands into a pool of clumsy houses, including one like
Profi's own in the other Eits; a road foolishly climbing up, recklessly
descending.

This house: a carcass of wood comically perched on paws of corrugated
iron that exist in the sun like skins being dried.

In the dining room, nail-heads glisten from the rough floor, lines of pine
and shadow, chairs are phantom, light leaks out gray.

They took what was simple to this house without a top. Yasmin felt a
physicality as a full stop, a definitively provisional measure:

in the building as the silence in an empty building

an insufficient physicality of scale that only pushes the world further
inward

gorgeous and vibrant, not in the body but already in the stone walled
heart

and wonder about the act of containment, only to see it manifest in
the smallest act of silence

what is, what if, or, will they ever teach the world that contains them?

In through an absent window, the bird flew into Profi's hand, palm
open, feet lightly in the creases.

Profi unscrolls the beak and the message, peels back the bird from the
tail feathers to the front, the tip of the beak to the tail, and reads the
message in its entrails before it flies out through the absent ceiling.

Would the flightless birds leave, like all other flying birds, if they too
became flightless birds?

—

All of the sudden I miss everyone.¹⁸

Endnotes¹⁹

1. There are, of course, other elements, such as connotation, mediation, etc, that contribute to this effect, but they fall outside the scope of this introduction.
2. Non-genre literature is a phantom, a slippery notion of literature potentially impossible to define without bringing about its destruction, but one, in all its elusiveness, that must exist because if there is genre, there must be its negation: non-genre. When we are confronted with a text that falls within the purview of what might be considered non-genre, reading becomes a recuperative effort, one in which the text provides the tools to define itself. There is the oft repeated description of text which teaches us to read it, that it utilizes its own rules, and the reader simply needs to learn these rules in order find coherence in the text: this description is precisely what we do every time we read; sometimes a recognizable genre is the guiding principle, but in the absence of any guiding genre, the reader can utilize the text itself to provide this guidance. Rather than the set of expectations coming from outside the text (genre), in many cases it comes from within.

No text is beyond the reach of genre because all text evokes “the enterprise of its process toward form. Form is macro and micro. The word is form, the letter is form” (Nakell). Since text can never escape its compositional existence, it can never disguise itself as non-text, as much as it may try, so the reader will always find recourse in it. The reader may have to focus on the micro level, on the word or letter, and build from there. No text is beyond recuperation because text, as a physical presence on a page, is always a fixed point of reference. In the realm of physicality, text will always be what is presented on the page, and while it may take time to develop a navigable course through it, this physicality will always allow the text to be read according to, at the very least, a set of expectations the reader develops.

In *Souls of the Labadie Tract*, Susan Howe comments that when considered together, the various aspects of her book offer “maps of languages” (19). This reference to maps is significant because language itself is a kind of mapping of consciousness. Genre then, becomes a means of reading the map, a key to understand its markings, and if the key is missing, it does not mean the map is unreadable - the reader must simply develop their own key. If language is a map of a consciousness, then the text on the page is the physical manifestation of the map, and while Howe uses this analogy as reference to her own work, it is applicable, across the board, to all text. Text can never escape its textuality, and thus it can never escape its recuperability, even when the text is obscured, a technique Howe uses late in *Souls of the Labadie Tract*, and only bits and pieces of legible language can be discerned, the reader can still focus on the letter or the nature of the image created.

No two texts operate in the same manner, so genres must remain oblique and inclusive in order to offer any functionality. The field of cross-genre, or hybrid, literature is vast, and if it’s true that no two texts operate in the same manner, it is especially true here. While cross-genre work should never be confused with non-genre literature, we can use it

what non-genre literature is not. Cross-genre literature is limited to genre itself, and the notion of cross-genre work can only tell us that the field of expectations has opened up, that, depending on what the genres mixed together are (the term cross-genre won't tell us that - we have to figure it out ourselves), what transpires will likely produce an entirely singular set of genre expectations for the text.

Returning again to *Souls of the Labadie Tract*, we can quickly see that Howe oscillates between historical prose and poetry in a clearly delineated manner. While this may not help us immediately grasp the work as a whole, or understand why she may be doing this, it does give us the means to proceed through the text. Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* also oscillates between genres, but there is no clear delineation between these moves, which occur in the midst of large blocks of text. She writes:

A doodled gnarled tree. Milk belongs to the mythology of cats but it makes them sick.
Ours was a stray with ringworm. One night each year on Boston's Beacon Hill the
curtains remained undrawn and the public was invited to peek in. I didn't wear my
dark glasses because I didn't want a racoon tan (83).

Howe give the reader visual cues to gain a sense of how to move through text, but Hejinian does no such thing. She jams poetry and autobiography together, all in the same text block, blurring the line between them, but not removing it altogether. Even a blurred line provides a point of reference. Hejinian's oscillations may do little for the reader's initial development of expectations of her text, but it doesn't take long to get a sense of *My Life*'s compositional makeup because even in these shifts there is consistency. With consistency comes pattern, and genre is nothing more than recognizable patterns of language and within language.

Not all cross-genre texts, however, are so easy to delineate. Renee Gladman's *The Activist* arrives with a number of visual clues of genre oscillation, but these clues are often misleading. In a passage she might, for instance, use the language of fiction but it may visually resemble poetry. She writes:

Still there because they love me,
he thinks.
This walking,
he'll say when he arrives,
was difficult for me (35).

Gladman utilizes line breaks in the narrative, though it might be difficult to consider this passage poetry and just as difficult to not call it poetry. Rather than viscosity giving the reader a manner to develop expectations of the text, it misleads the reader. Elsewhere in the text, she uses the language of reporting to obscure facts about the bombing of the bridge. On one page, we read: "Investigators combed shards from the collapsed bridge for signs that it had been blown apart" (18). Within a matter of pages however, the reader is offered, in the exact same language, different information: "The bridge remains intact today, despite reports it is long gone" (20). Rather than simply crossing genres, Gladman superimposes them onto each other, using visual and linguistic genre expectations to undermine the role of the genres in the text. These techniques seem innocuous at first, but they eventually put the reader on alert, constantly interrogating the indeterminate nature of the text, the frustrations of genre constantly present. This constant present of frustrated genre, however, ultimately builds into its own genre, and the reader can, with a degree of certainty, expect the text to behave in a certain way.

There exist a number of works that are often described as indeterminate, which are more difficult to classify because they exist in a limbo state between genres. One of the creative processes of reading is finding a determinate location for the indeterminate. Time, consideration, and discussion, through and in the act of reading, will always genre a text. Often, though, texts of an indeterminate nature have not had time to become determined. Leslie Scalapino's *Horse Horse-Floats Horse-Flows*, exists in a world which cannot yet comfortably or accurately define it within the strictures of genre. She uses large prose blocks, those stable monoliths in which we usually find meaning, and syntax that resists our best efforts of understanding the language it holds. Visual clues must be ignored, and because the syntax of the text violates our typical expectations of the way language behaves, it must constantly be re-evaluated. Throughout the text, we run into language like this: "While the existence of any thing is not tied to his love whether they grind any individual as if equal with any other or not, that hierarchy senseless in that there is actual occurrence, action is the death of experience also, too (to)" (90). In this disorienting syntax and language play, the reader might have a difficult, if not torturous and impossible, reading experience. The text initially appears unrecuperable, but initial impression here, like with other cross-genre texts are misleading. If there are no patterns to be found in the syntax, if meaning cannot readily be made of the language, and if structure is of no help, are these not expectations to read by? These expectations may fall outside what might comfortably be found in most texts, but there is no denying that they are a means of approaching the work.

Clearly cross-genre literature is not same thing as non-genre literature, but the two might have a closer connection than surface appearances might indicate. Renee Gladman says, "the crossing of genres...leads me to think of the infinitive *to reach*" (Person 47). The impetus behind the creation of cross-genre texts is the attempt to move reading and language outside itself, to open it to new possibilities, contexts, and realities. New uses of language always require new forms, and these new forms variously manifest themselves as cross-genre or hybrid texts. In the blending, mixing, and subversion of expectation, readers must develop a new vocabulary by confronting the limits of their own language, and ideally they will exceed those limits.

Though the texts themselves can be understood according to genre expectations, varied as they may be, there is always a consciousness behind those texts, and it might be in the consciousness of these writers that non-genre literature resides. The texts themselves are merely the failed attempt to express something in language free of the constraints of genre. C.D. Wright seems to have had this in mind when she said, "I want my writing to be exploratory and animate and profound. I want to touch my blameless dreams, even if to date it is all paper and mistakes" (61). Here she notes a desire she has for her writing, but because of the limits of writing itself, she expresses the failure of every attempt she made to achieve those desires. Language exists and functions in such a way that the written manifestation of it will always be understood through the mediated experiences of those interacting with it, and as such, it is always vulnerable to genre.

Thought, however, is not vulnerable to genre. It exceeds genre in all cases, and can only be tangled with genre expectation when thought gives way to languaging on the page. Philippe Sollers contends that "written writing is only a fragment of the writing that is lived and thought" (199). Here he delineates a space in which writing exists without physicality, without fixedness, of writing that exists outside textuality. Writing that exists outside

textuality cannot be encumbered by genre because it is always moving, reversible and never fixed. Sollers further notes that genres are “maintained only by a convention that pays no attention to the economy and field of writing” (204). Genre conventions restrict our notion of what constitutes writing, in which light we fail to see we are always writing, always exceeding genre, operating toward its negation. Here we can see that what is at stake in the literary experience “has nothing to do with ‘literature’” (196). It has everything, on the other hand, to do with the experience of the individual outside textuality, where we are always “writing, in our dreams, our perceptions, our acts, our fantasies, our thought” (203). This type of writing, outside and away from physicality, occurs on the level our transactions with thought, and it is this type of writing which produces non-genre literature.

Helene Cixous describes the experience of entering the space of this transaction with thought, where Sollers’ conception of literature actually occurs. She explains: “When I close my eyes the passage opens, the dark gorge, I descend. Or rather there is descent: I entrust myself to the primitive space, I do not resist forces that carry me off. There is no more *genre*” (Cixous 139). This fragile space of non-genre literature is freed from the physical act of writing, and this form of writing contains the moment of freedom and the simultaneity of silence, where there are no formal restrictions because there is no form.

Non-genre literature is the ever present nudging of consciousness toward what has not been realized. Textual writing attempts to provide a map of thought, of a representation of consciousness moving through the world, but this attempt will always be restricted by the conventions of writing itself. It is always done in the symbols of language, recognizable down to its smallest component of letters and punctuation. The physical act of writing cannot achieve anything without genre, but in the realm of writing outside textuality, where non-genre literature exists and is performed free of fixed, symbolic gestures, it can never be pinned down to expectation of any sort and cannot be bound by genre.

3. Document one of *Eits*. This demonstrates the constraint as described in the Introduction, presented as a table or map.

4. Document two of *Eits*. This *Eits* is a work of fiction, a non-traditional novel whose structure is largely determined by an Oulipian-style constraint. While I do use the constraint in the Oulipian sense, I’m more concerned with the use of constraints generally speaking. Of course, generally speaking, all writing is based on constraint. Language is a constraint. The sentence with its inherited grammar, the way the page is used, top to bottom, side to side, whatever rules we’ve inherited, et cetera, are all constraints utilized in the creation of text. Marcel Benabou says, “In fact, it is rather difficult...to imagine a poetics that does not rely on rigorous rules and, more generally, a literary production that does not involve the use of certain techniques. Even the most rabid critics of formalism are forced to admit that there are formal demands which a work cannot elude” (40-41). Even the very act of writing, with all its own inherent constraints, is a form of constraint placed on thought.

Document two of *Eits* is what most people would consider to be *Eits* itself simply because it fills the most number of pages with visible language, however, as already noted, it contains no more or less actual language than document one. As an iteration of document one, document two is actually merely a subset of the first.

5. Helene Cixous: “Between the night and the day there is a long vivacious but fragile region where one can sleep even while being awake, where even standing on two legs one is still a phantom, where the doors do not yet exist in us between the two kingdoms...It is a fragile region that can be shattered by a too brusque gesture, a magic hour. What I write then knows neither limit nor hesitation. Without censorship” (140-41).

6. Here we see language (the magic hours) that must appear in this first sentence, as dictated by the constraint. As noted in the Cixous quote above, this language reaches farther than the constraint itself to something else entirely. It’s also important to note that the appearance of “the magic hours” in the previous section was not required by the constraint, but as a means of developing the work, required language is often anticipated in sections before it is required to appear.

7. A reference to the song “Flightless Bird, American Mouth” by Iron and Wine. This in keeping with the constraint of *Eits* coming from another band, Explosions in the Sky, and in the spirit of referencing the everyday. Explosions in the Sky was chosen for a number of reasons, and perhaps the most simple is, Why not? I was listening to their music when the idea came to me. As a band, they fall outside mainstream genres. Perhaps the most important reason to this project is that their music is just music. There is no singing, so there is no language in their arrangements. The only language then is in what exists outside the music – the album and song titles. I saw this as a way of exploring a limited language set, as already discussed, without being influenced by language in the music itself.

8. *Eits* is a novel in the vein of Robbe-Grillet’s conception of the novel (instead of like Robbe-Grillet’s novels themselves), which he believes “must invent its own form. The book makes its own rules for itself, and for itself alone” (New Novel 12). To this end, the novel shifts in form, providing a texture to the space and reading experience of the novel, all in hopes of creating a space in which content and form inform and push each other to new limits. Martin Nakell notes that “since content and form continuously create each other, the more inventive the form, the newer the content. Every new content requires new form, every new form creates new content” (Narrativity). *Eits* is never satisfied to settle on one form for too long, and it is in the movement between forms that the narrative develops in interesting ways.

9. As a work of fiction, and in the effort of creating a fictional work, I look to Ronald Sukenick, who states:

Fiction constitutes a way of looking at the world. Therefore I will begin by considering how the world looks in what I think we may now be coming to call the contemporary post-realistic novel. Realistic fiction presupposed chronological time as the medium of a plotted narrative, an irreducible individual psyche as the subject of its characterization, and, above all, the ultimate, concrete reality of things as the object and rationale of its description. In the world of post-realism, however, all of these absolutes have become absolutely problematic. The contemporary writer - the writer who is acutely in touch with the life of which he is part - is forced to start from scratch: Reality doesn’t exist, time doesn’t exist, personality doesn’t exist (New Tradition 35).

So I start from scratch, creating a malleable world, a world in which characters will change, their names will change, they will explode and reorganize, they will always have within them the constant potential to shift in time and space. “They may,” as Robbe-Grillet comments, “themselves suggest many possible interpretations; they may, according to the preoccupations of each reader, accommodate all kinds of comment” (New Novel 22). In order for this to happen, characters must, according to heriberto yepetz, be able to feel “as if composed of bubble gum. a character is not a stable thing. a plasma. characters should always melt” (160). I’m interested to see what happens to characters after they melt, what shape they will take on, what they will do. The character that will likely change the most in this project is the setting. Setting, no matter how much we try to separate it, is always a character, and so it too must be like bubble gum and plasma.

10. One of the names she will go by. She also Yasmin, Yasmin the Light, Jenny, etc. Naming is one of the techniques utilized to destabilize characters, to allow them to melt, to force our perceptions of them to melt into a plasmic sense of time, space and identity. Renee Gladman says that “every sentence is a potential problem of time, space, and identity. That is, the manner in which we go about articulating ourselves *in* time and *in* space and *as* time and *as* space is various and debatable” (This That). I would contend that naming functions in the same way (writing a sentence is a form of naming after all), so the statement would read: every name is a potential problem of time, space, and identity. So the shifting of names will heighten these potential problems, for us as readers, and for the characters themselves.

11. As a method of achieving texture, and as an attempt to disrupt the narrative the constraint will inevitably help shape, I insert text created through different means, often with a different syntactical texture, or a different thematic concern. Kenko notes, “In everything, no matter what it may be, uniformity is undesirable. Leaving something incomplete makes it interesting, and gives one the feeling that there is room for growth” (70). This attempt to disrupt the narrative shaped by the constraint will of course contribute to the overall narrative. Disruption will become part of the narrative. As Laura Moriarty says, “Narrative is everything. It is sequence...is the air we breathe or the very act of breath and then breath again” (209). Narrative is inescapable, even as we seek to disrupt it. The disruptions become part of the sequence of narrative, and thus will call for more disruptions, and ever more, and finally, in futility, we must allow the narrative to rest, until disrupted by the reader. Any formal structure, be it language, sentence, paragraph, etc, generates narrative, and the more varied the form (leaving a feeling, perhaps, of incompleteness), the more potential for invoking an active reader to develop his own narrative.

12. While this is at the core a piece of fiction, many will want, at times, to call this a hybrid, or cross-genre text at times, but neither of those terms are particularly appropriate. My hope is that the text functions at the interstices of genre. A hybrid or cross-genre text indicates that the work is encompassing several genres, and while this may be true here (or nearly true – I can’t quite commit), it doesn’t accurately reflect the aim of the text. That is, I want the text to function in the space between genres. By placing the text between genres, rather than encompassing many, the text can function in ways independent of genre expectation.

Jonathan Culler states:

Some of the most important expectations and requirements for intelligibility are enshrined in the various genres. A genre, one might say, is a set of expectations, a set of instructions about the type of coherence one is to look for and the ways in which sequences are to be read. And that is perhaps what is most fascinating: the astonishing human capacity to recuperate the deviant, to invent new conventions and functions so as to overcome that which resists our efforts. These texts which fall at the interstices of genres enable us to read ourselves in the limits of our understanding. Our most profound experiences may be that of frustration (262).

We've arrived at a time where the terms hybrid and cross-genre come with their own genre expectations. We know how to read them. My hope is to approach a level noted by Philippe Sollers. He states, "It will be clear that on this level distinctions between 'literary genres' inevitably collapse. They are generally maintained only by a convention that pays no attention to the economy and field of writing" (204). By placing work in the interstitial space between genres, we allow readers to invent new conventions, to develop new expectations to use until another work in this space comes along to confound those expectations. By creating new expectations, readers create new taxonomic categories that can then be circumvented in subsequent efforts.

13. You may recall reading this already. It appeared early in the text and now reappears for a few purposes.

1. Kristeva has her notion of intertextuality, where all text borrows from other texts in the world. This, however, is a case of intratextuality. All texts, in some form or another, feed off themselves, and in this case the text is a linguistic appropriation of itself, set in a new context, delivering a different emotional register. From this point on, text from earlier in *Eits* will be retrofitted to work in these slightly alerted contexts. Sometimes, only a few words change, sometimes none at all, things happen to Profi and Yasmin the Light together now instead of only to one, and so on. This allows the residue of earlier text to carry into the latter part and build over time, to accrete into a new space where Profi and Yasmin can reside together.

2. Musicality. This is after all a constraint whose genesis resides in music. The texture of *Eits* begins to feel like the texture of the music of Explosions in the Sky. Heavily layered with reprisals, moving in and out of various tempos and registers, the music of Explosions in the Sky utilizes a number of musical forms. The use of intratextual assemblage helps *Eits* begin to develop this same feel and become musical in its own right.

14. I'm trying, syntactically, to condense, as much as possible, actions, images, ideas nearly down to lists. Part of this has to do with narrative speed. Part of this has nothing to do with speed and everything to do with sound. While lists tend to indicate a hierarchal structure, or a narrative order, they do so less than if the same information was transmitted in a less condensed fashion. Space, or the lack of space, indicates how much importance to place on one thing versus another.

15. The white space surrounding this text, and found throughout this project is not negative space. In a medium dominated by text, many call it such, but this denotes an absence, that

something is missing or that something has been erased. Nothing is missing. Nothing has been erased. Just because something is not visible does not mean it is absent. A more accurate view is to consider this potential space. I again invoke Queneau's notion of an infinity of words existing between two words of line. Likewise, there must be an infinity of words surrounding that which is visible, an infinitude of possibilities awaiting a reader. This seems significantly different from denoting an absence. It is instead a denotation of abundance if only we had eyes to see. If the act of reading is as creatively vital as the writing itself then this interstitial space is one that allows the reader the opportunity to consider the potentialities of the text. As Blanchot says, "Reading is more positive than creation, more creative" (Gaze 97). This potential space is one deliberately provided for the reader, a place for reader, text, page, and author to interact, to intermingle, to discover the infinitude of combinatoric potentialities of the work.

16. Yet another musical reference. This time to the band Years Around the Sun.

17. Now that you have read nearly the entire text, how would you pronounce *Eits*? I rarely speak it, and mostly read it with no sound. To me, it is more of a picture than something to be uttered. When I'm required to pronounce *Eits*, I often vary how it is done in order to avoid pinning down one option. Sometimes I might pronounce it "Eights." On other occasions it will be "Eats" or "Ights." Though rare, I might even just spell it – E I T S. All this points to one of the aims of the text, nothing new here, which is to allow the reader his or her option in matters of reading. If the title is this flexible, my hope is the rest of the text will be as well. In keeping with the introduction to this project, there is another element to combinatorics and potential not yet explored: the utterance of words and the potential for variance housed within those words. *Eits* as a word and as a project points us toward this exploration.

18. Aside from the already stated purposes for *Eits* to demonstrate the combinatoric possibilities inherent in language, my hope is that this exploration of potential highlights the reciprocal relationship between writing and reading, a "new space," as proposed by Sollers, "where these two phenomena could be seen as reciprocal and simultaneous, a curved space, a medium of exchanges and reversibility where we would finally be on the same side as our language" (195). As *Eits* builds upon a limited language set, it explores and exploits the combinatory possibilities that language allows for both writer and reader. It demonstrates that all combinatoric potentialities, visible or not, always co-exist in the same time and space, and in this infinite space, individuals are invited to be writers and readers in simultaneity.

19. An endnote to the endnotes. A disruption to a disruptive practice. This is perhaps the third document of *Eits*, but it is more likely a continuation of document two. The stated purpose of these notes is to provide critical context to the work, but stated purposes and the actual functioning of things are very different. The actual function of these endnotes, intended or not, will likely be to further disrupt the narrative. Never mind that at times they've appeared to be attempting to instruct. Forget about anything you may have gained in terms of knowledge about the text. They function as a means to disrupt how you read the narrative. They've invaded your reading process, your subjectivity, told you a specific way to think about what is going on in the text. There's something to be said about seeing that innocuous number, flipping pages and reading the corresponding note. Or better yet, seeing the number,

trying to ignore it (but you've already seen it, so you can't entirely), and then, coming to the notes themselves at the end, you try to remember what they reference. Page flipping becomes part of the process again. These notes become part of the narrative itself, and this is not a result unique to *Eits*: it is simply how endnotes function within a narrative.

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