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ORPHAN EYE

A Thesis Presented

by

M. M. WILSON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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English
Program for Poets & Writers

ORPHAN EYE

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M. M. WILSON

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ABSTRACT

ORPHAN EYE

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These are poems written by M. M. Wilson between the dates of August 2015 and March 2018. These poems were written in Belchertown, MA and Amherst, MA.

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Introduction

What would a bodiless, a hostless, a parentless eye see? The orphaned eye would lack interpretations from the body, the brain, the world, society— nothing would inform its seeing. The poems here waiver between wishing that could be true and knowing that it is not. There is an awareness of this unshaped eye as a pretense, but also a continual denying and accepting of that awareness over and over again. Ultimately, I believe, each poem rejects the artifice of an orphan eye as not only impossible, but useless. The constraint of seeing things for what we are, for what we know, is what creates our sense of beauty. If our perception was not altered by this constraint we would live in reality, which is not just useless, but terrifying. How awful it would be, I can't imagine, or rather, I can imagine and that is the pleasure. In a way, then, the title of the collection is a sort of negative definition.

I feel a bit guilty for a title that seems to favour the eye over the ear, because sound is the impetus of all of my writing. Sound is so fundamental to the meaning of these poems that I would hope that it couldn't be overlooked (or under heard?) The sound is what creates. To me, the sound of language exists very much on the page. It is like a form of synesthesia where the eye's movements and recognitions take part in the act of hearing the poem into being. The words, even the letters, are textures that I work with to form the final surface that will create meaning through the act of reading. I want readers to read these poems as musicians play their instruments, acknowledging the need for both player and instrument to result in music.

The child's series of poems wants attention here, as well as in the collection, so I'll indulge in talking about them. The three poems somehow contain the rest of the collection, but they contain it in the passive way that a clear, glass jar contains the light of a candle. They exist with and around everything else, including me. I needed them. I still need them. For obvious reasons, I prefer the lullabies to the nightmare. However, the nightmare feels necessary to the lullabies. The very fact of having the lullabies, their existence, created the need for them, a kind of self-birth. Thus came the nightmare. My hope is that all of the poems in the collection are simultaneously themselves & their motivators, the destination & the verb. It is through these dynamic acts that I hope reading these poems will make you stay in the moment of your, their, and our need.

I'm indebted to other writing, music, language, silence, stillness, and the present moment; it is the idea of the absolute presence of the self and the moment that has released me to to listen for what I might find, destroy, remake, or witness in these poems.

To think the world is one thing
 when really it's a lot of little things

that make you scared
 of reading in your own backyard—

—not the being there,
 but the you being there, like a tornado

or explosive. You think
 of yourself, picture yourself, sitting there,

what that will mean for you
 when tonight you dissolve into every

part of light you see.
 The underwhelming idea of body as if

to feel were not a terrible thing.
 The world in every moment shattering

all your ways of being
 with bird wings and traffic wind, the sound

of a sliding glass door,
 the shade in wood pouring.

My Sister

I was born upside down and backwards,
breech, baby B. That's why
my name is Megan and not
Marissa— an alphabetic fate my parents believed in.
But I was the bigger one by two ounces
and in some ancient, barbaric culture
I would've lived and she would've been sacrificed
or left in a frozen Siberian forest
but instead we were made identical in the same
horrific, geometric-pastel 90s American fashion.
I can't tell who I am
in any of our old photos. I guess
telling us apart wasn't needed before
we were easily classifiable and
I learned to hate her with everything I had
because there was a right way and a wrong way
of doing everything, like going to church
with dad when everyone else had stopped
because he couldn't go two sermons
without fighting the pastor. I saw
a million churches all wrong.
When I finally got away
you'd think I would've been happy,
empowered, relieved, and for a second
I was, until without an alter
to sacrifice the world on
my brain began letting itself
of all this blood until I finally
told my sister how much I suffered and she said
I know you think I'm an idiot but I'm not
and I loved her for that. We're now all equal
in a world controlled by a distinction need,
a need to say you are not me, how
dare you even think that. I love
how I can turn to my sister and say
what are we thinking today and she'll say
shut up you're talking like a poet again

and maybe I am. For once I think
crying might be useful if I say
tell me about that dream you had
where everybody loved you
and you had a million friends at school
because I've had that dream too
and I'm no longer afraid to admit it.
But some people can't stand the idea
that they aren't special, that they don't have the right to grab
whatever they can because they can like
my sister when we'd only just got here,
and we wanted it all, so she grabbed
my arm and put it into her mouth until I gave up
whatever piece of plastic I was holding
whenever she came near.
My mother had to ask the pediatrician
if she should bite her daughter, but no
that wouldn't have worked, I needed to be the one
to show my sister what pain was really like
and our poor mother had to coach
resistance until I really believed
that I could do something, that my own mouth
was capable of sending signals to the outside
that I am you, even if you can't see it
I'll make you feel it, and my sister
even before a year understood that.

Considering If It Were Yes That

→

The same feeling you get when leaving through an emergency door like a burst of I don't know into something warmer you think is warmer. How does it work like that— all the yellowness the sand and outer space and you in the middle falling, falling.

→

For the sake of as much we are polite
and do not ask to lay our heads in laps
each other's what could be only cursory,
the this is what we know—
what screaming could I walk on you,
my searching fingers in your open mouth.

→
Considering if it were yes that
then yes, that fleece drinking
a warm stove blackening soft
the wish of a catalyst nine p.m. arrived
snow drifting louder down upon your face
and I thought we were dancing.

→

I confess that I fear to love & vice versa.
All of that I hurt myself in a book of walls.
Pages made of mountainside. Great big aggregate
funneling down all desire & run from.
When offered the moon I neither rise nor fall
but lie still pretending to be my own ocean.

a child's lullaby no. 1

the she-
bear
runs there
in the wild

the wild there
runs
like the stars
when you see
too far away
all at once

the she-bear
runs there
to the stars

in the morning
the she-bear
comes home
steps from the stars
into the stone

the she-
bear
runs there

The Butterfly

There is a place you go
when no one is watching.
It is a cradle of birds in flight
carrying the last snow on Earth
to a prisoner's head, already sacrificed
to the indoor flies of December.

I have been killing myself all over the place.
On the ceiling, on the table, under the bed
more than once, in the mirror, in the bathtub
actually the lake, or was it the ocean—
 that fat dog chasing a black butterfly behind me
out of time, always at night.

The Light Years

A calf to the blue
light swimming
around you

it watches you whole
and looming
fills the space

Our bodies burn out
across the room
the divergent

celestial rays of drums
calling out to each
how indigo blooms

into desiccation
fevered wild in knowing
we have counted
so many days

Born At Night

after James Schuyler

I.

If it's you or me bumblebee
crooked hanging in the corner
let it be me. Again. The humility
of being horizontal, prostrate on
the lacquered floor, stained a
deep coffee, humming a taste
like all the water that's ever been
steeped into the boards. This is not
lonely. The sunlit particles convulsing
towards a current of air cold
and fallen down the stairs to
greet the soiled stepped-on sheets
of reflective magazines pushed through
the doorway. Good morning crows,
good morning picture frame, good morning
table legs and hidden outlets.

II.

A life mimed and molted
into tea bags of peppermint divulging
a systematic passage of time
punishing the wood grain for not holding
and not loving the rug enough.
There is no way of being on the ground
without feeling close to the dirt,

its smell the only strand what crawls
up through the cracks & vanishes.
A delicate life setting bright
on an old day with tulips
growing. Green sharp tips exposed
to the light of a living room
upholstery, mugs, books defolded,
a life worn out and shortened
like dismembered bulbs forever
among shards of glass, tap water,
covered by a film of dust, a life like
a golden pony running at the horizon.

She put water in a vase and wished for flowers.

the risk of a bud
before the bud
the distinct hard edges
of the first unbled move
towards something like saturation

the still deep blue
moments like a room
steeped into being
the run-off
milky and bright

As It Were

after Marianne Moore

You've heard a cicada

who's known a heartbreak, but
is, in his compound gut,

a jellyfish or red-

juice tooth of beautiful
defeat. How suitable

the mantis can repent

without his head and yet
Bertran de Born's beset

with grief! Enzymes that melt

the tender soon-to-be
butterfly will still leave

the crawler's mind intact

with fear. I once did see
a disembodied bee

thorax and face crawling

toward an empty beer
can to die without fear;

as Cato with his sword

or as loved dogs, sadden,

do starve. Death is pretty

when all the ugliness

is seen; a dead brown cat
freezes on a mudflat

near the highway road— so

the fur's ripped from its tail
showing the skin so pale

like the milky whiteness

of baby teeth displayed
for science, all arrayed.

Mother's Loss

I mourn a picture of your gravestone
It is background for years
 without contact

Someone else has your number
so I can't not have it
 anymore

I am sick from wanting
whoever has it to die
to make dead again the line
I lost and must stay
I lost

again you have missed it all
which missed you back buried
alone wanting to get away
from where you are but not you
and I can't

 in frames you
in my life my young life
I see that photograph daily
I wonder a bad thing
to see you again & again
 falsely
not to see that I will never see
 to act otherwise

a palsy to my own heart
not fully having the loss
feeling not the absence
you are you were
a great suffering

a tower
of sacrifice your early life
lifting your own
father's spleen to the ambulance
when the cops took you
again
home to your own mother
later
lost her living—
your biggest fear I know

can I take solace
you lived not long enough
to lose yourself lose me
your baby youngest you called
last for yourself you tried
so much not to continue
the loss that is
a constant (not) there

to keep up that bearing power
you spoke
you said the things of life
its awful truths to learn
I can't help
but think you
were prophetic of yourself
you said

then you die
did you
was it
I am afraid
alone in death
you know it

The Moon in Its Low Chamber

I sleep
upways into
the morning I
cannot sleep
at night

anymore
the light
is always on
in the sky

a box of holding
light, a box
containing it
all bright
I am

alright
if I say
I am

a child's lullaby no. 2

there is a bird
that carries a pearl
which everybody knows, which
everybody knows

a caterpillar owns an emerald stone

there is a tiger's topaz eyes
that have seen
beyond the sky, beyond
this side

come the summer
we will know
the sapphire that grows
holding us
in this deep sleep

Pneumonia Complications

maybe perhaps
it'll be like this
the dogs in the woods
sounding off
or a dumb whistle
nodding to the place
in the park
where you are strung out
over a Daisy

even a chainlink fence
can block you in
a red hot air balloon
falls on your head
or you make it out
only to choke
a dry piece of toast
down further

your throat
wrapped in a wool scarf
with loose threads
catching
the crashing plane
you are under
at twenty-four

Aversion

For example, a small snow
gets plowed into a pyramid
of glacial size, a carriage wheel
jutting from the summit
like a proud weathercock.

Or in other cases, the spool turns
faster and faster the faster
it grows smaller but it
just looks that way the men bury it
the less there is the more it is
running out out of control
racing to deplete itself—
Get it over with already!
I know what you're going to do!

Everything in Between

Do snails have hearts

arachnids mollusks even

You are only sometimes what I think you are
A gravity an atmosphere something I run into

I love those white bow ties
like a man covered in bees
I want to catch them
once uncupped

spasmodically flying
a pilot under siege of tickles
make them stop
learned nothing

You are more often an osprey
 riding the wind of a massive clay landslide
I think I am a beetle in that same slide
You flaplessly follow a homing satellite

Could a mouse within that current rationalize it
Or would his humming heart just stop

Summer Is Awful

I am not sentimental, I have been told.

The torpid sickness of personal misting fans and subtropic heat—

I'd rather die in this southwest facing bedroom

than see another person as uncomfortable as me,

because fuck them, right? Adam found out he's been doing it wrong.

The car's climate maker can't keep up either.

It's more of a grinding motion than a pumping action.

Trying Again to Pretend for Reason

Give me this much you know—
the aching milk sounds
a dish time washed over
that my hands so foamed
a great whenness like weeping.

Give me such rheumy eyes,
I am still bovine
and searching at the empty
of people around me,
the lack of how it suffocates.

I ate the coin you'd given me
so easily, as if it were easy—
to seek evidence this happened,
all of this to myself.

How to Something Else

Nowhere on earth offers reprieve
from scenes reminiscent of all
good things, soft terry cloth,

the space behind an ear or postage stamp,
barn lofts, soup broth or mere scent,
& nights so cold your bed must learn to tolerate

more than one person, which liberates the soul
to greater things, when the world becomes
a casual bet between friends, and the only concern

how to grow a mushroom farm
how to keep the mud from getting in
how to make love in a small house

while screaming the periodic table
to confirm your own voice is real
& reaches into the dark sabbath night

where long vigils are each second,
time shrouded in mouthwash, wool socks,
white noise machine on high

but still, the crepuscular sting of knowing
your smell lingers on that chair, cherry
chapstick and five-dollar gin, my love

hell is the only place not to wonder
how someone's ears and nose
can smile so brightly.

We fought them with our teeth

and in our own way
of being
together we have made
wherever birds are born
or cover is formed
spaces of us
where not even
the sun can go

Detritus

Entire mountains
can be found within

to have a crust, a thinness
so likely to break

it almost already has.
All that matter moving

so chaste its company
the gathered dried

foliage quiet in chatter,
resting on the silt the hill

a hidden pace to new
elevations is startled—

the potential delicate
shattering sound

that dead things contain—
the afterglow of earthquakes,

rustling like their mothers.

Orphan Eye

the hem of this
unsettled mind
is hard to find
the velvet pain
of soft and green
which left a mark
with bitter spleen
and followed past
constraints behind
from powers tied
of blue and cream
to rigid molds
and this routine
the rounding straight
and broken kind
of living what
you did not mean

Plastic Furniture

her rounded square kitchen table
up against the wall like a thought
already too small for eating

suggests what was wanted but not
too precisely counting the calendar
is a tally of spite and need

of microwaving from frozen
the congealed and reconstituted
served like a sentence over

the hex honeycomb design
escaping the formica surface
this is a commitment to minimize

the space an unregulated size
of displacement is needed never
really believing in eating there

ideal forming attainable and not
the other way to round
the room she buys a bigger one

I Am Carrying a Body in Rags

Give more it says the muslin wrap
bunching in spots and tearing
over my shoulders I am a water buffalo
Give more my horns say
my steps are slapping leather steps
hot dusty street the mutterings
forward and back I cannot listen
it urges we are rounding the edge
of the civilized now to the jungle
swamp layers deeper and deeper
until you are up to your chin
the body more mud than desire
you can see pen and ink pot
a man asks your name
and your burden answers him

Routine Daily Catastrophes

When it happened, we were all unaware of any change in the weather or any sense of a cosmic importance speeding toward us.

When it happened, I was eating the furry flesh of a kiwi on the balcony of a sunny Saturday morning.

When it happened, we were eating crab cakes on a blue lagoon.

When it happened, the stars were playing poker in the basement of the Milky Way using electrons as antes.

When it happened, the moon was singing love songs about koi to the rainbow.

When it happened, the sun had gone fishing.

We Learned Undressing So That It Became an Act of Sacrifice

remove

the inside velvet

turkey innards

a cartilage moon

milk teeth

assurance claims

revealing sound

endless space

a waveform

between seconds

take in

sea glass

wet pottery

brown sugar on pork

thrilling

porous now

dead skin flakes

the open tongue

for once

we make love

like real animals

Ruin

A leaf came towards me.

A reason of light things.
Tobacco-brown and unglazed,
Dull fragility on its way
To the foreground of me.

How it ruins— to think
I would miss it all
If not for watching
The late comers
To church that morning.

An ease of enthrallment
Tumbled into focus—
Unguided, although I like to say

It came right towards me.

Monster Cat

Pick me up, carry me
on the shelf of your neck
your legs are furry telephone poles
your round, furry baby body
like a lima bean with one big eye
Walk us into the night
with slow easy mile-wide strides
and I'll make you a crown of me
Describe to me the openness
above the trees, the sense of relief
to see multiple landscapes at once
and the air as if you have no
lungs at all no capacity infinite
capacity for all the beautiful cold.

Not Until Morning

At night I think
 every bad thing
anyone has ever
 done to anyone
I see red
 blistering
dissolving
 bleach poured
into the eyes
 of an eleven year old
held down
 by two other
eleven year olds
 you say don't
focus the disaster
 but what
if not the disaster
 you say
the white helmets
 Paris pumpkin
spice the Noble
 but you look
like a spaceman
 and I've just
passed Mars
 flying or falling
will you notice
 going toward any light
extends your shadow
 and brightens it

Otherwise

In a high, bushy crown
of a Ohia tree, a pair
of Akekee are nesting.

The white, dusty spots of lichen
like plaster
wet and dried and
wet and dried and the monogamous
couple has wedged
heavy moss
into the forks of tall, straight branches
with an underweave
of fine, wet grasses.

The dry nut-brown leaves
curl, securing more closely
the nest within.

So well does the nest occupy and fill up
the space it is in,
you cannot imagine
it to be otherwise.

a child's lullaby no. 3

I am peering through
two holes in a wall
the ground
very close to me
floor almost all the space
I see with chair legs
a lamp base
 here I am

a carpet hard
over concrete
I trace a line of contact
rib bones, hips
to the knees
a split moment
to be born in
 here I am

a body knows
laying down
even if it cannot speak
the weight, its own carrion
and it never feels
how it thinks
 here I am

below the spine
behind the eyes
on the floor and under
the moment run away
from disaster

do not come where I am
looking for me
lost in this space the body
I left years ago

I Am Not a Constellation and You Are Not a Tapestry.

We eat eggs at diners we go to together.

Why you salt your burgers is one of the great mysteries of the universe.

You say it's because your dad did.

Our flat is of the East End style.

I brought a vaguely southwestern runner for the hallway.

You put your eighth grade shop class cut-out of a whale on the wall.

I want to take the cast iron pan and when you taught me Lacan.

You will take the flat screen and a sense of what you want.

I go to you when I hate the sound of people shouting over music.

We watch hockey, eat fake onion flavors.

I leave you when I read or start writing.

You leave with a toaster pastry at eight o'clock every morning.

Why I want you to hold me is the uneven heating of the Earth's surface.

Why you do is your business.

Let's go someplace together.

The Still Life

the long grass
long wind blown
matted, heavy

tree, lattice
of leaves—
a small sound
blown open

the grey light
the grey day bore

sing
a little longer

Into More Dark

Try to witness the night
more than stars

 more than street lights—
their shadows
 casting dark into more dark

 — Heat Lamp, bring me some warmth
the sun is on safari
 the children are always fighting

why the sudden mystery
I get lonely at night

and look in the dark—

 something I can't remember