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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Department of English

Creative Writing

Reenactment Season and Other Poems

by

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A thesis presented to the
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of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
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Reenactment Season

and other poems

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Reenactment Season

Here are the shadows: a blue and reddish
petal, a blade or a wing, a sigh or an arrow
quick-culled from its latest leisure.
In this twilight, a flower cannot be used
as a flower and any sound would be wrongly
made. *If you could only keep turning
in the air, I say, hanged and pretty.*
But there are other figures, crossing
my sight and each other. They say again
and again, *the watchword is desire,*
knowing full well that death is faithless
to desire. If you could only keep turning
in the air, old cloud, if you'd hang,
I'd let you droop like absence—
let you still any new light in me.

“High overhead that silent throne
Of wild and cloud betruvelled sky
That makes ones loneliness more lone
Sends forth a crank and reedy cry”

-John Clare

“...even in the limitless, uncharted seas, he revealed his identity, at a long distance, to those who knew him.”

-Herman Melville

God is Calling Me Pilgrim

There are those who walk and disassemble the world
with their minds or know it with their bodies, can make
a sieve of city
walls, and those who lie still, who might hear a voice saying:

let your heart, that stammering bird, provoke into being a lake at your feet

Then God

is speaking: *Your course is a too public way. No one else
should use this road.*

*I revise this. Make, instead, a fortune
in my name. Something private
between us.*

Now call in the cleansing waters.

The sky doesn't open. I'm standing by water.

So I'm land—land spent and land captured.
If my course is owned, is private,
how can I know the world well enough to find fortune?
How can I skirt so close to both danger and remove?

God: *Step out of your house, Pilgrim, past
the calamitous mud of the city. Introduce me
to this world.*

Of course, I will lead you.

Of course. But will I survive it?

God Names Me Pilgrim, I Name the Beasts

I said, Will I survive it?

And He says: *Look to your character's inventory. Take stock.
If there's danger, there's poverty of spirit and glut.
Take heed—shut out
your inheritance, the sulphur of desire.*

I smell the smolder of it on my heart.

*Then look to start your journey soon, Pilgrim. Can you be an open
palm, rising under the sharpest blade?
Can you stand the tetherless months before you find our fortune?
Will you rejoice when your heart at last rises
from the city's mud and through water?
: ay! There's a green field.*

*

my journey moves away from dusk's burn, from the shadow of each
previous denial, the failures
of my old name.

*gather wood and flesh, keep the finest
muscles and brute eyes of other men
close.*

It's lodestone to metal, their love of dirt and earthliness.

Look to your own character. Where do you keep it?

No longer in front—only on either side of me.

*And the shadows? As you said,
they scatter
by every footfall—
toward sea: its salt and promise*

*

Get to shore, gather plank and men.
I find a shore and guide
many bodies—all heaving
into one.

*Watch them: wood, eye and palm
stacking, one following
another, a multitude
of vessels, full and filling—lifted
against the press, the slip of water.*

the sea! always it's churned as a distant creature, now it lodges inside me;

I fear its rhythm, its voice,
saying:
THE OCEAN IS A TUNNEL FULL
OF THE GENITALS OF CHILDREN,
DEATH AND ITS LITTLE APPLES.

Will it harm me?

*You should fear it, Pilgrim. It's made
of a thousand bodies coupling,
of your first death,
and it calls to you.*

Can I survive it?

*Who can tell? Only, it calls
you, it knows
your every name—old or new, given
or taken.*

It knows my name? I must, as pilgrim, take inventory and wonder:

what now could drive lust inward?
if not the sea, what now will plant
a foothold on my soul?

The Pilgrim Loosens the Veil

The life before and the life ever
after is a promise he always makes, is
a promise suspended, is a gauzy curtain.

Let's call this veil death. Or, maybe, a dense fog.
What lies past? God puts want in our hearts.

And women—wanting. Land is
a woman. Everyone and everything is a thin shadow
under the veil. Or a bauble sewn into its fabric. He thinks
if he can hold it, he can own it. So why can't he own it?

God is a fortune, is a Woman and the Pilgrim is an Artist,
a Sentimental Traveler.
His heart is an island, emerging from the ocean.

The neon and impractical ocean.

The Traveler is a Composer

All blooms and spread-wide joints, she is
land, the first song, an endeavor of chords to place
pattern on water, the drowning of flowers.

He loves her wrongly, says

 a lifetime with her would rush
 through him like a thousand
 miniature seagulls, like a train

 hurtling through a moon-shaped tunnel.

He loves her meanly, knocks nightly though he knows
her locked doors are denials—the sheet's rose-colored
spots holding out against him, to their own keening
edges. He dreams of leaving her, of finding green
and green with no more red.

But will she have him? Not until he's gone.

The Traveler Takes Flight, For a Time is Heedless of Time

The sea thrusts against his float; a sea made of bodies—
figures eternally parting, coupling, and parting again. The sea,

a cello caught in deceptive cadence, never resolving, never
wanting of lost men. She wouldn't have him,

poor rover, so he rushes from all havens astern.
She wouldn't have him, the young sir, and he is drawn

on a bed of grief and labor, pushed by the hope
of release, of finding new land. Land without warning—

a pale yellow dress, spread on the horizon. Land without
warning—her body, rising above the violet harbor. Here,

she is a different she, but he knows her by sight—she
is pattern, and she will save him from drowning.

Arrival is an Easy War

These new neighbors of his, they are tight-strung
as curled-lipped bassoonists. They are the only thing
he wants to fight. The new neighbors, low,

lowing, circling, honing in on her, such a sweet,
central note. *She's mine*, he says, and it's a girlish
hiss. *She's mine*. He is so surprised to have found her,

here, again and now she is green, green, with no more red.
No more locks, she loves him dimly, is a satellite
readying for his turn, the first glint of his light. He waits

for when her abdomen, slant as an untilled field, will shift
toward him, toward the halo he'll make: his figure, dark before
half-open shutters. But for now, he's without even the smallest

of her violets, her most downcast favors. Only the hint
of her song is there. And *their* incessant hum—it's made for him
and comes of a deep trembling: their cat gut-colored

flames, the casualties, recorded loosely on the front.
Odd, that he could hold on to such promise. Odd, that his limbs
should remain distinct, almost apart from his hands.

His Her, His Finally

Has the traveler passed desire? The seemingly
unending low-song has left him. In its place, a grove

of cricket legs are folding and unfolding, wooden
wheels hum and screech. He has her now

and the deck of his ship stretches under waves.
He has her and she loves him without knowing

what he has brought. *We cannot take your history into
account*, he tells her. *You'll birth it new; we'll scratch it out.*

Death and the Woman

He brings her fever, he brings her ink. It's not
the first red she's ever seen, but so much of it.
We'll loosen its hold on you. He's sketching her.
She's dying and he's scratching her out.

He pencils in her eyes, thinks she thinks
he's the one who is not quite dead enough.
He makes her again and again—into maps,
into symphonies, into what should set him

trembling. Really, he's only watching her, taking
notes as the sickness moves over her, glazes
her skin, transforms her, the way, he remembers,
violins complicate the simplest of longings.

The Traveler is a Composer, a Curator

He places her splayed knees and stockings
under glass—the traveler is an artist,
a curator of his own past and future.
He takes a bit of her spent flesh, licks it
like a postage stamp, puts it in a case.
He thinks, *is she not lucky to have been,
to have lived through my ears? Yes, yes.
They're all lucky to have died: once,
twice through my eyes, and on my spear,
my map, my cock. And the screams?
They're still on my ears, my map. She is gone
and it is good. She is gone? She was only
a song, a girlish song. She was sharp and, once,
was redless. She is sharp; she is pointed.*
Her shades: dissonant, made
of land, made of skin,
and still pointed at his best parts.

So the Dead Say

A man came as a traveler. He took nothing for the journey, but lay this command at parting: *The dead will be seen no more*, he said. He took no bread, no welcome, and he lay his command at parting.

A People, A Land: A Soldier

The first hook baited is spit upon, sir, then you lay
it in the hull. I left home in company; a tour
made of salt, then bridge, a wall of hot
cotton coming. *Look at them.* Who said it first,

before the pines began their cracking? *Look at them.*
Bells or laughter, the sound stopped short between
the trees and circles of snapped open stalks. The bells,
suddenly tongueless when the first mud-blasted limb went

limp and the picnickers piled up, sir, they clogged
the roads—you saw it too: shouts struggling through
muslin, wheels nubbed down to death. So what
if we took to water? We were the handbrake

on the canoe, the futile start put in motion
by the land and the water. I hate the way they shove
each other, slip, then slap their ripples over us.
Still, we send our lines behind us, hooks, empty,

sir, bobbing to the surface. Look at them, spit
on them—lay them all down, deep in our skulls.

All Havens Astern: Through Landlessness

Do you not know what kind of strange
you are, sir? We're not all made of your brand
of stern stuff—not clinker-built, not stacked
with wood, metal and some grand voice

chattering in our inmost ear. Besides, what would we
want with another world? We could handle any
weather, sir, and even the hard press of months
caught in the same sight and smells. The sea

was the wall we held our want against. And what
have you brought us to? You opened us,
exposed brine, the much vaster blue yearn
in our gullets, told us one day, our skin

and bones would scatter until there was nothing
between us and the sky and the ocean—no more
loneness, no deck to splint upon, only us, floating
into welcome and pastlessness. And then? What

did you do then, sir? You took us ashore, put her
soft body in our hands, showed us how easy it is to part
her legs. *Like slicing butter*, you said. What are we
to do now, sir? How can we hope our flesh

will clear easy? How can we leave this world when
our hunger has found such a feast, such a docile meal
to fasten on? Don't look at us that way sir, it's you
who set this stone inside us, you who told us we'd float.

A Guide, A Land: The Map

*You are the history of your own adventures, you say, and here,
you point, our past may lie*

*on either side of us. Not a curtain, weighted and thrown
over to smother the players; not a fog*

*of parchment and font?—the past is only
on either side of us, mountains down*

*at the place in between, valleys scrolled even. SCRATCH: you motion
away. SCRATCH: hunk of tree, hunk of field. SCRATCH: of each*

*and every blade of them—all gone, sir, your shapes are moving outward
like mold, like loss taking over. I marked*

*a pleasing sweetness in you. Your harbours move
me as sonnets.. I see you are amounting,*

*breathing your own life in. And you are
sighing, sir. No, moaning—blithe*

*as a chimney starling in summer. More
than a series, more than operation, I knew*

*I marked a pleasing sweetness in you. A tongue isn't a mouth, sir, isn't
quite a spike pointing and your breath is russet as you move nib across*

*stomach to lobe: the pen and the guide
playing point and follow, point and follow.*

The Shore is Bold and I am an Inland Creature

If I am sir and this sir is a bird wing's beat if it is shaking and fearful in me, sir, then how can I not call on your voice to smother it? If I am sir or

a skin and scheme for you, sir, and sails unfurl on either side of me, and if they are great yattering snow fields flexing in desire, it is not

by my design, sir. I am a shell, a fragile house and I am cracked by them. I am a glass, I do not wish to be, sir, and I am waiting for you to take me, sir, set me, then splint me on your palm.

Forever Is Always Knocking

Dear Unhinged: Fixed
in position, uncovered, my catching
was easy. Chairs already contorted
around you, and floorboards bent and breached
upon your approach. Is anyone left

to wonder how many
directions you came from,
or in which nights' wake?

Dear Foundation: I wished
for mortar, was given glass
walls. On them hang a flock
of shields, a lion
to doze at each entrance.

Beneath, a field of irises—a solid math
made of globes and women. After it breaks,
there's the mud of lost petals
and blades, tiny rungs
fractured between seasons.

Dear *Please Stop* from Me-in-Corners: You clamored
at every lock, brought in a circus of raw
velvets and multi-limbed creatures
to take over (a good den
 to bid on me, the inhabitant;
 my muscles—millstones,
 the roof that binds me as host.)

Dear Sky, dear Sun, dear Sir, dear, dear
Whoever: Apologies
 for my pilferer's sight,
 but can you not rest
the light as it slips down the neck
of a single skeleton key, or place rags
of ether on the snouts of the lions
that stretch within me?
I have pressed buds down
accordingly, set a century of dawns
in just the one eye—impossibly
perfect, shut against the inside.

Light Take Passage Here

If I am sir then I am blind and broken. I have taken
bread, I have taken welcome. Behind me, the country
becomes more barren. *You did not say it right.* I do not
say it right. Behind me, clouds crack out
of sky and into pastlessness.

If I am sir, then I am voice and ink and maker of silence. Steerer of ships, I
fly sail in dead weather. *Flap your silly wings, snow
bird, your body is a yattering field.* My body is only a field, a
shelf, lined by dust and night. My body, a page,
arching toward desire.

Partial Twinning: Plays and Poems

: wild with blood

1. Manual

Learn first to notice the light an animal
leaves in its slaughter—it seems a little.

It is a little—just a rattler with a marsh-wren
by the belly. When the wings are

width-spread and trumbling, it looks almost
a carefree thrushing. This season is near

over. The next will be dim as a spike
and bright as a limb. This is all

that's promised us: every day,
a new cloud-hooked gift, a something more

than other. Yes, we could easily be eaten
by hours—listen as the grief of each muscle

sings, then wait for the body to slip,
bulb and seed. But I tell you: if God was all

we had, the chorus of our limbs could not take
further instruction. And if I was all that God had

besides His first loneliness, He might see
how my motions mimic the loll and slash

of the out-of-door prowl—or how I pretend
to know the first thing about anything, how

I make my tongue shine.

2. History

among towering trees, within a locked border there's no one left to enter into—the land is a blight, a footprint full of footprints; the air—heavy with spice. a time of a different sort—that's how we'll call it. a muck made entirely of flesh and a nut-glut season thick enough to drown us. us of a different sort: we lie down or we totter. us after the nut-glut and the sun low enough to make an arboreal star of its squinting. canopies upon canopies—the trees are eating the light. if we climb for it, you'd have our bodies move like golden gliders darting through branches. but on the ground, I could find you, so much of you, I'd bury my cache for later—my store ready in the mud for forgetting. given time think you'll grow there? given wet and given time we could grow there—fast and honed as golden lizards; dashing on a most uneven ground; blending ourselves in with cumin, with peppers; warding off whatever teeth that wander toward our insides—we'll sharpen our bristle and think on skin: freshly-made backs, newly-naked and a red welling where our claws just sank. backs stupidly lumbering toward us, under us. blind napes wandering near and we, we keen for them. but where are their eyes? stupid eyeless wonders. and where our eyes? stupid, blind monsters—we have lost our star-sighting and we are dashing.

Conception, then Practice

Late afternoon at the beginning of time—a glittering lake in the background. The stage appears otherwise bare, but as 1st and 2nd interact, screens lift to reveal plants, live animals, the occasional piece of modern furniture.

1st paces back and forth. 2nd is in a corner, sits in the lotus position.

1st: Tree. There, I said it.

First screen lifts. Light shines on a skimpy, leafless shrub.

2nd (snorts): Nice.

1st: TREE!

This time, a large, magnificent oak comes into view. 1st is elated. He pulls out a hidden list and reads aloud.

1st: Magnolia, Pine, Elder, Azalea, Maple, Holly, Hollyhock, Violet, Iris... (etc.)

Plants sprout around the two players. Some are convincing enough—appear real. Others, however, are too brightly colored, or have shoelaces and soup cans hanging from their limbs. Nonetheless, the stage is starting to crowd as 1st continues

1st: Cow, Horse, Rooster, Tuna, Trout, Salmon, Perch, Mouse, Cat, Catfish (etc.)

2nd: Show off.

1st: Lungwort, Elm—Yeah. I'd like to see you try—Dogwood (etc.)

2nd plays with a two-headed puppy, which bleats happily. 1st looks up from his work.

1st: Do you think it's okay if some of these herbs seem to be kind of fuzzy—you know, like wooly?

A lamb springs up stage right.

2nd: I don't really see what the big deal is...about any of this.

Furniture appears. 2nd tests a white Formica dinette set, swiveling in its chairs.

1st: I just don't want to mess anything up. It's a lot of responsibility for one man—setting the world straight for the rest of god knows how long. Sleigh Bed, Bedside Table, Teak Kitchen Counter Set, Granite Italian Countertops (etc.)

2nd: But you're not just one. You looked in the lake and you named us.

1st: That is exactly why you, of all people, should know how easily this process can derail. (*A train's whistle can be heard from offstage.*)

Back to the list. 2nd tears plastic petals off a synthetic daisy sprouting in the roots of second tree.

2nd: I could help.

1st: No, you couldn't.

Still more on the list. 2nd shoves an ottoman, barely misses a stag that grazes on pink and grey grasses.

1st (looks up): Listen. I'm sorry, okay? I think maybe, when this is all over, someone's going to need to apologize. And, maybe, someone else is going to have to go on being us, but, sort of *apologetically*.

2nd: You mean, I get to be....

1st: I'm not sure. (*He balls up the list, looks up helplessly*). You probably shouldn't get your hopes up.

A giant, blue insect waddles from stage left to center, then falls to its stomach, buzzing heavily.

1st: You see? Just look at that thing. Remember last Wednesday? I called it *fly*. Look how flightless, how worthless it's become—fat on the wonder of new beginning.

2nd: Call it *death*, then. Or maybe *sleep*.

2nd stretches out on the newly appeared chaise lounge—snores softly. 1st looks to the lake in the distance.

1st: Fine. Sleep, then.

The sound of the buzzing and 2nd's snoring combined grows until it reaches a deafening volume. Insects are released from boxes and pumped through the ventilating system. They crawl on the crew, the two players. They invade pockets and mouths. A thick rope dangles above; faintly, a pulley creaks. The insect on stage heaves, then alights.

THE END

On Hinges

dear girl you are storied
once first
to adore
covered in fine
hot...

but sent [out]
for failing or falling
[before, under leaf,
canopied]

past lid or light
the shifting roots
[as voice and tendril]
cried

Go on. Stand up. Keep your teeth on.
[given speech
or skin]
this you [think] may be an
other language
as if [through walls]

suddenly you un-
gloved

a pendant
poor moon-tinged

you an open door
[to] a makeshift room

[the miracles he made within]

Pervert's Prayer

Dear cloudy cluster-muck: what charming good luck,
a lucky piece you are—I asked and look! were not a bit of me
a bit hurt. Hurting's for rabbits in the wrong gardens, I say,
and other women's see-thru thighs (thighs like mountains,

the last pair, did I say?) when pressed on table-sides. Anyway,
any which way I find the next lovely sea-fox
or she-bear, I'll bet she'll be bearing teeny
weenies, tequila shooters (no, Pa, please don't

shoot her! Don't sweep gift-stoops laden) with
sparkly o's and precious whatnots. Then what sweet
little mama cubs, all of us—fuzzy-muzzy lady paws
pawing after curious feeling. And you? not

in sight, is what I say. Did you ever think to make the world
all in flowers? Or to dress the city in skirts? What if
it was you skirting red pokers, just a skin-width away
from frying, and me and the sweet cakes—safe

ahead, still sighing? But if a head must fall,
well, put a hand to my neck—feel how quick its grow-
back. Yes, I'd like to keep parts of parts of everyone
in piles. I'd like to tire myself out without trying, yes

god. Yes, god, tell me that want is naught
but an eternal hallway, a row of too bright doors ajar.

I know want is opening

a drawer stuffed with things unmentionable,
is an unmendable garment.

And what if I put it on? What if I wear it through?
Rub its silk down to tissue? Would it dull? Be too dull

to hurt? Yes, don't let it hurt, God—yes, make me
less, keep me dull, God, small and lock-hungry—
and try (just try), to take not as much of me
as what you need, as what is dear.

The Threshold of Domesticity

What keeps a ghost? Intact
privacies, letters unread, letters

labeled AT SEA. If she remembers
to praise the beauty of each lost

astronaut; if he sends flowers
to the furthest, most forgotten

plot: where a woman waits, stares

into lilac-lit water, wonders which
is further: a star or a plot, used

as an address; or where a man floats
over a town that he might only dimly

recall, until he is no longer buoyant,
until memories weigh as much as land.

Junket

(Interior of a log cabin on a snowy night. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, corpulent and half-naked, lounges on a bearskin rug by the fireside. YOUNG MAN, also partially dressed, paces the floor.)

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

The night isn't exactly what
it ought to be: it might be
day, but it can never be light
enough. It is always too late
for light. Day is not dark.
Day is an extension, what
we call work. Work is what
makes day look like
night never can.

YOUNG MAN

I wish you would talk to me. I mean really talk to me. Your words used to land like sparrows on my earlobes. Now they slip in like earwigs.

S.O.D.

What is meant and what is said
should always be the same.
Words, actions, thoughts—
all should be engaged
in a process, though my piece
cannot be won with words
alone. Values and standards
and school must play a part.
I engage in that process
in a systematic way, have,
am currently,
and will in the future.

Y.M.

You mean the systematic way you flirted with that General this morning, the one with the snout of a lion and a zebra's mane?

(S.O.D. rises, walks to a mahogany end table, lights a cigar)

S.O.D.

About all the people we've met today:
I've known them previously
and it so happens they are located here,

in particular those I have not encountered
before. It isn't as if someone is saying
gee, I don't want to know, but I know,
and that's enough for now.

Y.M.

I love you. Do you love me?

S.O.D.

There you go. I asked
that question and I came away
knowing that I have never seen what
you've said. Though I have seen
that courage is needed more
than love at such times.
Years of freedom, years a lot
like these. I've indicated
that, needless to say.

Y.M.

Your incompetence is surpassed only by the tsetse fly's virulence.

(S.O.D. pours a glass from a crystal decanter)

S.O.D.

Drink some port.
You'll feel better.

(The fire roars. Outside, YOUNG WOMAN can be heard)

YOUNG WOMAN

Ooh lala. The snow is dead like angels; the trees, bare as a desert. Whither has
the world's toupee gone?

THE END

Copse Is Green

The bad boys and
even the less bad
boys, they don't come

for you; the leaves drop
beyond your bidding.
Notice how the fields

from some distance
resemble sheaths of hot
linoleum, or how the fat

hive whirl of a turned on
and waiting tractor seems to draw
closer. Walk, instead,

for shade and resting—
past the give of corn
into sapling, around

the flustered dog-cock
sumac. Go and spy
on her, her hanged

tobacco eyes, her cool
and sky-like, a fuller-than
you, or just a silhouette

of someone else's girl
through a split screen
window. Behind her, the sun's

crown narrows; light rages
through the forest. Behind her,
men take the copse branch by

branch—trees yielding down
to furniture; the furniture,
primed to lie down in fire.

Persephone

The town is never as it once was,
it begs now at the gate of the past:
 Shetlands, too skinny,
refuse to take
riders, a field of discarded barrels
 thrum and moan through
spring storms. Certainly there are
children, at least the memory
of childhood, of not wanting (what
 had you named me
 before that day?)

When I come back, I am (no longer
 naked and) willing to bring you
anything. When I come back (I am nameless,
but) I remember your skin, your voice,
 and his hands.

*

It's all right—in winters,
 I go, but I remain
the same. I found (I love
 that first ferocity
of larger buttons,)

a footbridge that played zydeco
 for tourists (the yield of traveling
 zippers,)
and a man who would not leave or
 ask anything of
(your eyes, I'm sorry, they are) rivers
too large and
 dark to move.

Backyard Soldier

First *me*: a number, wool-licked
and powder-itched. Then *I*: a dead pip,

discovered by a bitch (but not 'til after
one hundred years rolled around with me) under
the field that served as my home—a place

of anemic azaleas. Such is my
luck. My leg worth no more
now than a sodden cigar box, a starling

nest, breath gone up in unnamable,
indistinguishable vapors—I am done
for. Let new dusks come rough

or smooth—bid a part of me
by your door. It'll bark at shadows, spook
the ornamental hens, scare the salesmen away.

They will leave their felts on, go at a quick
trot to their station wagons, they will
never see me—any of me—coming.

Not Parcel, Not Liquid

In the beginning, London was a great, empty lake. At first, we knew nothing of it, except that it was the center of the world, and the center of the world should not only be an omission, but should writhe at the icy meet of needle and tangle.

In the beginning, what was glanced was heard immediately. Water swells said *other* and branches claimed *city*. We may have aligned ourselves to the flight of the jackdaws too quickly, because, in the beginning, their wheedle said *safety* and the edges of London did not threaten to soften the edges of our city.

Now, we watch their frenzied mining as they scour trees for green-winged insects, and the corners of our homes dampen, slough off.

Still, we can imagine the birds are as mislaid as ourselves—that their first few motions also resulted in a long track of ellipses leading to the shoreline. *Unknown, unknowing*—their little footsteps singing.

In the beginning, the city seemed to be so full of miracles, how to believe in the ordinary? And we could never tire of it—flame calling out *greeting*, our lashes answering *singe*, the sky a thousand o-shaped surprises.

But below us, the lake stretches on—past gardens, past doorstops and railings—and up to the very hem of the woman who mouths *moon moth, moon moth*—just chanting, cracking, slinging on to paper, the dark font of our bodies, the inky smear of beginning.

I am 43 and I am Afraid

There's nothing outside but downpour:
the fields shrug down like sodden
bedding, the cows, too dumb to move inside.
I am no better than one of them. And you,
are you saying something? I can barely hear
you over the radio and the wind and its
persistent humping against our tin roof.
I'd like to think we are ears turned on
to one another, even as we are the dead ringers
of the sky and land—the habit they have
of reaching for one another. Maybe, one day,
I'll say, *Forgive me*. And I'll mean: quickly
please, before a new geography—the back
of your neck, your silence against the slick
thud of rain on soil—rises up to swallow
our house. *I spoke sharply*, I'll say, *and with evil
words*. And yes, suddenly, it seemed, there was
no water in the air—only a lack and trouble, a breeze
stirring through the Egypt of our mouths.

Seedlings of the Field, Clapping

BIG SHOT *and* REPORTER *sit at a table, smoking long, unfiltered cigarettes.*
REPORTER *begins by asking a question, succeeds in only emitting white noise. She is, however, understood by her companion.*

Reporter: (static)

Big Shot: I don't know. Why would I need
some little reporter bitch? I have voice
enough, more throats than print rags, than eyeballs
and websites combined—why would I need some
itty bitty to step up all *dolce-dolce and pretty please?*

Reporter (nonchalant, pressing on): (—more static)

Big Shot: No, it's not a flip of the heart, or a voice box collapsing
in the years since then and now, not even a fear
of crowds that's hanging me up. I know
I could always forgive me, but what still
turns in my mind like maggots in a soy field is how
I could let some big oaf work
his way up to this mission.

Reporter: (a warmer tone, it's ingratiating.)

Big Shot: Yeah, a real cosmonaut, that one—you know
the type. A mountain, sure, clean hair, edges sharp
as a kitchen countertop, but who keeps
a sawed-off shotgun under the spaceship's pilot seat, really?

REPORTER *plays with her tape recorder and looks over her notes. While she stalls, the light from the window turns firebrand red and yellow. JACKAL, LION, and WOLF enter. A trail of vines and foliage follow.*

Big Shot (*no longer waiting for a question*): The worst part?
I believed in him. Cookooed and cajoled him nice
as a high-class hooker in a steel town. But who,
at that time, wouldn't believe
in the starry wrapped gift a whole new galaxy?
Yes, thank you, daddy! Just what
I wanted—somegreen. Yes, please more sweet
air please. And him a mountain, a real throw
what you killed on the BBQ and fuck
while it burns kind of man. That's the man who
could bring you a planet.

WOLF *slides up to the reporter, gently and firmly places a paw between her thighs.*
REPORTER *doesn't respond, stares straight at the audience.* WOLF *turns*
to BIG SHOT and opens his mouth. His question is the sound of several woodwind
instruments playing different melodies at the same time.

Big Shot (*without looking*): Yes, I believed. (*She stubs out*
her cigarette and lights a branch.) I think it was
to do with the dying. Didn't we all know
we were dying?

JACKAL, LION, and WOLF *start laughing. Their laughter sounds like too many stereos*
on, like a roof caving in on an orchestra hall—musicians flailing and playing at once.

THE END

Clones Sing Through Wire

I.

What stories are found
in space? *As if our house
moved to the middle
of a field with none of us*

knowing, I say, *with none
of us awake*. In space, our
house moved apart, so I
rebuild with wire, with

grain-sized bricks, knowing
we won't be able to carry it.
I say *I want you to learn
green, so learn our eyes,*

and i, he learns and he builds.
I think i could almost
remember. I say *I want you to
remember blue—learn this*

song. My son and I, singing
into space, blue—nearly
black. i, he almost remembers
coos along—the walls expanding,

black shrinking into blue.
I feel as though we are nothing
more than wingless

pigeons, flung in a pit.
My son, a cooing dove,
our walls working outward.

ii.

My father thought we were wingless
birds, alive and unable
to thrash in the darkness, but I
didn't know, as i know now,

how grey can overtake darkness—
how chromosomal wires
cut past the reckoning of story
or song. i want to teach my son

blue—how we would be
lost if our wires refused
song, wouldn't pierce
space. i'll teach him

our eyes—how they open
like the stories of green fields.
But he wants to learn red. i tell
him, *Grey is a blossom*

spreading over space. i tell him,
We are wires, shooting
through absence. He wants to learn
red and instead sees fields

of great grey blooms. I fear he
will tell his son we could only
take so many stories. He'll say, *We are*
wires singing by our silence.

Space is at least part house,
three walls trembling
without bracing. He'll say,
We could only take so many

colors, and they may almost
remember green, think to tame space
like a lawn, master it like a house—

four trembling walls wresting up
in the middle of a field
and none of us willing to raze it.

The Key To Hypnotism

It is not necessary for the operator to know the rules
of the waking brain. Let's say he's shut his eyes
against you and his breath sacs are hushed and wet,
and you, now, are something less. Something barely
there at all—undrawn.

I know you—know you'll want to make
even his water-stained words come
out of him; want his sighs heard. But his skin
is soft sponge, his mouth widened
to a blue undone.

So what to do? Keep a weather eye skinned
for strangers, for anyone new? Why not? You're the operator.
You, could easily impress upon
your subject his first state, his helplessness.
Remember, the operator must be willing

to feign newness, to make room for beginnings—
to allow one false start to follow another,
until, hey! there's a green field, a lover
nimble and able to move in a stiff one's place.

Take him home, Operator, learn your lines,
learn to trace
the air around him with moans, with the passing of minutes.
Then say this (say it with me, and with confidence!):

*The house is heavy; your lids are heavy.
You'll quiet and sleep until
the shadows of your limbs are half-buried.
(you, too, Operator, are more heavy than secret—)*

*This house is a mouthful of glitter; your tongue is heavy.
Don't worry, you won't fall
if you wait until
(tell them you are alive, yet)
the shadow of our hands is buried, is forgotten.*

In This Four-Footed Thing Lies

The evening gathers day by wafts of light, and you,
my little otter, are perched to drown outside
sounds with endless barks, gripings, while I still try
to name what's mine by its fatty middle:
to the slump and gleam of the bedroom ceiling, I say
constellation, meaning *consolation*. To you,
I say *friend*, meaning only that you are here,
flashing tooth and blackened gum to bugs
and pocket beasties—even the clouds will roll,
tender their bellies up. The neighbors, now, are soon
out of doors, their eyes a ready lit-torch progression.
I know they'll take no measure of your talk, the brisk
shifting of your eyes and nose. Instead, they'll crop
on our lawn, kick the grass, sniff our casements,
whisper how their days have been. You'll whine,
flick an ear, say, *Can you believe them?*
And yes, I suppose I'll believe them.

Yet

At first, the clip between the train and its trestles took
surprisingly little: the coins we placed to see
how they'd flatten; the boy who caught his foot

there. The horizon was soon smeared
with it; how the cars parceled the light into strips
until the cornfield was moving, was a movie.
We were glassy as millpond water—unmoving
in the dark. That's how the iron went inside us;
you can see it when we pass before a bright
wick: there—the once distant thrum, the ties
dragging gloom inward. The doctor says
it wants to travel there, to grind me

into earth. *Ah*, he says, making a motion, *I see
your darkness is a sighing thing. Here,
let me light it*, and drives the first track through.