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Kenneth White

*The University of Montana*

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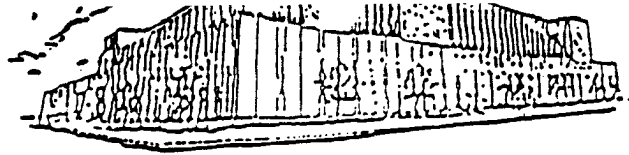
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# TIGERSPRUNG

Poems

by

Kenneth White

B.S. University of Idaho 1996

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

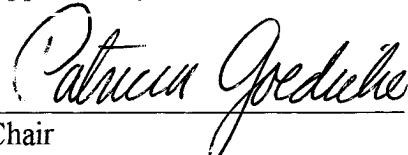
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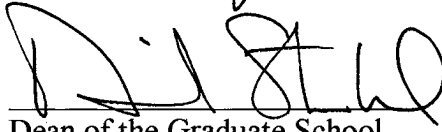
Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

2000

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It is quite clear that the only possession he has (“my skin is all I have to my name” is a common expression) weighs heavily on him. It is still in excess, because having and being do not coincide, and because having is a cause of misunderstanding in all human relationships: I have the skin of an angel but I am a jackal, the skin of a crocodile, but I am a dog; a black skin but I am white; the skin of a woman but I am a man. I never have the skin of what I am. There is no exception to the rule because I am never what I have.

--Mme. Orlan, on Didier Anzieu's concept of "*Moi-peau*"

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**I.**



## PRONOUNCED

The man leans close to her neck; the music  
is too much for conversation, but they are  
experimenting. They are bunsen burners  
turned up too high; bubbles rise  
all around and strange green fire.  
The man speaks into the woman's ear. She nods  
and tugs up the corners of her mouth  
like a movie he's seen before  
that he is in. Even now, something gathers  
around the legs of his chair. One chews  
at the hem of his pants, grooming its whiskers.

Laughter from the last valley. Village brats  
fly to him, echoes to their home, strewing pastries  
and Sega controllers. They have dimples and small eyes.  
He burps and velveteen tree limbs. He tries to stop. He says  
*Stop!* and a little round-faced boy with furry, marigold ears  
falls from his mouth and holds out his arms to be carried.  
The man bites down and runs, surefooted and syllabic.  
Stride for stride with him is the feeling  
that every incarnation is a track star. His keen  
starts like a dog whistle and an urchin  
with marathon lungs starts to pry  
his jaws apart, urgent to get this thing going.

## NO MONOCLE NO WICKED CONSCIENCE

A peeled orange held to the nine o'clock sun. Red cells  
spun in a vial, an amber bladder taut with shining gloss  
and through the open window, light. Rose madder  
shot with spidery purple vessels, inner gold leaf,  
Byzantine, those first hermetic visions of the word afire  
and sound sealed coracles filled with oil, lit adrift.  
In Sanskrit the very word for this, how light begins,  
the sound of it. Stripped from between  
myself in segments, room divided  
against the whirl of the desk globe  
intact, blurring Pacific with Ukraine -- when  
eighth by eighth myself in farflung quarters bound  
for home by clipper ship, steamer, dogsled  
paired with spice and black market tusks  
in the gullet of a Junk, one last run  
unpirated. Matter's fever for matter.

Hold this jewel and any fascicle of fluids  
against each other and atmosphere relaxes,  
flooding cells with a concert of radiant madeira and proof  
of light's particular gravity, unmeasurable, waving  
ambient concern and other lesser arcadia. *In Vitro*, the lense  
contains me, instructs the light between my eye  
and what my eye infects with examination.  
Whose slow shutter opens on the shore  
to the bay where a galleon holds  
its masts in focus for the gulls and the crew  
stands smartly on deck? Who stands at full attention?  
Twinned flags make in a low cloud a glass  
holding back sails, these birds, this Caspian sea --  
simple room open over morning orchards.

## FROM THE VAMPIRE BALLET

Tutued necrophiliacs *grande jete* from stage left to right  
while the assistants sprinkle pressed leaves  
spray-painted to look like bats  
from the catwalk, deliciously precarious.  
On the marley floor, in the light of pink gels  
diffused, succubi drown in pools of their own  
excessive fabric, reflected. The scrim's a dirty sheet  
cunningly lit. I think the crepe capes were a nice choice  
although the glitter's a bit passe  
and Lucy's been at the chocolate again I see.  
Gauzy from the wings, the delighted faces  
impecuniously mauve through cloth; row by row  
arranged, vaguely gleaming, their seats  
loom over the stage, a gallery of lovers  
I'll never meet. I've quit the set  
and the director's daughter, high strung marionette,  
lovely late matinee. I'm missing my entrance.  
A pause for effect, the audience thinks, until  
one wattled gent in a pricey seat huffs upright  
in a hurry -- the first of many-- but only makes it  
three steps before his curtain drops. He rose  
far too quickly. His wife, to her credit caught him  
partially. Someone calls for a doctor. There are several.  
The stage hands heave more leaves down onto the stage.  
People gather their scarves beside gabardined knees  
and three inch heels. The man straightens his glasses,  
brushes himself off. Someone snaps their fingers  
over and over. Our eyes meet, an unexpected draft.  
I see that inside his head a thousand craniums  
finally slide down their pikes. He tries to  
everything. He tries to --  
there, there. We'll take care of it directly.

## AT THE WHALE'S EQUATOR

Each moment suffocates the next.  
The downturned U of the old  
railroad tunnel, open arms, an oilspill.  
He aims for the faint wink of a lighthouse  
above a landlocked reef, ignores  
another's breath in the ink, ignores walls  
with rusty hands, patient rake handles.  
He aims for the distant eardrum as it rises,  
the end of the canal. A new  
exterior shakes itself awake  
and pulls on its thin silver bathrobe  
with the delicate embroidery.  
Nonchalant, into a familiar room  
with a reading chair he strolls  
over a grim rorschach of graffiti. This girl --  
he knows her, head like a thistle, her insistent  
press skyward. The world  
under his feet. *Taxi!* and it comes,  
pulls him again into the amniotic rush.  
To find relevance -- there's his trident  
and dim headlamp. The sky an oilslicked sea  
understood. He is beneath, a miner  
alive in the belly, miner that swings  
his birdcage with its bird inside.

## THE BUTCHER

At night, the shop door locked, he wrestles twilight  
to a copper scab, crop hours  
rehearsing stitches with a curved needle  
and heavy thread. He sews the necks shut  
on the pigs' heads and line them back up  
on the locker shelf,  
but everything he does makes a new wound.

Give him a crisscrossed block,  
two good files and a pail  
to throw the fat in, then stand back  
and remark how sharp  
the grins are sliced in mutton.  
It only takes a moment  
to become the center of his own attention.

Some days he'd kill for the color blue  
that wasn't the filmy blue of cold veins.  
He worries that all his hair is falling out into the meat  
but put a knife in his hand and he relaxes.

Past the smells of the shop and the stares  
of the neighbors stacked  
shirtsleeved in their windows,  
past miles of gray and rust,  
the upturned collar of his figure  
grows smaller as he hurries west  
to seize him in the dark.

## **BEDOUIN**

The dancers couldn't outleap their leotarded carrion  
though at any chance they'd have dropped themselves,  
bulky capes pooled around curved, muscular  
feet, articulate as a scimitar's flash, distant  
vulture beaks. On the balcony behind his ear  
draped the parts of himself most crazed  
and sordid across seatbacks  
like a tawny desert cat. Tumbling chain links  
against hot glass in its throat couldn't drown  
the woman's long fingernails, their whirred hymn  
urgent across the fabric of his pantleg.  
He drove home at four a.m. again  
through drought of another year.

He is not as brave as she who wandered into the dunes  
after the children ate the final hawk and sucked its shins,  
its talons licked to jewels like earrings against a pillowcase,  
but to say he stumbled is a lie. He wanted to lie  
down in all those crumbled carapaces ground to meal  
by time and the abrasive love of other carapaces,  
that he might forget his body by giving in to it,  
shrink to a slit while the shadows increase,  
wheel lazy on concrete, acrobatic  
as multiple griefs. Patient, sensual  
glut, for the moment out of reach.

## CONDEMNED TO SPEECH AND DECEIT

Only the scaffold steps will know, and even then  
the crowd could coat his hair with spit  
or revolt and send him back into the thicket,  
its clever roulette of variable deaths.  
Should failure wink from the capable gleam  
of instruments, he'll ask the merciless outline  
of turrets which archer might lend an arrow. He must not  
confess. His turgid, redolent, sensual sins  
pile up, threaten to bury him or blossom  
with the quick spores of injury Thirty-seven flagstones  
describe his cell. Let him convalesce  
in sedimented wine glasses or let him vanish  
in the snare's brief, portentous O.

As General he lolled in the slow construction of his sheets,  
glossy forehead clear as a shield. No roil of burning wheat  
or its looped black signature. Such expectation  
last night in his lonely garrison. At the feast  
her broad hips were his figment, rolling socket  
to socket with the timbrel's rattle, a promise  
behind gauze curtains. He leered over a platter  
of greasy meats, drained flagons to the bubble,  
every breath engorged with the professions  
of her waist, the wealth of his table.

When I started these books they had no end and now  
I've read them twice. There is a kindness of hours  
when it's light. Who died in the barley harvest  
left Judith in the night to flex her white forearm, cut  
to the spine an army's channeled ligature, then hold up head  
and falchion spattered with Holofernes' caustic  
blood. I dangle from her fist by my roots  
and turn the page. From the door of my internment the maid  
gnaws her lip in dull amaze; after all, my beard  
was so thick, my thighs like masts and now the hound  
of the Assyrians gurgles artesian over his own hands.  
The maid blinks, makes ready the bag.  
Close your eyes and it's over so quick.

**II.**



## ASCENSION

The farmer stoops to make the tin pail ring  
under the Gurnsey's vast, raw udder, under  
the sharp, teat beak of the iron weathervane  
pinned deafmute to the roof.

Its rooster comb spins to the field  
where the long grass will this evening  
meet the scythe's impartial curl.

Growing fat and shitting in the horse's grain,  
the loudest mouse in a barrel of mice  
claws and whistles amid round goodwill  
until the farmer's son  
picks him out by the tail.

Dumb to seduction  
the ship ribbed dairy cow hoists her idiot sail  
across the packed dirt and sets to work  
flinging her whole small attention  
into rubbing the knobbed rind of her skull  
against the board swinging at the corner  
of the barn, while in the reeking shade  
the pig stalls in ooze, quick heaves  
from its long, curved jaw, an unoiled wheeze  
that before each foot cleaved into a hoof,  
each lid closed an eye, began cell deep.

## MY GIG ON EARTH

I deliver hay by scent.  
Nine Hanoverian appetites mull in midnight broth,  
stilted stomachs, intestine miles. How their masticating ways  
crack a morning in half like an apple. A light wind blinds me.  
All the pre-carrot paste from the carrot factory  
wouldn't do me any good during the new moon  
I'm afraid -- dark is dark and the hot wire's electrified.  
The current of surprise lasts all day. Endure the arc;  
it pays to find the break before the horses do.  
This is the life I vowed to leave in the barn loft  
as the school bus snickered away. I staggered  
five gallon twins to the trough among  
the paddock residents and their other qualities --  
cables of urine threading into mud, the famous delegates  
of cockleburr and steam. Adolescent coyotes  
smoke their homerolled smokes behind the haystack.  
Maybe something will catch. Maybe they'll turn  
the collie to the hard stuff or the winter pipes  
will freeze and I'll have to roast  
the yearling with an apple in his teeth  
to thaw them; the good of one  
beneath the good of many. Nameplates simmer  
in rows before the pitchfork antidote.  
One impatient foreleg repeats like a trick  
countdown, mounds of dirty straw on the hill.

## TRESPASS

The man slid through the dark  
window to steal our good thing.  
My sister knocked the bedstand over  
clawing him off of her.  
I woke in the forest without knowing  
how I stood there, scanning for his back  
among the black trunks of trees.

She says she hears breathing  
behind every seat, tries each lock,  
finds each lock weak.  
I drape thread across trails  
so I'll know where to wait,  
and mother my violence  
with an eyedropper.

This forest is deep.  
I've checked all the fences.  
My sister is sleeping  
and plans to wake late.  
When the dog stirs, I stir,  
and weigh hard decision  
against outside sentence. The scale  
sings what it slurred before:  
there are always consequences.



## WAITING BY THE MAGAZINES

He needs bar soap and likes the kind  
he can reach in barren aisles  
at two a.m. Among frozen concentrates  
he prefers cranberry juice cocktail's  
convenient shelf. He remembers the deep electric  
disconnection like two strong hands  
twisting the knob end from a corn cob  
hidden deep inside of him. After his hipbone  
cracked the plastic dash and all the little green lit gauges  
fluttered off and on and off, he went black  
to sirens. Milk in cadaverous rows behind the slap  
and kiss of glass doors remains motionless  
in the fluorescent hum. He needs bread.  
The bakery's closed. It's been six years since  
the ditch grass rushed the windshield. Within  
the first six months Laura left twice, and the last time  
stayed gone, but beside dried fruit, the sweet, shriveled  
raisins he imagines she could come back.  
Or he'll walk. Both visions are heavy so he props  
a six-pack on thighs that once stretched  
pantseams and fantasizes one good piss  
free of a catheter; the sound of fluid  
as it travels tubing is smaller than the sounds  
she made in his ear as he held her  
as they danced in a bar or after,  
in the kitchen, when they made love  
against the refrigerator.

## AGAINST LETTERS

The starling folded into the dark flower of itself  
and dropped from the black sail of starling  
telepathies, bound alternately for both horizons  
and fell, changed to a snail shell dropped  
from a kite's beak, struck the pond, heavier  
than the rosette trail of the water skippers, heavier  
than your girlish handwriting, predictable,  
inexplicable, and still all this imagining  
is not enough. I leave it there,  
reachable, although there is nothing can fill  
this distance, no floral stationery  
order, no phone's red message --  
I'm bound by turns for any destination  
without post. The mail truck wobbles  
from the mailbox, but I'll wait until dark  
before I crack that gate. Send words  
and I'll stack them with the rest, beside the pond,  
hold them with a single stone, a monument  
against tomorrow's inclement weather,  
the deception that only motion seems complete.  
One water skipper briefly pauses  
in the mirrored cloud of birds  
unfurled like a linen sheet blown  
from the line, settling  
drowsily over the stubble of last season's wheat.

## AND THAT'S THE WHOLE WORN EVENING

Rechtenwald's salamander, or so says Ray,  
is subject to a frayed attention span.  
Jaime loves all reptiles for their steadfastness,  
even the pit vipers.  
Jaime never gets asked to dance.

And because Ray is descended from the first carburator  
he rasps free advice in a pocky tenor, breathes grease  
and pulls baling wire from around the engine block.

Oh, Irene and her damn sugar spine!  
Her extremities were never truly colonized.  
We're gonna have to pull this engine.

I crouch on a milkcrate. You hang on to this  
and we'll get it out just fine. Don't let the cables foul.  
Ray rigs some pulley system

that almost works until the come-along  
jams. He tries to fix it but the release lever  
gives and the cable rips right through my grip  
and past my ear. Signs a stripe so clear and antiseptic  
across my hands that I have no questions.  
I know what happened. All skin is  
sacrifice to friction. This I understand.  
Not like that other pain.

## WHY I SPIT IN THE WATER TROUGH

How they sense it evades me.

Each morning the same favorite joke: cavalcade  
of bladders in synchronicity, great butterstick teeth  
aimed my way. I pretend to fumble with buckets of grain  
and doorlatches until I'm certain they get the picture  
which is that I'm in charge -- sure, I muck stalls  
and shoulder bales around, an alfalfa stacker  
from way back, but daren't spitefully bepiss  
straw gathered by the pitchfork whipped  
toward the wheelbarrow carted by the hand that feeds  
you or so the saying goes. I feign a trip  
at the lead mare's door to cement the pact  
and stare her down. I've learned this tactic's impact  
superior to a headbutt -- still, once in a while,  
equine sarcasm sorely underestimated as it is, their timing  
in scope approaches professional; when I'm navelgazing,  
one blazed long face drops over the dutch door as bait  
for me to notice and with a question turn  
toward the blow, forceful from a nostril bright green  
atomies, a nasal procedure horses have the patent on,  
with the desired effect of rousing any latent  
rage. Meanwhile deceptive in the ambient  
light, morning diffused, the beast composed, beatific  
as I draw a flannel sleeve across my  
spattered forehead and left cheek, dangles  
her leaf-veined face, trying to sucker  
me into a repeat performance but even my knobbed  
skull learns real good upon occasion.  
Before the other barrel unloads I turn my back --  
take the thick brunt on my neck before her triumphant song  
and victory lap, trailing supporters, around the paddock.



## WRECKING BALL

Easing down from the sharp air of January he once broke the surface  
of some hot springs with his body, just as that morning he had used  
a hatchet  
to break the surface of the ice in the water trough so the horse  
could drink.  
He grew warmer as his task progressed. Walnuts dropped from an  
overpass  
break with a delicious crack. He was on his third tablet of paper  
before he addressed the topic of collarbones. Engines and rubber  
bands  
followed close. He couldn't decide whether sound broke or bent  
so he told himself that tablelegs could take precedence and edged  
ahead  
to the camel's back and pencil leads. Then the wrecking ball  
of an early morning phone call reminded him that what breaks  
is also subject to its own hierarchy and he had started on the beach,  
apportioning one break to every grain and fractured rock.  
So he stayed up late with a black marking pen  
and weighed what fit, then made thick, black Xes through all the  
rest.  
What made the cut was closest to the coffin, in the front row  
his face breaking open until his composure rose finally, ornamental  
as a red-rimmed carp, its mouth a repeated oval.  
His shoulders bent, quivered as if sinew strung him  
from jawbone to toes. Then the string broke  
and the bow broke also.

**III.**

## PHOSPHORESCENT

The androgyne for hours molds itself in wax. Look at it,  
it's everything -- even the flyshells on the sill even the sun.  
The threads of your housecoat are sad even the smoke  
from your nostrils is crying. Here under the earth  
this could be copper or coal -- the point is dust. Diagnosis:  
Goldlung. Even the weevil even the oatcrossed  
tongue. Mud on mud, the man closed  
in peat, last hibernation before the scientists  
come. Even as bald as a barrow wight  
contemplating its bony thumb. Even asleep  
the follicles of your scalp are hidden even the gala  
of your blood is dumb. Even the face in the bark,  
the bark of your prisoner lung, pilloried silk, spills  
its hidden arc. Even carded, even spun.  
Even the candle of your neck is supple, even  
your swamp is haunted. Even by beetles, castling dung.  
That's not god or wheat kneeling down in a wheel  
or a ghost with a lullaby, even at ten, even at dusk.  
Not the husk prepared and not the corn, not a single  
yellow crumb. Draw the shutter, the oven's ready;  
the curtain's come undone. Even together, even apart,  
that's just some old body closing shop. Even for now,  
even for good, giving its good light up.

## THE TRUE STORY OF THE TOES

The left great toe a lathe-turned pear, a maestro at his podium. The right a muscled troll glistening at the smithy under the bridge, thick with goat flesh, with whole milk squeezed from the hide bag coathooked beside the door. The left toe, Arthur,

was not strong enough to hold a pirouette but was wonderfully articulate, pointing out the first pale mornings of April from his sandal, pausing in the delicate comma of his hair, then capering -- wee, wee, wee, wee.

The stout right Malcolm calloused by years of forcing the offense left, broke boars against his dull leaf, at night watched the window's gold flag press Arthur's barbican, ripple with the lamp. Malcolm ciphered ciphered ciphered on his drafting board.

Sometimes I would spend entire days in the company of my great left Arthur. He had a library to the ceiling and could hum Rakhmaninov convincingly. Arthur dazzled me with his choreography -- oh, my virtuoso. I tried to see the left great toe in me.

Malcolm sooted my right boot and caused the seams stress. Clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-hungry right toe. Sometimes Malcolm mixed wine with his miik and let it curdie into a near pudding that stained the carbon papers spread like Autumn across his lap.

Arthur intimated that his sock drawer had been rifled and green thread sewn through the haphazard tapestry. His sitting room smelled of burned turf. He could hear the tink-tap from Malcolm's midnight oven glowing workshop.

One morning woke and staring out from the comforter cover was  
Arthur. Arthur! Arthur!  
Narrow waisted Arthur looked a consumptive matador in his  
graceful worry, but the red cape  
was Malcolm's when I tugged back the duvet. Emphatic beet!  
Malcolm? Malcolm? Malcolm

beamed rawly through all his failure; he had outdone the early  
lawnmower. This had seemed  
a routine stubbing, but a blackened coliseum and devastated  
aqueducts accompanied Malcolm's hematic glower. His carriage  
delayed when the plan went off-- a forgotten glove -- Arthur knew

a close one when he felt it. The tiny armies of Epsom salts affixed  
bayonets, marched into the sea.  
Over tender months, beside Arthur's pure tenor, stubborn  
Malcolm's shower silence changed  
to subtle basso noticed first by porcelain and then by soap; he fed  
their fallow taste for tremor.

Malcolm grew back a rippled tortoise for his forehead. Arthur wore  
his gifted, crooked brooch  
while stirring fishhead stew with brie. The cello was too genteel so  
Malcolm learned the fiddle,  
composed a reel about stolen cows and breakfasting on gristle.  
Arthur used the clippers

and let the cotton ball slide; at last we all shared an uneasy slipper.  
Still asleep in wool  
blend socks -- merino and lycra -- the toes had both agreed the  
mornings were cold enough  
to compromise. I started toward a window to listen to the leaves  
but thought of tea

coating the inner cup like the memory of a banished limp, of my  
body snug in accord  
with my body. At this my kneeling nerve bundles tittered behind  
the altar  
of their hands. My robe fell open. Hesitantly, an unnamed nipple  
piped up.

## THE GREAT JEALOUSY OF STONE

Igneous, I rose, welterd  
the view on the valley  
of the river, febrile  
intermezzo before sump  
congealed in gutter strata, before  
some aggregation of nerve  
called out, conceived  
what nerve controlled.  
Wailed a pink cleat,  
animate loam  
reeking of soft molecules,  
empty hallways,  
bone's flawed bituminous --  
by all known standards  
hardly molten.  
Parried my confederacy  
with duration, each seismic  
twitch and won, monopolized  
sensation, claimed  
the fields now tilled  
beside the river named.  
Without mouth or skin or one  
withe to tremble.  
Sealed from furnace my heaven  
those first days of motion.  
Let the soil reveal  
how bitten heat  
deserts, leaving just  
crater, cool hearth,  
hurried note.

## TIGERSPRUNG

--"The tiger walked humanly enough on its two hind legs; it wore the suit of a dandy in the most refined elegance, and this suit was so perfectly tailored that it was difficult to distinguish the body of the animal underneath . . ."

Jean Ferry, "Le Tigre Mondain"

This was coffee with Avery. *I'm a monkey*, Mondain said and waved his monkey gloves. As he stirred clumped sugar a hair drifted, clung to the rim of his cup. Avery believed everything.

A plaintive bleat of a village goat staked in a clearing. Mondain loved L.A.

In Myna tones he phoned Miranda, who didn't know his voice and hung up repeatedly. When she stopped

answering, myna-perfect he mimicked ringing. That morning a toucan mask for his job at the fashion magazine. Wheat germ smoothies with spirulina and whey protein. These and toucan colors

were much in vogue, Fridays at the fashion magazine. The magazine staff clapped and clapped. In his office, a painting of tall grass, an oscillating fan, a photo of Miranda. Sheila from graphics asked out his cufflinks

for a *Cuba Libre* after work. He would accompany them to keep it complicated. Was excited until five o'clock, at five o'clock he exited. To prepare he taped his whiskers

back behind a Moray mask wide enough to hide the twitch. Moray was opalescent gleam, was coral reef. Mondain's whiskers itched.

Mondain almost gave himself away

by jumping over a bus. Sheila's haunch and strut inspired that in him, a reckless leap and hurried explanation. He never planned it; he planned against it. When it happened

he always made it. Moray was scintillant but not too meek,  
which did not go unnoticed by patrons at The Watering Hole, sidled  
up to teak, among them amber-irised Miranda, barstool prised

between her knees, gaze-locked with a Gnu in boots, his  
audacious,  
flaunted golden tooth, which he would lose. Mondain's moment  
froze. Sheila's elbow came unglued.

Miranda's hair a stung, cruel orange, and conscienceless  
as angry bees smoked down rows of corn. Her hair was early  
August  
to a T. Mondain passed by. Miranda took him in dismissively

as too well coiffed an eel and on the make. What a disguise! She  
looked at him  
and didn't leave! He shot his cuffs, made section B his coral reef.  
The cocktail server  
rolled her eyes, smiled, revealed rows of well-capped teeth.

Carved, the bar was thick, had swivel seats. Mondain felt his drink  
was watered down, in fact so weak that he had several, suggested  
Sheila  
had been stalking him from a blind beside the office coffee.

Behind his smile, Gnu's home run had cleared the park, his stock  
was on the rise.  
He sauntered closer; those freckled cheeks, those feral eyes! He'd  
be her first date  
in weeks, poor thing. Miranda fluttered slowly her cocktail napkin  
and drew him in.

Miranda swished, Mondain stirred and stirred. Sheila called the  
Libre  
plenty mixed. He had tried so hard until she left; it must be  
something  
on the gene that made Miranda's stare so fixed. He watched her  
flutter work.



Gnu swore he saw her number on it -- he was in for sure. Gaskets  
on his engine rattled,  
he had revved his charm full throttle when the electric chandelier  
spit a spark like Miranda's spittle of derision that found its mark in  
Gnu's *Naked on The Beach*, now in range,

affected him like gasoline; his nostrils flared and temper! Miranda's  
gravel laugh  
deployed and behind the delicate mail of his mask Mondain's ear fur  
stirred;  
when last he'd heard that thistle rustle an apartment building  
burned.

Sheila tried to leave, he caught a claw in her boucle  
and blamed it on the table, called the waiter for a rasp  
to smooth the rough away when his larynx sprung its clasp.

Heat lightning woke in a tinder jungle; his vocal slip was flint.  
Sheila stepped back from the table and Miranda's pupils thinned,  
Gnu turned his back, started walking, murmured, *Bitch!*

It was overnight they say, that all stripes Mondain had remaining  
turned to white.  
Miranda's cut cable hum still etched into his ear, there among  
scattered swizzle sticks  
and the lingering mist of beer. Her first move simultaneously took  
the mirror,

her target and a dart midair. By her second spring the bar was clear.  
Mondain's fervent  
wish: a fishtank hat to float his boulevard to a distant block, enough  
protective bubble wrap  
for a tailored suit and Gaultier's own bungee cummerbund, elastic  
kevlar, rubbleproof.

From the weak remainder of his diaphragm, rich conceptions rattled  
a last bottle to the floor, where scotch and glass and voice pooled,  
saturated  
the corner carpet where he hurled his cane. He followed where his  
rumble ran.

The sun gone down on Burma. Tales around a poacher's fire.  
The sun gone down on Bangladesh. A blue-shelled beetle stilled in  
trash.  
The sun gone down on Los Angeles. Roar or nothing. Roar or  
nothing.

## REVISION

It appeared the lamb had just up and run off.  
The lion sniffled and whumped and overdid the bluff  
but nobody cared, they thought God  
would handle it like he handled the Egyptians  
but when no locusts, lesions, adult-onset acne  
or even any annoying nervous tics manifested  
the people got pretty frisky, started sleeping  
with each other's fathers, secretaries and casseroles,  
shooting pomeranians and leaving mouldy cheddar  
on their neighbors' windowsills, not to mention  
some monkey business regarding a golden cow.  
Well let me tell you  
when God came back from \_\_\_\_\_  
to find circumstances were not as he commanded, he was not  
pleased.

You could say God was pissed. He turned all kinds of things to salt  
and set them on fire. He scattered the people with a divine loogy  
and flipped them the bird -- the same unbridled verve  
that had the Old Testament retired. Some fellow  
crawling away from the wreckage didn't realize his knees  
left weird little splotches on the rocks. And the sand, whew!  
Well the sand was in his eyes and throat  
and he wondered what he had ever seen in those secretaries.  
Just before his lungs filled with dust and that funny rattle  
this poor sap started thinking what everyone  
for the past very long time must have thought  
there at the end when . . . Whoa, hold on.  
It's tough to say, I wasn't there and that's not even  
the real ending. Sometimes I make things up. This is how it  
continues:

. . . thinking that he really liked riding his motorcycle  
through the curves around the lake road, 1200cc's of shiny chrome  
and he couldn't wait to hit the next straight stretch  
and open her up. Open her up he did and I can only speculate  
how at first he must have been pretty thrilled  
after putting along at 35MPH all afternoon  
but then I hope it seemed like the feeling a waiter gets,  
or we have no warning, as he carries a tray of wineglasses  
each threequarters filled. That feeling just outside the kitchen door

before he goes in where the mopwater's spilled, that moment right before he hits the floor. So the memory of last night's asparagus.

For some reason this outweighs the usual fantasy about starring in C.H.I.P.S. and how he wouldn't have made the same career choices as Erik Estrada, he would have been more careful. The asparagus was very green.

He was interrupted then by a commotion from the restaurant kitchen, a dull thump and breaking glass. Two, maybe three seconds before the patrons' knowing smirks across the tables at each other, as if they all shared some grace that kept them from harm, grace and understanding, grace and relief clear as a telegraph. Then on the dike where the road unwound and his bent wrist urged the bike forward, his own flower sudden as a flare gun. The old world swerved, shuddered. He recovered enough to brake and look back. Why am I telling this? I'm not

going to sucker you with some sob story about a little girl and bad timing, I'm sure people get killed by motorcycles all the time. But when I heard I just thought, *Shit!* How many moments wait to blindside all of us? It wasn't me on the motorcycle or me on the road or even me standing on the trestle logs with the rest of the family, red-and-white bobbars

below them like signal fires on the water and even if it had been I couldn't have done a thing to stop it

I could only have slugged the guy afterward and thought that it hurt him through his new, persistent numbness. Later I'd have had that memory of my own dumb smallness stacked with all the others. I'm not alone, right?

Haven't we all at sometime wanted to hurt . . . ? C'mon, I'm trying to open up, here. You know, I share my feelings with you and you share your feelings with -- Wait.

I didn't make that up but that's not how the story ends. This is the real conclusion: You're the guy with the scabby knees, crawling away from the fiasco, under the assumption you'll live to make more messes. You're the one . . . No.

That's not true. Let's begin again. Okay

I was there, we all were there but it happened to be *me* on the hill, yes *I'm* the guy with the hamburger knees, doing my best to get up and run from all the cheap stunts I'd done and worse the most horrible things so easily avoided but instead I drank from that well again and again.

I stole the gold to make the cow, seduced my brother's wife  
and all the neighbor boys' girlfriends and made the men  
smell my fingers before I kicked them in the stomach. Oh yeah,  
we were drunk and it was all in fun.

Now I wriggle toward that beach where those farflung traumas  
accumulate, wedge in the funnel gummed by deceit  
and all the prurient pleasure I took in it. If it wasn't  
a move to set my nerves 'ashimmer it was wasted.

Observe the aerial shot taken from the choppers  
as they converge. I'm a brave beetle in the mechanical wind  
and slash my staff at the waves, but if anything  
they draw closer, gray as a mopbucket.

Above me questions populate the intricate horizon,  
buckle their bucklers and mount. As one  
they lower their hard visors. For a moment  
there is a small silence, you know that silence  
when the brindle bulldog is too strong for its chain  
and just before the final instant of strain, that instant  
before the first link breaks? I hear it and try to laugh.

You know the rest, how the horns sound and the slopes  
turn black. How as the initial arrows strike the water  
all I can do is wait for the first rank of questions  
to consummate attack: Can this be real?

Has my whole life been carnage? Is it too late to change?  
Can I take it back?

## REST, ICE, COMPRESSION AND ELEVATION

The rages that small animals have had Felicia, being small, being animal, wearing mascara on occasions that required them. Massaging the orbature of her face, the fascia along her masseter, Felicia a palpable tension detected there, steady as the tremor of new incisors about to erupt, nullifying the November Ashram issue of whether or not her navy leotard would find appropriate fit on hips that commonly spun wicked -- chronic sciatica from the gymnastic mishap considered -- cyclones of desire beneath the cummerbunds

of men both real and imagined, including swamis, a subject only of calories, style and cummerbund. material, the quality thereof and also the imagined men, who, like gurus and leotard fabric, could prove uncannily tensile under stress or run on a whim, often just where the sciatic nerve stripes attention to the derriere, racing from sacrum to heel so that the incisors of surrounding men, real ones, glisten in the presence of Felicia's waterproof - mascaraed eyes, intercepting the act of measuring her rear, to which they respond with smiles, elastic as the fascia

in the erector spinae of Felicia's Hatha Yoga instructor, whom she calls Baba, whose divine fascia iongues in the Piow not only in the studio but on the bus if there is ROOM. For Baba a leotard never really is an option considered, peeled like his real name Carroll, whose chronic sciatica improved greatly after decades of stretching, long since having left that neoprene cummerbund lumbar supporter with the forklift job and his ex-wife, who still holds the Mary Kay mascara sales record in the Pacific region. The shrew is a voracious eater, whose incisors

do the work of many looms. If at a spinning wheel -- sharks are production plants for incisors, rows and rows of them -- and that wheel happens to be at sea, the chances of developing sciatica from hunching over the spindle while the deck rolls, is high. When it rains, cheap mascara will run down the face like inky -- let's just say it implies sadness, which limits the fascia's flexibility by producing hormones that increase tension, until like Elvis Presley's cummerbund, the sea spinner at the wheel and spindle will be a bound rhino in an industrial leotard

and unable to execute even a simple backbend, hip thrust, with or without the svelte leotard of the professional. Time and again black is a slimming color that seems to shrink the very fascia that cozens us as one bundle like bark around a cottonwood, a favorite target for beaver incisors, beavers that gnaw questionless and build in the course of things. Baba's back is fine. Is sciatica a problem for beavers? It seems more likely the affliction of that strangulating cummerbund of C-spine subluxation would affect them, but philosophies that for humans serve as a mask or a

balm -- I dare say as both sword and shield, are far from the driven, glinting, mascara rimmed eyes of beavers, unassailed by the question of whether to gnaw or not, summon incisors divine from the gum. Paisley has made at least two title runs as the cummerbund print of choice, but was each time overturned by the slim, pharonic black of the catsuit leotard underneath everything at one time, but covered, yea, smothered Felicia's pliant fascia, the dissention flaring there, a lengthy smolder untouched by Yogic influence, invisible as sciatica

to the outside world, defended by kevlar fascia from the specialized fire hoses of the mascara testers, flashing dress-shoe incisors, distorted under nylon leotards and slitted cummerbunds, behind which, incendiary searchlights cross and recross beams over the professed innocence of a calm sciatic.



## TREPIDATION

about being in motion, about  
the secret color factory, the slightest taint of black and the smallest  
incidents bear up under considerably more pressure that they're built for.  
Motionlessness is key -- one tack pinions the whole crewelwork,  
the the last seam of the table, the vanishing point so skewed  
perspective's a thing denied in the frame. Mylar soft sculptures  
hung from the art building's top floor, passersby reflected  
in fluttering mirrors and the warning *Lest you man the irons too, pass by.*  
Painting class, whereupon a chessboard is set clever  
on tabletop cluttered with the knight's face,  
warped windsock bent through the window and genius  
blithely diving into whipped color, a froth, a far off room  
pigmented godly in drab world. Neglected  
small detail. Very nice but a terrible table rendered there in oil  
couldn't even be sat at. There's no way to sit at that table.  
If the distance from here to there weren't prohibitive, admit -- hardly  
traversable, the whole distance in one date -- training for it  
requires more energy than willingness  
to commit, currently, to a sustained effort  
that could adversely affect us. This, by the way, is off  
limits. There are Chinas of things can go missing.  
And those Other machineries, with *Still Life on Table* and  
*Still Life on Table with Breakfast Service*, rest in the studio,  
on folded fabric, silver polish after hours.  
Hold up to life's still window light, translate these  
woven fibers into something real, not some engineered fruit  
in a basket on the impeccable palanquin table,  
made of the fluctuations of unassuming beige. Finally  
incarnations of beige you can feel! She has photos  
of the top of a cheetah's head as it lay panting  
beneath the jeep door -- the inexplicable arrival of a color  
no one's ever seen before that burns undeniably beyond neutral  
and I feel it. She said she could -- what did you bring me?  
More ecru or eggshell dusty door, color mutes -- a wet  
seal gray, which evaporates and settles far away

as ash finds its ways into the woods, leached  
for years of spring color -- bricks, matchbox cities  
inviolable cisterns, low insurance rates, economic booms and the first  
jittery signals of insurrection, last fits of wandering  
among another's flock in the adjacent field  
--dull Merinos, multicolored archipelago in this uncertain  
relationship, pulling up roots, the impulse to soft-shoe a little  
in lullaby patterns, my feet have drifted, will drift and we return  
vigilant to the small details.

## JOE AND THE MAGNIFICENT MAGIC POLYESTER SHIRT

### I.

The tall woman in black with cheekbones that struck Joe like hatchets on his own cheekbones suggested an orange construction worker's shirt with the sleeves cut off that she called a wifebeater and hurried into her room to find it before the people started arriving and drinking her liquor. When Joe followed her in she was sifting through mounds of clothes like multicolored graves that buried the bed and brushed the pink curtains on the room's only window. She said he might help if he didn't mind, and Joe, who hadn't really been drinking, thought that wasn't such a strange request. He looked over and under everything, but the closest he came to anything concerning construction was a dented hardhat hidden under an empty hamper by a worn toolbelt, and Joe, who was above all else courteous, didn't ask any questions.

### II.

Finally the woman dismantled her dresser installation like an installation surgeon, her long hands parting and categorizing, stopping clothing leakage with direct pressure. She said the wifebeater had been absorbed like a litter of rabbit fetuses. Joe said he didn't get it. When the point where a cigarette would have been nice had almost evolved into the point where Joe could go naked or wear a wheelbarrow for all she cared, the woman made a sound like yum. Joe, who was above many things a curious fellow, and also hungry, peered over her shoulder into what resembled a cave. Coiled like a smooth answer to an unasked question in its den lay a glimmering brown polyester shirt the size of a sock. A slim blonde woman in bell bottoms and long-heeled shoes who had a room upstairs swished in to see what was taking so long when she saw the shirt and stood waiting with her weight over her right hip, nails clicking like the shuttles on a loom as she smiled.

### III.

Joe made a sound like hum and the tall woman in black -- very deftly for having such long limbs -- plucked the shirt from its cell, a textile treasure, and let the rest fall around her in a celebratory avalanche. Joe shrugged it on with a shiver and the quiet whispering rasp of green corn husks on the backs of his arms. Joe felt a crackle of blue static and wondered if this was an electric shirt and hoped that if it was it wouldn't give him cancer like electric blankets were supposed to. Evidently it was *some* kind of shirt

because Bell Bottoms stood straight and stopped clicking her nails and the woman in black's dark eyes glistened over their shelves, and because she couldn't think of a reason why not touched his back where the polyester grew onto him, a living thing adhering to his spine. Joe, who didn't say anything because he wasn't sure, imagined that under her hands, on the inside of the shirt he felt the small caresses of a multitude of synthetic cilia nestling into him as if they were cold.

#### IV.

The women guided him with their hands into their living room where everywhere the ceremony of innocence was in the process of drowning itself. The siren shirt called people with its sweet, insidious voice and all around there was no mast in sight. Joe thought that was fine by him because if he were on a ship at all it would probably wreck although he might not feel it and coral is pretty. Straight men touched the shirt while clapping Joe on the back, and Queens, brightly colored birds, squeezed dancing past him through the doorway into the kitchen for more drinks and brushed against its sides in their introductions and reintroductions. Women grasped his shoulders high up where the shirt covered them, laughing and clinging close to the rich brown of it like human fabric, stretching their arms under Joe's arms and around him, their fingers on his chest and waist. Joe thought the shirt was tickling him.

#### V.

Near the end of the long night and close to morning when most of the people -- except for a man who said he rode a fast train down the wrong track and a couple smoking one cigarette while sitting on the couch cushions, which had been turned over because someone had spilled beer -- had gone, Joe toppled into the broom closet and knocked over the upright vacuum. A shelf fell on him. But Joe, even sprinkled with the blue-white freckles of spilled industrial abrasive, was undiminished. He felt as large as a planet. He felt large enough to have his own gravity, his own atmosphere. He felt like a large brown polyester planet before the green growth starts and the genesis of something greater begins to stir.

## STEALTHY HYPOXIC

He believed in nickel, the oxides  
and the mercurichromes, God as sediment,  
the blessed tectonic seizure, the ghostly cave  
paintings in southern France, Adam Cadmium.  
Planetary conjunctions, fossilized chicken  
tracks and the advantage of atlatl in primitive  
stick throwing contests. Yes, he believed in revolutions, stock  
crashes, wars, cyclones, in ratattoule  
well prepared. Blondish, a sunburned blunderbuss  
toted by anthropology coeds, a teaching assistant  
and an associate prof, he was famous among a half-dozen  
countryclub mothers for his doublebarrelled  
smile from the guest seat at their family tables, was showcased  
to fathers, their kites, free passes to the opera. He knew golf swing,  
snooker,  
World Series stats, the Freemason handshake and English gardening --  
had been on Safari, taught the guide lacrosse, could order  
warm beer in Swazi and in the end consumed them all, swallowed  
them alive. It was bar talk got him into it. That and the Aussie  
spelunker's crinkled confidence, the seven pilsners, the red-  
headed station 6 crewmember's right breast daring him  
to go through with it. *Of course* he could spelunk, that's one  
of the twenty-seven essential things he did best  
but now no radio or inner ibex persona evolved to handle  
precipitous cavern life like the lampeyed surprise of Coelacanth.  
That goddamned dilettante Australian trapped  
or dead. Oxygen tank! Oxygen tank! Currently perceived soma:  
integument sack filled out of course with the bone and vessel and muscle  
expected, and the great nonvascular gristle of our common plight.  
Such tumultuous, unpredictable bricabrac of derring-do, sightless spring  
from crag to crag. Pinned there with him, so deep that even the air  
had weight enough for seams to brim the nethersilo's subterranean  
grain system, bleak with lungfill, ample with the silent spaces of less  
fluent caves -- his brio --the very poorest trade he'd make for a place.  
Consider two-a-days in the season of burning bluegrass, hot choke  
from the Palouse, running suicides in 80 degrees  
to ingrain the folly. When he curled on a crackback and took a kidney shot,  
pissed blood that night and met the morning practice rosin-handed  
to keep his place -- let him do it again, he thinks, that was  
a kind of failure, more painful but better lit. Less populate?

Nighttime fields before harvest, you could hear the whisper  
as wheat shafts leaned back. If trapped on your car hood with a girl  
and a blanket, a badger can shred a baseball bat. You can drown in a  
granary.

He'll live there alone for years. Too spacious? Too temperate?  
Then early February, predawn wooded hills, the desolate belfry  
where ice bats congregate after coating the highway  
with their hurled coos and sleeted, thoughtless spatter  
from a wastrel sky. He would stay until spring, stay  
if she came back. He'd stay, succumb to the echo  
returned from the curve of gibbous cauldron,  
the ferrous ore swollen, mined and hammered  
from the pediments. It's hardly different, a cave,  
it's really not that different at all: he could be a wharfinger  
irascibly hoeing lobster mulch, or an ancient engineer  
correcting a flawed architrave -- it's all bilge out the scupper;  
TD dropped, mustelid-gnawed bat, bedding Esmeralda's mother  
after riding lessons, Esmeralda quitting riding lessons, it's all the same,  
all forgotten, he's spending his last O2 without admitting he's always  
breathed  
this way, in darkness, and nothing changed except himself.

#### IV.

## THE JOURNEY LASTS FOR LEAGUES

I.

On patriotic days he hangs those droopy things. On patriotic days.  
On harlot days he wears. On harlot days, call them the guards  
of palatial worst, the groundskeepers talk quietly  
among themselves.

There is such . . . Moreover, there is such  
to be had for the asking.

Turn over the tables Jules turn over the tables  
and choose

Jules,

who can't remember what he longs for or  
longs for what he can't remember. The bridge  
of his cool foot slides across the sheet  
into the hot arch of the other.  
Just like every day,

the cacophony, he keeps it buttoned.  
Snatches a reason out of air a noble profile out of air.

Throw off the covers Jules throw off the covers  
and rise

Jules,

who swipes the sleep from his eyes,  
who executes a double Windsor  
then puts back again the silly tie. The tie  
serves the minutehand. Serve both  
the meaning and the minute, Julian.

Strudels, frappe and lots of, heigh-ho, lots  
and lots of jellybeans, whose jelly jells  
in color, jellies dyed, scripted L's. Heigh-ho  
the dish brims with jellybeans  
on the cafe counter.





The pig gelder has a song with the giant's wife.

*Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring  
Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring  
Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring  
Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring Bedspring  
Bedspring Bedspring BedspringBedspringBedspring  
BedspringBedspring Bedspring Bed-spring Bed-  
spring Bed spring Bed Spring . . . . . Swoon.*

Thus humming under his breath the pig gelder  
sets out each morning  
for a bright new day of gelding.

### III.

Put down the lighter Jules put it down  
on the table where it belongs Jules  
or in your pocket. Dispose of the lighter  
it is rubbish although brightly colored  
and useful for cigarettes, the lighting of them.  
You'll wear your thumb down Julian.

Triple-skinny shot of everything to-stay.  
She's late she's late she's late today in the way  
she's mostly late for most things. Today she's later.  
Another croissant Jules he'd be happy to bring you  
so be sure to flag him down. Flag him down, Jules,  
the waiter, who knows a thing or two.

The late workday passengers, their faces framed  
above the advertisement for pineapples  
on the side of a bus. The second round  
of paper cups wobble round their sticky rings  
on nylon briefcases at the intersection.  
A woman in a team ballcap  
sips her latte and looks through  
as the engine swells to the traffic light.  
Now Jules, why don't she wave?

IV.

Remember, intones the pig gelder, it is so important  
to consider the condition of the pig's future

Enough! This from the pigs, all together

In order to produce a truly level-headed pig  
requires the services of a pig gelder

Enough! cry the pigs

The contributions of a level headed pig  
cannot be reiterated enough.

We've had it! Squeal the pigs, whose level-headedness  
has not kicked in.

V.

The giant's satchel spills a wealth  
of battered apples or his satchel belches  
a yearling heifer onto the cobbled floor. Always,  
from farmhouses razed the giant comes back,  
from coops gone to feathered kindling. Comes back  
from rubble fences -- one pictures him  
with his wool hood fallen from his mullet,  
the faint steam of exertion rising -- over leagues  
and leagues of countryside the reverberation  
of his hum shaking martens from their limbs.  
He plants his stripling ash with every stride, florid  
with the efforts of his haystack methods, their refinement:

The accident method	The windmill method	The four winds method
The concentration method	The frolic method	The combustion method
The bump and	The grind method	The one hand method
The frost heave method	The nearly dawn method	The OOOO the hay

hangs all in orchard trees like brittle tinsel.

## VI.

How do you like your tea? Jules to the aproned man.  
Something put a riddle in Julian.  
Pardon me? I don't -- the aproned man began  
Something put a riddle in Julian.  
Julian rode over his falls. My tea is best with honey  
and any kind of tea is fine by me, really, but the hive  
is important, and the condition of --  
Confound! Confound! The time,  
do you have it? Granular or too syrupy  
and regardless the quality of the leaves or the means  
of steeping -- is it quick? I mean fast, your watch?  
I'm a waiter said the man, I don't drink tea,  
and brings more coffee, refills the jellybeans.  
Julian's riddle thermometer, the mercury molecule jive.  
Tea language means nothing here, so stir it, sir  
and reconsider why you're sitting here. The here wherein  
you're sitting reconsider. Here, sir, unlike your former  
heres, the heres that you're accustomed to,  
right doesn't always apply to the customer.  
I'm a waiter sir, and you're not in the here  
that you think you are, so be patient.

## VII.

Meanwhile the pig gelder all 'aquirer  
scours pens with glee.  
With all the gelding and singing, gelding and singing  
he wrestles the pigs with ease,  
and his good right gelding arm follows  
the methods traditional to his foregelders :  
in the method of doves the forearm flexes.  
Then the method of the barge rope wearing through  
and the barge taking leave. What tendon play!  
Follow with the method of the butter quickening  
in the churn and the song of the churn

as rendered by the churning maid, born deaf.  
The whetstone attenuates the instrument  
in the method of the soldier returning  
through the meadow surfaced all  
with buttercups -- the lot of these  
the gelder applies to the pigs.  
He wrestles the pigs with glee --  
the pigs freckle his chin,  
after all it hurts them far, far  
more than it hurts him,  
and how precipitous it was  
where he had been!

### VIII.

Here we are in the giant's lair  
-- the goings on of early morning --  
polished silverware, good china, kitchen  
bustle, the sills all cleaned in the feather  
whisk method and the hearth ashes  
mounded in the midden method. Still

the great goings on she makes, the giant's wife  
when only groundskeepers and the breakfast maid  
should be awake. Her goings on and her breakfast airs,  
her goings on, her tousled hair, her hangnails  
unclipped via the misplaced clipper method.

Here we are in the giant's lair  
ignoring her cheeks' patina, blindness  
being a version of the survival method.

Here we are keeping the hedgerows trimmed  
in the dewy morning -- recognized universally  
as the preoccupation method.

Here we are heating the baking stone  
in the doughy kitchen, known in this region  
simply as the bread method.

Here we are heaving ham-knots to the hounds  
the lame one led back of the stables  
to engage in the culling method.

Here we are industriously keeping the grounds  
with our heels to the windows  
in the manner of the prudence method.

Here we are when the colorless vial  
she empties into the giant's vessel  
in her idea of the decision method.

Here we are looking under our arms  
in the furtive method when the ground  
trembles and here we'll stay.

IX.

The gelder aches with collarless dream  
and milk of a broken stem  
and how precipitous it was where he had been!  
And the road's a bit dusty but he don't care.  
And his back's a bit tired but he don't care.  
And he'd do it just the same at the county fair.  
And he'd dance around the palace in his underwear.  
And he'd do it twice as well if the giant was there  
'cause he's quick as a snake in the linen drawer  
and if someone wants to holler he'll do it all the more  
and geld them where they stand one, two, three, four  
and back again back again quick as a wink  
as a wink of his scintillant gelding knife  
back into its crescent sheath  
-- intricately stitched and  
blackened with the stains, the stains, the stains,

O, the raspberry stains of pig gelding.

And he'd never had even a scratch.

No, he's never had 'nary a scratch or doubt,

so the gelder whistles 'round a barley grass,  
as he skips toward the  
holding pen,  
skips boldly toward the holding pen  
with a heigh, heigh-ho,  
skips merrily on

to the holding, bolding, holding pen.

How the gelder's lungs swell when he sees the bull!  
No he's never had 'nary a scratch.  
How his lungs work like bellows at the gelding forge!

The briar bends back from his shin.  
From horn to horn leaps the brindled sun.  
The thistle curtsies from the hem of his shin.  
The gelder's in the grip of an irresistable method  
-- the bull all brindled in the sun,  
the rose draped low at his hem.

And the sun leaps back and forth  
as master of powerful method  
And the suns leaps back and forth  
with casual mastery of method  
And the sun leaps back and forth  
in effortless, arrogant method  
from horn to horn.

How the gelder's at the mercy of his brindled lung!  
His knife a suave shimmer in his hand.  
How mercy is gelded by the sunny horn!  
His knife curls from hand to hand.

Headlong with the method of promotion  
the pig gelder promotes himself  
on the gelding scale.

X.

The morning's cut tulips have been opened fully  
a long time. The waiter  
smartly opens a muslin umbrella  
over Julian's table to turn the light.

Diffuse, blonde light over Julian's streetside table  
and over the tulips in their tulip vase.

*Hello little broken  
anklebone, as surely as my shoe rubs,  
as surely as the phone. Hello swift amphetamine -- I'm  
not the pretty little seagreen couch you thought I'd be.*

Jules is a tough talker and has been an hour.  
Half twelve creeps round, he will immediately  
her number along with her new tube of toothpaste  
deliver onto the sidestreet.

The waiter's apron holds a row of pens.  
Julian contends that she will never again  
eat the heel of bread if the loaf is shared  
with Julian -- henceforth it will be him that eats

the heels of future breads although the heels  
that he detests she revels in. On his plate  
butter runs from the edgewise incision through  
the crescent bun down onto the bisque when,

Lo! What ho! The sidewalk throng is happy  
to part for the keel of a viking ship.  
The keel is a man of five full fathoms  
dangling his stone breaker's hands,

oaring his shoulders toward colder lands.  
With old world shudder he kneels at Julian's table.  
Promptly Jules stands to meet him, eyes  
well short of navel. Jules blurts



*She's late*, and darts. How easily the giant  
gathers him in! The arms of his eyeglasses  
are polished femurs, his breath, clover  
that ruffles the linens and the giant begins:

I set my satchel down that out might pour riches. My bootlaces subject  
to my wife's nimble fingers -- she stayed so I brushed her hair. The spring  
flooding clear over the red clay of the quarry is nothing.  
The wind frantic over wheat in harvest and the gold wheat  
resisting, field by field as far as even I can see  
is nothing. No, nothing nor those same fields by night  
undulant with fire, nor the farmers' grief, nor the rich core  
rot of a cedar log nor the lighting that felled it.  
When I brushed her hair all of this became as nothing.  
My drink I took from her hands and the comb fell.

XI.

The giant's wife cries beside the holding pen  
and what remains.  
She throws his knife in the fabled direction  
of the tundra by means  
of the boomerang method,  
(and what remains?)  
it's caught in the beak  
of the blue macaw, who dissipates  
(and what remains?)  
with its mites, the pitted blade  
and us  
in the fabled direction.

XII.

Time to hang your flag Jules it's time  
to hang

Jules, (Where has your riddle gone?)

your flag, Jules -- you only get once  
upon a time, for the proper flag  
on which you must decide,

Jules, (There's a milkcarton with your riddle on it)

what's worth asking for and what's  
worth embroidering. And where you are  
Jules, if anywhere. And what,

Jules, (Wove yourself a Julian out of green syringa,)

method you might use. If you use a method  
twice, Jules, it's not the same,  
method if any If any method can  
be said,

Jules, (burned yourself a Julian up of old syringa)

to be twice, or even  
right, Jules, or rather same,  
Jules, in any day by any name.

And what's he doing here, Jules?  
And what method does he hold you by?  
And why's his grip so cool Jules?  
And where's the apron-man with his row of pens?

And what's he saying now, Jules? (There was a blue ballpoint pen)  
And who's he talking to? (a ritzy fountain pen)  
And what flag shall you hang today, Jules? ( a yellow highlighter)  
And what flag shall you hang today? (another two blue ballpoint pens)

At what point, Jules, did the days seem less  
like days and more like versions of the empty  
method? And Julian, what's that like?  
Remember the smoky glass of the candy dish?

At what point, Julian, did you stop noticing  
the days? When the days all crackled outside  
the embassy of days? That version we know, Jules,  
-- we know the nuances of the pretending method.

Remember the plenty of the candy dish?

### XIII.

Sunny kingdoms closed like daffodils in the evening.  
In the land of the living, groundskeepers took their pay  
and left without eating.

As a tropical wind over a throat contraption  
in the method of speech the giant's voice  
caused great distress among flagpoles,  
freed all the flags collected from both  
the hidden direction and Julian.

Our hoarded hedge clippings sent willy-nilly  
with the flags and sculpted hedges,  
willy-nilly past our dignitaries, willy-nilly  
over heavily treated boundaries toward the tundra  
in the method of the williwaw, the giant's most perfect  
method. In the imperfect method of the messenger  
the blue macaw dropped a version of its beak.

In the land of the living, groundskeepers were replaced  
by algorithms, and progressions  
of calculating swine.

As an arctic wind over a throat contraption  
in the method of vociferous speech the giant  
scoured the kingdoms for passage back  
to his wife, alone in the unkempt garden.

Alive in the method of the living, a method  
now denied to the giant, who only found wandering  
a youth, knifeless across the wilderness, in search  
of a forgotten method and the blue macaw,  
who came and went freely

XIV.

And Julian saw much of the land in this way,  
buttoned to the vantage of the giant.

And near the giant's fire at night Julian  
saw his shoes never showed any wear.

When the last of the empty method was forgotten,  
when the memory of the jellybean plenty  
was hooked finally from his forehead  
by a hooked beak, and carried away,  
when for the first time muffled voices crept  
from his shirtsleeves and dissipated like threads,  
Julian lay down to rest  
beside the giant's fire. And the method of the meaning  
cleared for that moment Julian's palate  
and clearly Julian was hungry as a rib, the giant  
held out to Julian a heel of bread.  
Julian devoured the heel to a snippet  
that he placed on the ground, to show  
that although he was too late, he remembered.

And the giant began to hum in the method of distance.  
He hummed the song for brushing the long red hair  
of his wife. He hummed the dirge for the haystack  
methods, methods outgrown. He hummed  
poison, a noble profile out of air.  
The giant hummed Julian to a tuning fork.  
Julian's nerves stuttered in his spine.  
Julian put his hand on the giant's boot  
and heard the reverberation of a monastery bell  
from leagues away. He heard the clapper  
shimmy in the bell. He heard the copper bell  
reverberate.

A green-winged gnat flew into the giant's nose.  
What the giant meant trailed off  
as an unnamed method, as stirring  
breath in a still ravine. The gnat brought  
the blood of villages. The gnat brought  
the blood of the blue macaw  
who came and went freely  
carrying in its beak  
the inconsequent sceptres of many kingdoms.

Over the dry creekbed of his throat  
contraption, in the lost method of speech  
as the copper bell stilled, the giant began  
as a croak, continued as law:

All the days of my childhood were the air in a cave. Then I was kissed,  
stood as a man  
with a hillock on his head and wept. O, I was kissed. Flocks competed for  
her shoulders  
and rainsqualls rode her hem. I was kissed. She with a carved rafter in her  
hand --  
I had followed her more closely than . . . I had clung to her like starlight  
and mightily  
-- have you any idea what it is to wake as darkness and stand in a body?  
My cup from her hands. I heard the comb break on the cobblestones  
as I lay down again. When did this begin? As I say,  
I was kissed and here I am.

And there also was Julian.

## **EPILOGUE**

## **BOTH THE SENTENCE AND THE SORROW**

No bye-the-bye, no God  
speed, no reason, no good hunting,

no warning: there's the door, trap  
repeated, implosion anted up.

Nested in my cap, fancied whim,  
bait encased entirely by skin,

tremulous as the risen vein from hip  
to groin, this ignominious slip

demarcated, paginated, leaf  
by leaf a followed fool.

Plumb bobbed, warlocked in the oubliette,  
bookstocked, well contained. My taproot,

attenuated best mistake, my plinth,  
my skip's last bright note, hamstrung,

feckless and hidden in the bedclothes,  
my vested elf, whipstitched

notion of this carnal self, fluttered,  
mawkish, hawkish, clever fingered

at the lock, sealed in ribcage,  
involuntary, in vain.