



SICKARUS
M. BROWN



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HEIDELBERG

2018

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Standing here where the street ends
and the country lane it becomes begins
leading downhill, where I used to sled
in the deeper of the two wheelruts
only an ace could survive and not be
the boy who broke his arm
launched from the path at full speed
into the trunk of a dead oak tree.
There's snow on the grass, leaves still
green in November. A memory
I can't place when — that I'm not sure
even is one. The clouds in the leaves
further off. Solid things. Bedsheets
hung to dry upon the throbbing
branches. I think of a hand held out
with fingers spread, like a screen
I can still see through. The gaps
in her fingers — my mother's
held over my eyes, that I wouldn't
witness the gore of a man about to be
ripped in half from the waist down,
caught in the elevator doors. I can feel
my lungs leaven, smell the leafmould
and lichen blooming on the bark
so much that I can't believe
I'm not really there.

ARMY BRAT PASTORAL

The sun cracks the hill, forcing the colors of the day to rise into themselves. Ridge that loomed like half a parted Red Sea

holds its breath, stands with vestments drawn as if to prove there's nothing inside itself worth concealing. It'll have to wait

out the day to make real its wave's want — to flood the village and all the sleeping children. This means *you*. Pulled under

to where the dark retreats, where the sea-adder finds its love to clutch and coil in the skulls of knights, drowned in earth.

You wake up to your mother's touch, a plate of toast smeared with *Nutella* in her other hand. How quiet it is, the world war

happening outside, and daylight so severe in its eventual victory penetrating its claim past the blinds, under your bed to reach

and annex *No Man's Land*, that its regime could never survive the resentment it inspires much after the armistice of noon

to stay the eternal relapse of night's revenge, that great slip and slide down the dandelioned meadow into the mole's den.

The promise of the end, of alien times and places is already figured here behind the Kindergarten — dead tree and rivalry

of your parents' reasons, yelling in the kitchen, the playground pushcars you're too big to ride and *Playmobil* republic sticky

from being played with. No, your krokotears will not suffice to quench the village bully's thirst. Bespectacled, dripping sweat

as he chews *Hubba Bubba* hunched over you in the bushwork hushed and patient, staring as if through you with eyes unseen

behind the sun caught in his glasses — glaring like spotlights
to brighten the wounds where he works. It is said the sandbox

is a portal to Chinas far away — if only a child's hands could
penetrate past the loam, down where the digging turns red.



LUSTGARTEN

I remember visiting Schloß Schwetzingen sometime around 1995 — a drive in the country, an afternoon picnic at the Roman Aqueduct. Scarfing down my beloved PB&J, juicebox crumpled in my hand after being led through lattice arcades of ivy-clad iron for an hour past the lichen-pocked statues of gods and nymphs, near-hidden by haggard growth — the nameless prisoners of an Autumn estate.

I remember us stopped on the circular lawn, immaculate and recessed under the bare-breasted Sphinxes that lie past Apollo's Sun Grotto as my sister crouched to tie her shoelace, with me whining Sphinxtop that she *hurryitup* so we could finally head back to the car and leave this place, dead-ended halfway to the horizon. All for some TV show I'd have damned the world not to miss, miserable tyrant that I was.

The next Spring, Mom and I would bring stale *Brötchen* in a totebag to feed ducks roosting at the artificial lake, returned from Winter. I remember falling into that frigid muck-water, knee deep — leaning too far over the sandstone ledge just to touch one of those rare swans that on another day (years later) would bite me. Come the Summer I'd pace again the curlicue mazes of sheared shrub and whitest gravel savoring the mossy spray of Arion's fountain, licked from my lips.

VIRGIN OF THE ROCKS (JULY 1997)

Pigeon shit. A scorpion
bleached like a desiccated
lemon peel, trampled
into sand-grey pavement.
Dust wafts. Heat. Forgetting
that is a darkening at the edges
of souvenirs it hurts to see.
A child's tunnel vision —
clinging close to a disem-
bodied arm on the *vaporetto*
dangling from the shadows
past the wink of what lies
beyond recall. Glints, waves.
Canal water that's half Adriatic
blue, half blue of cataracts
in green eyes. Lime-streaked
facades. My few memories
of streets have since mingled
it seems with the televised
scenic blight of Baghdadi
alleyways, movie set *imperium*.
Sourceless glare. I think
it's called *sfumato*. What sun
shines in memory shines too
from the Madonna's face —
bloodless marble amid much
dayglo olive and avocado.
I had no choice but to fall
on the stones, weeping *please
buy me it*. The fake *Transformer*
I knew was about to be lost
forever. More dust and no-
where are my parents
to be remembered. It's just
me in Venice. *No extras*.

THE NEW YEAR

I was only eleven, how could I realize
what it meant as the home room teacher
instructed the class with a solemnity
that's perhaps just the tinge, the fingerprint
left on the film, what really happened
smudged by my own recollection —
how the strange new date
we were told to write several times
at the upper righthand corner
of the page (as if it needed practicing)
had changed somehow differently
than it usually did over the Winter break,
and that this was meaningful
not in a way for us to understand
but would just the same be
inflicted on us now. I remember
how the kid-me thought this went
way beyond a real-life situation that might
lend itself to a lesson in practical math.
It was all too abstract, even for that —
nothing to do with the counting off
of numbers that make up a year.
It just felt wrong to write
all those zeroes in succession
that did not add up, as where before
there were three nines wriggling in place,
each verging on double digits —
ready to spill or explode
if one but lit the fuse.



AM HEILIGENBERG

PHILOSOPHENWEG

The suntanned purists have come to saunter, their monotone sedans parked down by the river. Polo-clad burghers with rimless glasses, retired colorectal surgeons with tugged-out posies. I sit down, recline on a bench where the system of gardens and inscriptions terminates rather abruptly in the romantic view and unruly underbrush beyond the wooden railing — sucking on a *BumBum* (a kind of popsicle).

HEIDENLOCH

It is around midnight when Victor Hugo parts the thorny briars with his walking stick and peers down into the moss-lipped abyss. Suddenly a low voice quivers behind him : *beeüiddennlochb*. He looks. No one. Again the low voice. Horrified, he turns around and sees a shrub advancing! No, it's just some tattered hag hauling branches... Annoyed, he thanks her with a few kreutzers. The mood is ruined.

BISMARKSÄULE

I might remark about how the hawthorn bushes yawned all afternoon with their hermaphroditic blossoms, greyish and waxy to the touch... or I could slow-strip the poetic banana peel of this luridly tagged-up pyre, a prizewinning design dubbed *Götterdämmerung* by its young architect... but I'll probably just go on skim-reading, lying limp in dappled shade under the *Imperial Eagle*, the *Serpent of Discord* writhing in its grip.

M O N S P I R I

Recent laser surveys have established the prior existence of hundreds of hut dwellings within the parameter of the Celtic double ringwall.

The topmost hump is like a kind of palimpsest : an Iron Age citadel, a regional seat of trade and pilgrimage abandoned to Roman conquest,

the modest temples devoted to Mercury and Jupiter, part of the latter still conjoined in the ruined transept of the medieval *Michaelskloster*.

T H I N G S T Ä T T E

Imagine postwar pinegroves. Car exhaust. The faraway pealing of bells. A theater shaped as a giant trilobitiform fossil, cut into the mountain.

Each *Walpurgisnacht*, students hike up to the open-air site to get drunk and do drugs in torchlight. Here is yet a place for *Ecstasy* and *Infamy*.

Hear the slur of thousands of voices drowning from below. See flames tonguing the splitscreen of trunks, leaving no trace of blood in the sky.

AM KÖNIGSTUHL (I)

No birds seem to live
on the mountain in January —

stop now in your tracks
and you can hear the howling

of tires on wet pavement
a kilometer or so away.

A second rain falls
from the bare canopy,

the buds of the branch
in front of your face

like little stones
this far from Spring.



A TRAMP ABOARD

There were nights, you could hike up Huckleberry Mountain and watch the flak bloom over Ashkenaz, blockbusters pop like bubbles in lava silent for a second or two until the reverb hit your lungs, as if the hum of hundreds of Lancasters choired in your very bones. The ideal view from an unscalable height, as not even birds see : the *Norden M-9B* frames the *trace Italienne*, vision the Enlightenment could only ascribe

to the mind's eye. Howitzer salvos and fireworks on the Fourth of July quake the cornfields of a stranger Kansas. And the ruined *Schloßhotel* where Mark Twain spent the Summer of '78, prime for redevelopment as it stands athwart clusters of evergreen dark against the lighter hues of outlying leaves. A needle-netted ceiling, thatched shut and down with low light in the columns of thorned pine, swart molder-brown

of fallen down boughs and dead nettles brittle stiff, sticky with sap that the wanderer, away now from the right path, must trudge through and suffer the crows their old custom of cussing each trespasser out. Not a hatful of rain would swell the *Inspirational Mississippi*. No log rafts, no naked prepubescents in the willows. Just coal barges queueing up at the locks. And the flaming sword of Uriel, insignia of the *US Army Europe*, screwed to the chiseled-out space at the *Reichadler's* talons.

FOLLY RUIN

The Margrave von Geyersberg cannot contain his expostulation
on touring the facilities of his host
the Regent's vast estate, artfully deranged
as if undone by the centuries, overgrown.
"What special effects in this garden
in love with death! And yet — though the canvas be
your precinct and property, sire —
some diviner mind, some demiurge
has turned itself inside-out here, has excised
from its own inhuman cranium
the wellsprings of an infinite fantasy —
memories never made, dreams undared!
Yeah, and what crags are those — blue-tinctured, Andean —
serenely dominating the plains ablush
with dewy indecisive evening below?
Such imaginative apocalypse in the severe
cascading qualia of blackening firs
and foreshortened expanse, the many
sherbert grades of sunset suspended
over a glassy bog, air cool to the eye,
studded with ribbiting picaresques —
all these devices that so delightfully frustrate
one's need for punctuation! And the oak trunks denuded of bark
fluted smooth and pale, disappearing
into canopy partitions of shadow flawless
and perfumed, and the white noise of invisible
leaves invisibly roiled by invisible breeze
in a blissful night-scene
where the sight of individual things is lost
and only their outlines remain
huddled, cloaked in a metaphysical beaming,
the boney milk of the moon, which is more
a species of darkness than it is of light —
would you not agree?"

VIEW TOWARDS MAUERN (MAY 2007)

Ripply stream that runs the vale taking
its sweet time is maker, and all else

seems bed-mud, placed-there
pebbles, slight wake.

The hull manor shelled in wartime
across the road from farm and chapel

hides tulips bedded dense
under its four remnant walls

with render tattered and moss-tinged
canvas crumbling from ragstone

masonry, unrecognizable.

Old orchard pent with juniper
amid the meters of dying apple trees,

limbs buttressed with metal joints :
slant-plumed deviations

from once-mapped growth,
all that bloomed now greying

over disintegrating
barbed wire.



HILDRIZHAUSEN (JULY 2007)

Timber utility poles staked here and there
look like trees again for the ivy twining

their cruciform frames, suspending
powerlines that tune the gnat-heavy air

and whelms of wheat, binding hill
to swell and spent tillage slit with hayrope

in disciplined perspective. A view seen
from valley's rim : the sunken village

set over manured fields, steepletip against
what some *plein air* painter might think

jaundiced periwinkle, with the walled
and gated churchmound (presumably

a cairn in prehistory) near the built-over
site of a long-razed watercastle —

ancestral seat to the Counts of *Glebuntra*,
a bloodline ending in the 12th Century.

Town seal : the *Red Fort*, a coulter blade
buried below, forever to harrow

the bright and blank-green ground.

B E D T I M E

Here we slept, spilled into matted morning grass, like dew
spent on too-spaded soils of childhood. Misty betrayed

as if unbegin : our lives already lived-late, left lying to await
the shallow fieldstream's slow-rippling touch at the ankles

chill even in Summertime, that carves on valley's fallow
the muddy bed between our toes. Stream that would untie

the grain and tired clench, coil of our bodies narrowing down
to bone and the space below, if we could but stand there

long enough with a child's will of stone to stay in place —
to be a bead of sand at home in the streams of Doggerland.

The *Soul* would roil to salt and carbon dioxide *Mind* run out,
the leaf of *Thought* would turn and the loam of *Desire* fuse

all of us in its never-living filament, and *Self* as a ripple fold
in the stream no one stands on the footbridge to watch.

FREAK ON A LEASH

I was thirteen when I began my infamous career
in the nemesis minds of the middle school,
reveling and returning the hate
classmates (cruelly *other*) spit in my face,
tearing at my *bitch tits*
in front of the bathroom mirror — you can't do what I've done
to my body before you.

That no one could be
as *fucked up* as me, that's what I wanted
as my armor of grace.

Acting out in class — ploys that proved to maim
my intended end : to punch back, armed with nothing
but my own aberration, that they would taste
their scorn weirdly returned
in dead-eyed performance or just
leave me alone.

From detention to community service I ascended
to the higher jurisdictions, where was granted
a sentence fitting for the mounting gravity
of my crimes : *plays with his fingerboard in class, falls asleep
often or is unresponsive, unwilling or unable to complete
schoolwork, pants sagging, pants falling to ground,
student falling to ground, not wanting
to get back up.* And so I was
pinned to my conceit, the imposter taking my place
to trudge the sand-headed stupors of *Zolof*
drooped over in a baggy sweatshirt
with belly fat infurling like rolls of sticky parchment
blank and dumbly virginal. Though once
as my *Detainees* was summoned away, deep in the p.m.

I got up and dread-giddy spun a classroom globe
as the afternoon haylight bled through the windows doing its best
to melt my face — waiting, eyes shut
with my index finger like Adam, shrimpy outstretched
as the curdled hemispheres lapped
the squeaking poles, ready to pinpoint one exact place



after another I'd make disappear — yearning
for that budding May and my smoldering tweenage life
to hurry up and disintegrate already,
abandon me in a future and self I could never hope
to live to become.

That I might master the sundering art of how
to fast-forward the next burgeoning glorious
Springtime wanting nothing to do with me,
to disappear into oniony soil and leave the narratives reeling
plucked of subject, snag to catch the working weave
and ravel me down in this place
to unspyable peekaboo, just another wheatshade in view
beyond the chainlink installation fence,
free from having to be
anything at all.



She was in High School

and now I'm a year dropped out, scanning
family photos that will morph into each other

as JPEGs in a digital picture frame —
the birthday party when I supposedly threw a spoon at her face
making her cry in front of all her friends

or the movie night when she tripped a five or six-year-old me,
my eye-socket hitting the edge of a radiator

leaving a tear-shaped scar.

Now I can't see her face but mine as

I shower in the dark, like locking myself in a diving bell
to pretend being Hamlet the Hunchback

in *20,000 Leagues Under the Lagoon* —

where to ponder the cucumbersome prolixities of barrier reef
as I absently finger a few bolts on the frozen fuselage
and stare through my own reflection

multiplied there in porthole darkness.

Destination : the ultraviolet polypwood, the *Hadal Zone*,

or was it the black hole of Sagittarius

in the unimaginable ink-spray of octopi

where the fibers of our flesh so indentable

(that some goddamned teacher once told me,

with a malice wickedly unawares of itself,

come from dead stars)

coalesce into mollusk fossils — our truer bodies

hard enough to suffer the long and leeching touch,

the one-sided love of the ocean, embraced in its filament,

dead enough not to mind its taking us apart

as if to kill time with our long division,

its forcing us to dream along with

kelpen life-cycles, the desultory conquests of the angel fish,

the elemental accretions of what will become

\$12 tubes of sea salt.

The mermaid's grace for never having lived might save us yet

in that the pleading riddle of our becoming

and the corkscrewing inward of our being

separate

stops needing to be plotted and solved
once today's lesson on the *Periodic Table* finally ends
with the recess bell

and my anxiety (like that of the diver not knowing
if his lungfull of breath will last him

to reach the surface, just in sight)
boils down to a boredom swamp-assed and seatward,
hidden behind a hoodied curtain

of oily hair and sugar crash.
Of our adjacent rooms only a faint scar

split along the canthus crease of my outer eye remains —
some memento trapped mirrorside, those fault lines

I've furrowed, cracks in the hard tar stepped over
though wanting to trip, gaming with superstition,
wrinkles in that shaving cream-caked face returning my gaze,
scowling with later knowledge

as if trying to trick his way through the glass,
the pane so thin, dividing air from quartz —
as if he could reach out with unexpected violence
and actually find a throat to grasp.

THE OAK TREE (JULY 2018)

Two years are etched on arrows
pointing to rings in the cross-section
of a 100-year-old oak. An arrow bearing
the year 2011 gestures towards the bark
at the trunk's edge where the year
2000 is nailed about two inches away.
The years don't proceed evenly
down to a center, as one might think
they would. Rather, the rings distort
as they circle the trunk, evening
as they near the bark and take on
the tree's outer shape. Dark patches,
black welters mark the marrow
of the wood, where sap still bleeds
from cracks six years after it was felled.
Judging by how much space is left
between the years and the center
where the rings are so dense I can
no longer discern one from the other
it seems inescapable, that I imagine
the wood as a kind of map of time
contracting towards its center
as bathwater rounds a drain.
I scratch at a spot roughly where
I was born, then trace further inward
the births of my mother, my father.
There aren't enough rings to hold
the births of their own parents
but that are compacted in the dark
of the heartwood, smooth and hard
as stone. It's unclear why the oak was
cut down — whether it was diseased
or too old, or even if it could still be
standing, growing with our lives below
the bark. Or am I only able to know
myself apart — the tree as being

there, its rotting cross-section
propped-up in front of me
that I might see when
we were once alive.

W I N T E R A X I S

January at the *Hermisdorfer Kreuz*
and the giant blue signs like scaffolding

extend over the howling slush-warp
exits *Westeasterly* in high vis sans-serif.

München - Berlin, Dresden - Weimar :
a purer poetry cannot be, flashing by

enjambments hell-bent to *blab blab*
histories of rest, unrusting.

Winter tracts are a different text
to read, with no legible green

speckling the low blanks
of snow-blurred harrow lines —

leftovers of the seasons outlined
in corrugated grey-shade

as trees or houses revealed
in the shape of trees or houses.



VOIE SACRÉE

I leave the ground as if waking.
It's nothing like how I imagined it would be —
a Vernian realm, Fort Douaumont encompassed
by moonscape. Not the sterility of lunar sand
like the pulverized marble and bone
of strategic theory, countless hourglasses
dumped out, but tatters of drumhide
in mudcake, a snapped musket
and pillow-plugged excavation site
of medieval ramparts, maybe Mycenaean.
Surgeons and other critics will no doubt decide
a commaless curriculum. All as the road away
gloves the sorry salvage of clouds
and ungranted survival.

Half buried in battle-rent earth
the barbed wire trundles on and on
like a child's drawn coils of chimney smoke
hung from refuse pole-wood
found splintered by the wayside
as I ride past crater zone
to crater zone and crater zone
to crater zone.

The nature stench
of this tillage is cruel enough and crisp
to debrief our rotten aromatics,
leaves us whelmed to tend our leathern ore
bartered against worm, root and spade
of civilian imagination — bayonets
poked out just beyond the grass
of the monument lawn.

LETTER TO A PATRONESS

The Château de Muzot has
(now that we've tidied it up) gained
everywhere in brightness and homeliness.
The rooms, as in all these medieval houses,
have something honest and farmerly about them.
Something rustic, without ulterior motive ...
Anyhow (and so I don't forget it)
next to my bedroom on the upper floor
there's also some kind of old chapel
towards the rear of the house —
a small whitewashed room
accessible from the forecourt
through a remarkably low portal
still entirely medieval, gothic in style,
and in the masonry above it
in starkly protruding relief
not however the cross
but : a big swastika!

ALPENPOEM

Here on the mountain how far away
the world seems, though here too a man
could arrive and remake it in his image
enviored by an unknown number
of trees. A lakeside hotel where a man
arrives after a long drive, stays longer
than he had planned out of trepidation
for the driving away. A man arrives
here in the rain. He sees no summits
or mountains, in fact, though he knows
he is in the mountains. Where nights are
clear when they come and balconies hang
out into sublimity. He can't tell whether
that flickering point up there is a star
or beacon from a cable car tower. A hut
partway up the mountain. That mass
hulking in the darkness he thinks
he sees, blacker than the night rising
over him. One moment barefoot
out on the tiles, icy bedsheets the next
sleep subtracts him from. Come morning
tiles are warm, suspicions confirmed
that that was the mountain. No source
though for the light on what's obviously
sheer rockface. But there is the river clarified
at the banks — how it turns antifreeze
blue at knee depth, right where one would
be swept along. Viscous, too recently
coursing through stone. Lime-dyed blue
in a way that shows how the water
there is water, its color accumulating
in the lake beyond. Not so much depth
as silt and boulders grading down
into higher surrounds of pine, cliff, sky
the dark reflects. And though it's still
technically off-season, things are starting

to pick up at the hotel. This, despite that the conditions of late November don't exactly match the measures taken. Flowers pulled from their planters and rocks slightly bigger than pebbles strewn about the snowless parking lot, where guests' suitcases stutter ordeals of conveyance audible even now as he sits down with ten minutes left to order breakfast. *Weißwurst, die nicht darf das Mittagsläuten hören. Statt Kaffee ein dunkles.* A couple sits across from him — or is that a mother and son. Suspicious, he thinks, just how overstaffed the hotel is for being so deserted. Waitstaff who stand silently or hand-clean silverware with white gloves and attend to their lone patrons' needs with an attentiveness that makes him slightly uncomfortable — as if all of what surrounded him here was now concentrating on some point that he happened partially to be contained by. The rather bizarre 19th Century quality of the *maitre d's* attire. The mountain outside and its inclination for the man to just fall off. The crystal flutes where sunlight awaits a later morning Riesling or the odd mimosa. Passing bodies quake the lattice shone from the stems on the tablecloth when a server asks *Warum schauen Sie so betriibt? Heute ist doch so schön draußen!* — jerking her head sideways to the window, to the mountain outside. He winces up at her face and that sun behind it. Little tendrils of torn hair not pulled back into her ponytail and then blinded as she leaves. Snowblistered ledges out of scale — wide as a bedroom or just deep enough to rest one's razor on. He thinks of the *Bergbahn* queues

where the guests of the future will stand
around rubbing their hands together
trying for a little warmth to make better
their mistake of having come here
to see the shape of what things might be
sticking out of the snow. What is this
other than the most involved form
of boredom, waiting to climb the noon
that dusks already at the peaks.

As up on the plateau the wind wants
to blow scarves skyward, a skier is
airlifted from relative to absolute
safety. It's hard to imagine that
somewhere out there there is
the frosted carcass of one of
Hannibal's elephants, that died
simply from being in a place
it wasn't supposed to be.

AT VIRGIL'S TOMB

Is this what makes up time
for the unliving? Jackhammers
as keepers of the measure
of a shift you'll never work
or the Metro's contempt
for the schedule posted there
on the platform that only
you may see and later regret
having expected the actual
to conform to what was
promised. Lovers embracing
to take a selfie and smile
into their happy future,
a spiderweb over gulf blue
thrummed by the lost trades
or boots of readers erasing
the pawprints of the ants
too small for the eye to see.
This tomb is their world.
They cross the domed desert
of the ground, know this
terrain with intimacy.
The poet does become
a kind of sorcerer. He has
moved the earth — or others
in his name. Another earth
made of something said
in a crowd once. Cities melt.
The ants carry the illustrious
stones away and the dead
die endlessly. In other words
the poet has performed
a great trick — a tomb where
his body never really was.

Here under the sullen ebonized stare of long dead trustees perched like Harpies on the shelves of the *Bobst Reading Room* and the dozen students suspended somewhere between study and sleep — an absence lay there since I arrived, spread out on the mahogany tabletop. A grey down jacket and backpack, pen with a chewed red cap and a daisy-covered spiral notebook left open to the first crisp page, its pulp-white seeming whiter than white for the contrast of lines laced thin, ruled in blue. Though it's the blue hewing in my mind that makes me look through the plateglass grid of the floor-to-ceiling window down at Washington Square below, blanked out with snow and upheaved landscaping, drawn to the overcast sky above engaged with the ground in mutual quotation, nevertheless cut with veins of azure like lapis, as if to redeem the afternoon its morbid enclosure, a shelved book turned geode's interior — to fathom being *inside* weather as pages pressed, covers closed over you with a blue too fateful, like lamplit gold exposed there in the wake of a cave-in, its mortal insult yet revealing just how right the chisel-strike that cost you your life was. Like clouds on bluer days seem to erase the surface of space as brushstrokes you lean close to define, and then slowly retreat to see the scene come together as if backlit, the rough shapes a shadowplay in reverse your eyesight projects, as unending a scansion that keeps melting in memory's sky, further down. If not only the tracework (as termites chew through wood) of memories cloud-shifted as the tides shift Istrian shoreline fledged in moments we lived through, sky-blue : the jagged cape where she still sits, pensive though vaguely annoyed, squinting into the Adriatic's glare at my back as the dusty pebbles bake painfully under my bare feet where I stand taking her picture, squeezing the tiny ridges of a focus dial between my fingers — that miserable week we spent in Croatia, like our own *Hypnerotomachia*, our strife of love in a dream. *Blueprint* for a coming age. The bugs that barbed our legs. The fuss before administering the bunkbed enema. The plastic two-liter bottles of *pivo* I'd hug like buoys to float out in the bay. The boring Bavarian couple



who shared our room. The shitty calamari. The kitten almost dead we fed bottlecapfulls of milk until it was taken to be euthanized. The bronze of Joyce that seared my fingers when I touched it — sitting to face the *Arch of the Sergii*, adorned in bucrania and grape trellises. Cupids garlanded and horny, peaving down at the winged Victories and war chariots stallion-drawn, trampling the enemy prostrate with hands up at their hooves. The eagle and the snake in its talons, rearing to strike. Carved amid crocuses, the sigil flower of love. The delirium from mixing *Effexor* and beer that masked my rising fever. The grinding discs in my spine and the fear I loved her more than she did me. The dust covering everything. The storm that flooded the neighboring sewage treatment plant by our hostel muddying the aquamarine we swam in anyway, drunk to the gills. The evening she took the wine, ran and waded into the water — or tried to, as I swam out after her, withstraining, pulling her back screaming *just let me go*, locked in our room. In the picture I took she's still sitting there, writing in her *Moleskine* with the garish red ink of the only pen we could find frustrating her, unable to take whatever words came seriously. *Red*, she said, *is impossible*. *Blue*, too. That *ink black* was the only color she could use — *if you can really call it that, a color* — in poetry, as in life. That the word is inseparable from the ink in which it is written — and that only by blotting out the buildings of *wavebreak blue*, the *pallor beige* of clay under rock and menstrual hue of *buckthorn red* in pitch like of our eyes closed does revelation reveal more than some ruse of description just to flesh the outlines of memory — as the whites of pages yellow. *Write to forget*, she said. Let bleed the colors we knew, let them fade into none, as our days together burned on the negative overlap with the shutter left open — a *nothing* that is too much to see.

TOKEVILLE

Now zoom in on yourself
face-down in a Virginia swamp,
sun slumping in overhyped Summer
like an apple *Jolly Rancher* lolled
on the tongue — ossified egglike
thing wedged in Washington's eye.
Imagine an Afghan poppy field
and beyond it, the Amazon's edge
glimpsed through the vacant juncture
of a strip mall as if this were
just another storefront. No shade
to keep you from what means
to color you with lawboy
blue as the afternoon bruises
bare skin, white-hot gunning down
children out of an abundance
of caution. Only the guilty run.
Come dusk when blood is even
in the trees, hung there to resemble
order. Alas, there's not much left
in these weedy aisles that would
lend itself to such reportage
as trench memoirs render piquant
for cultured geriatrics — other than
perhaps the ongoing interregnum,
imbroglio that is the innocence
of our American friends, debating
how best to combat the common
dodder's insurgency (dark bane
of the garden patch) as they assert
their elbowroom on airplanes
half-awake, watching in-flight movies
suspended in a sky they don't
own but aim for as capital,
guarantee of a life yet to come.

But if only this were as granted as the space between
the pages of an in-flight magazine : that your dying

in a plane crash over the Atlantic was to forever be
the stockbroker sitting on a bench in Madison Square

facing an advertisement for *Calvin Klein Eternity*. A flap
you're meant to tear open — and where the tearing

of one side from the adhesive strip on the other
releases the scent. A quick pinch on the wetted tongue

and rub of swollen index finger over ashen thumb
to flip through and look at the places you'll never visit —

that you can live out the dream of luxury, breathe in
the humid air, shake a toucan's claw, tour the rainforest

that the caption printed over the banana leaf identifies
as the Yucatán. What lives you could lead, that only

money could buy. A single hook-shaped cloud above
a sleek cabriolet, the horizon an overexposed band

of white warped in the bends of its *carrosserie*, headline
laserjetted on sloping blue : *SAAB vs. klaustrophobi*.

The promise of escape. Open air. Gloss that's neither
sunrise or -set. 100% charisma. Steppes you can picture

yourself as part of — that's gratis. And that cloud hung
there to illustrate just how clear the sky otherwise is.

I'm dozing off in the righthand captain's seat of a *Plymouth Voyager* swaddled in its '90s reek of carpet and vinyl, sworn to the faraway Berkshires for the weekend. I can feel as Manhattan's binding spell like mummy wrap is peeled from me and branches barely green tear me away — quick as I might respawn or imagine myself living out there under a tarp — Dan Boone of the median, mountain man dreaming of contentment in a thin spit of forest — needling his track down unknown mileages of roadside. Go fast enough and you can see through anything — 15 mph over the speed limit as our van flickers past on car windows. I look into my looking but do not find myself where I would expect to, just the black glass of the *Voyager* and reflected landscape going the wrong way, streaming in the tint left to right into what we're leaving behind. I watch powerlines warp near the convex edge, where diminutive villas accumulate and slam into a wreck of dead-grassed berms, abutments sandwiching arcane industrial parks and greige soundbarriers disappearing, overlaid in a pile-up of detail. These places built according to what I assume to be constant though unrelated principles, random zoning laws that would in turn dictate the topography of any future constructions in the surrounding properties by virtue of a faultless contiguity slit into hillsides all christened in the course of their development. Let the source of the drainage marsh go unascertained — trailing off under thin-needled skirts of zombie tamarack — uncanniest of trees in that their manginess makes the abundance that surrounds them look almost fake for being inflated, beaming green as if to posit an audience of condo-dwellers, Ralph Waldos and other nut fiends who've all lingered too long to just stand and sway in the stink of the wind, agape at chemtrails ablaze across the sky as they get all goosepimply, contemplating how there's no stopping the coming kudzu sublime from tanking all their equity. So, no native bird sings in what I see, nor do wild flowers have names beyond their being streaks of color on the White Plains municipal palette. But, listen — I would make of my disdain a dinghy to recline on pungent streams of runoff as that flow under viaducts, leading in all directions away from the remains of the citidel, just to tour the interior like ducks do. Were there a sidewalk, I too would foot it. Kneel down and tweeze

the *Mountain Dew* from any grassholm, with half a mind to discover and render into the ledger of human history each Edenic do-over staked out here in the mulch-drowned archipelagos of Exurbia. To taste the tart berries of islands in the tarmac, roving yard to yard to excavate the scant remains of ramshackle huts on the outskirts of lava-toasted factory towns. Bugged in biowaste, ripped on wrinkle in a *Clarion Hotel* parking lot. Witness to the perdition of an alien race that in its honeyed endtimes unchained release from all precedents of desire, and whose art evolved as an ultimate means of achieving transparency, the prophecy of whitest skin, the technological conceit of a frameless interface, content parsable at once to one's willing as bodies turned *Body, Body Eye, Eye Sight, Sight Image*. So they became what they ate, as the prophecy foretold — spirits, jailed in the corn. Try to imagine their arrival here, when even the future was primed for a painterly scene of landfall. See them oaring triumphantly ashore to stand athwart the most serene and swollen bounty, gesticulating with grave importance in the directions their ideology would require them to run down, all the way to the end. And there He stands — the magus Patriarch tall in the foreground, with the scattered train of his kin behind him, trailing over grasslands back to the shore. He, a dark-cloaked Prospero — cleanshaven, frilled and imperious, left arm lithely raised to heaven, the sharp-nailed fingers gathered nearly to a point, as if balancing an invisible apple held at their tips, and the right arm arrowed resolute over the viewer's shoulder, the index finger slightly crooked in its indication, weighted perhaps with what one would like to think is the burden of foundation, stuck in stark relief against the fibrous blue of oceanward sky — this gesture that by the rhetoric of its metaphor seems to mean to channel the wrathful ideation of the biblical God, magnified as a ray-beam at the unconquered expanse, yet to be transformed. The fervent manifesting of a *New Canaan*, of Man's infinite destiny, with an industry much as the poetic imagination itself fabricates its own backstory, truer than the truth, to supplant its surroundings frozen as that sandbarred cape where the historical Pilgrims actually landed in Winter. Toward what ends do we journey our judgement as if forever just arriving — as if we were not, in a truth unavailable to ourselves in the moment, part of the very things we disparage? *It is an odd jealousy, but the poet finds himself not near enough to his object.*



Many and many an Oedipus arrives — he has the whole mystery teeming there in his brain. Alas! (writes Emerson) the same sorcery has spoiled his skill.

And what is this but to shoot a flare over the distance between us and all we fear ourselves to be, projected onto a world without need of our witness as it rounds itself off, whets and sucks the jellied rot of dead things down its pores, clumped with the drip of bitumen? Part of me wishes I could say this simple, say it in a way that would speak to us all about the plain reality of things, in litanies *plainspoken* and earthy and real. The hoeman who hoed this and that, the boy handcuffed as he bleeds out in the street, the girl kicking at the grass fringe along the sidewalk, the reservist jacking off behind the wheel as he drives home to no one I care further to imagine. The same goes for my life, like picket fences point at the sky and delimit even there a drama made of clouds. Universal vantage from which to engage you in vintriloquy, taking tincture from your black to stain the fresh page with my loafing beyond the fray. And what I presume you shall take pains to integrate. Like grandad Whitman, I want nothing more than your hand to touch, your eyes to see, your mind to mouth. A blank here to be imbued. Hungering for all I'm not, made the same as me as my skin assumes the license of Winter, to cake the land with white when — *flashblind* — my forehead slams on the glass. *Pothole. Sorry.*

AFTER GEORGE

Come into this parsed to death park and watch
the shimmering of a far off smiling coastland
and where from purest clouds an unhoped-for blue
brightens on little ponds and colorful paths.

Take the bruised yellow, pluck the downy grey
from birch and beech — creeping in the balmy wind.
The latebloomers have wilted, roses soft to the lips
as you snip them, braiding your garland crown.

Also, here, don't forget these last few sticks.
Take the rank purple from tendrils of wilder vines
and whatever else is left of your once-green life,
entering it all into the interface of Autumn.

AUTUMN IN MCCARREN PARK (OCT. 2012)

Let me begin this with you in my place, and how you are to be broken over the jagged backs of litter-bound shorelines, forever-there rebar and pined-for skylines debarring the sky, and the sky slung above that amidst the jutting craft of crusty field lights as deliriously clarified as it does impend, jetting and alive with dread leaves (the trillion friends of anything) that laugh and flying fall and really can't wait to be dirt. *You*: where a leafy friend or blue might've fallen, puddled, but didn't. Let me think this for you. How words are like walnuts whose lobes halve unevenly, their careless fracture that taunts you with what you thought you could do, could intricate. *No*: never such personal enjambments in branches blown too bare to be plagiarized. Or how your foot-splashes plunge through and ripple this or that too opportunely placed puddle's spit-in image of yourself, vantaged as from below. Or how with each step the boot of that alien shade meets the sole of your own, and you panic wait, just how deep is this puddle, anyway? Thankfully you weigh as much as you do, and things here push up against themselves to stay in place or aloft or inflated or whatever it is they're doing. Like the park benches and the railings and trashcans and even the figures of picnickers cohere into poses no yogi could comprehend. Wait, do you hear it? That jingling pitterpatter of the painkillers in your totebag, the lilliputian pink genies massaging the insides of your brain with their tiny magic penis wands, scrubbing away the litanies of amateurish graffiti, all the while revealing your body alike in kind to some provincial overpass, where a teenage self has practiced announcing his delinquencies to whatever of the world might happen to drive by, having come so far into these Idahoan wastes. And though this device helps me (*You* my little frog to be vivisectioned, outline sketched on the sidewalk, avatar who might be made to suffer there in my place, my *second person*) it's the wooden *Dummy* that's alive for seeming so, the doll that's glass-faced and pillow-brained, all stuffing, fluff and gristle. How unlike the *Man in the Puddle*: a bodiless reflection looking down at me as I, too, stare from where I dangle — downside-up in a tangle of strings that stitch the warp and weft of what's possible, body bendible this way, what streets walkable. Like a *Rat King*, this knot we are — crawlspace atrocity of nature, thing that ties and pulls its tails tighter the more it tries to escape from itself. It takes a scalpel to spill the beans, a sympathetic man of science to chain the monster to its bed.

It's been over two years since they cut me open, splinted my guts apart with tongs and sucked out the pulpy oyster-leather of what remained of the ground-down discs in my spine, cutting notches with a little saw into my vertebrae, sliding the titanium prosthetics gingerly into place. It took me three days to wake up, to find legs and a lower body lumpen and numb, not mine, just meat leading back to me. High on morphine I wrote a mock epic comparing my love for the one there at my bedside to entering a jungle tropic in full *Indiana Jones* regalia, questing in ecstasy for some fetish the legends promised would be there, finding instead a small moss-skinned fountain that bled clear and sweet water forever in a trellised cell under the canopy like a cave's interior, strangely cool and silent, free from the trilling cries of macaws and capuchin chatter as I knelt, like Ponce de Leon, with my hands cupped, finally, to drink. My fantasy, other poems scratched on hospital stationary, some illegible and the one above so embarrassingly bad I never did share it with her but threw the poem, like the rest, away the day I was released back into the Summer just as we'd left it, a month earlier. And how corny to say I was *reborn* — but it's true. Though, as is often the case in the movies, those resurrected are not the same as before, as uncomplicatedly *alive*. Their skin peels easily, their gait is not of this world, and they hunger in a strange new way — a slaving singe in every fiber of their being that demands the gush of sorbapples. Flesh bletted, drowned in liquor. Families find the afflicted hard to stomach. Friends run for their lives. And so it was with you. The leaves swerve and fall in their freedom to dissolve in the blood, replacing you. It's been heaven since you woke a disciplined slave of cum and decay. Searing bliss, as poetry *should* feel. How embroiled you've been these years, with what important research! *Yes*: it is possible to scale a lifetime of waste into thirty minutes — to sink still further into yourself. You can even love another person with a force that's equal to the velocity with which they repel you. Though this is still the stage where you're only beginning to suspect that the heroic efforts won't be worth their end. That all this crustiness of tawdry tin and iron eaves that poke from the peeling Permastone as realia of some *fin-de-siècle* part torn-down, its afterlife awkwardly plunged in the interstices of the next, and all those diminutive brick abodes of the working poor of your imagining is but another violence committed against the lives of real people, unrecountable in the ground. How each block had its own lethal hue of twilight, you'd nearly drown

just strolling down the sidewalk. And how could it be that, whether late to class on the *choo-choo* or to pick up your pills, everywhere you went you encountered not the dead, but the living? How many times did you charge the subway stairs, spotwelded ridges worn smooth by others more you than you are, just to emerge shocked at the sunlight — as if, in that time underground, you forgot there was a bright world above.



GREENPOINT (NOV. 2012)

Morning bloodlight touches the upper stories and leaftops of the magnolia in the backyard, bluing that shelf of shadow cast by my building. Just now I crushed the first cockroach of the season. Fresh off the shitter, yogurt damp in hand.

Last night I walked to Williamsburg in pissing rain, shivering too high poking at my phone. *Hey could you order me a hot toddie plz* left on read. Unbounded is the imagination — much as we are fast funneling down November. Seems the year is done for.

Magnolia, who for weeks after the so-called *Halloween Hurricane* like an eccentric, endearingly aloof, forgot to turn all the way — you're losing your leaves as always, I know, but I want to cry. *Reese's Pieces* stain my *Yoplait*. How far have I let myself go?

THE PERSISTANCE OF MEMORY

So I've been strangely OK
with the ladybirds I think spawn
behind the bathroom mirror, that live
and die mostly around my sink, that beige
and soap-stained plane like a desert baking
under the harshness of the double light
fixtures above. Their carapaces seem
to pale as weeks reset and the world errs
further into Winter. Today I wake and find
that one of them has failed to venture
past the corral bounded by the *Crest* tube
and the *Advil*. In an attempt to be gentle
I awkwardly ply the bug's grey-brown shell
with both my index fingers. It doesn't fight me
like the others to stay glued to the surface
but rolls into my palm like a little pebble
and then off, hitting the basin with a tick.
I let the faucet run but it's still there,
stuck between the chrome cover
and caulky mouth of the drain.
A flick and then it's gone.

THE PARTISAN

By this time I had rejected
the promise of love, learned to see
company as encroachment. I took
whatever wasn't bolted down —
heirlooms and quilts, lace doilies
whose coffee-stains dredged
the channels of my guilt, desiring
the parts of a body I couldn't believe
was there. It's like no one was
tugging the rope to war with me
on the other end. That it was just
tied to something past the treeline
whence it stuck, taught or slack
as my faith in the goodness
of the fight would flag. But not yet
during my days of corduroy, no —
things were still expected of me.
It was still possible for me
to disappoint you. Which I did.
You looked at me once, as if to ask
can I get dressed in peace?
No, you can't.

SIGNIFICANT OTHER

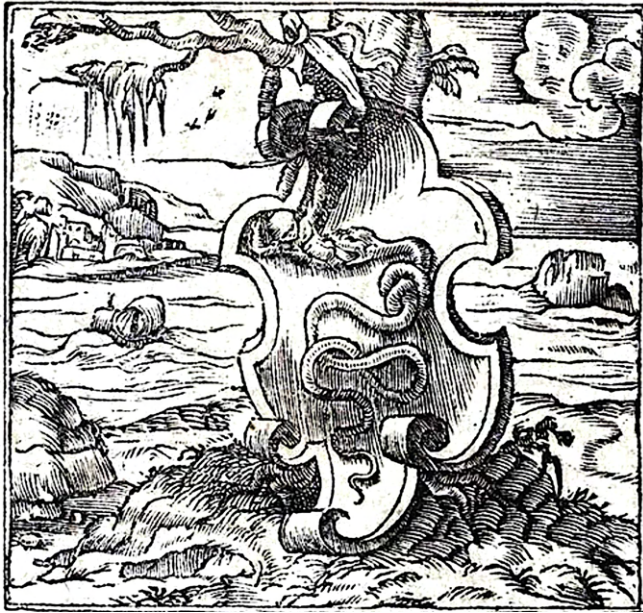
Yes, it was hard
because our words
would mean so many
different things
beyond what we
intended them to —
wanting the other
to understand our
meaning in identity
with what we thought
we thought. Again,
could we really trust
ourselves, our feelings
that revealed them
selves with all the self
evidence of a flawless
cover story we half
heartedly told?

THE ONANIST

No sacrifice to be suffered would suffice
the imagination turned, wound against itself,
chewing down to render of lard and tendon
the baser matter, seared gristle of the *seen*.

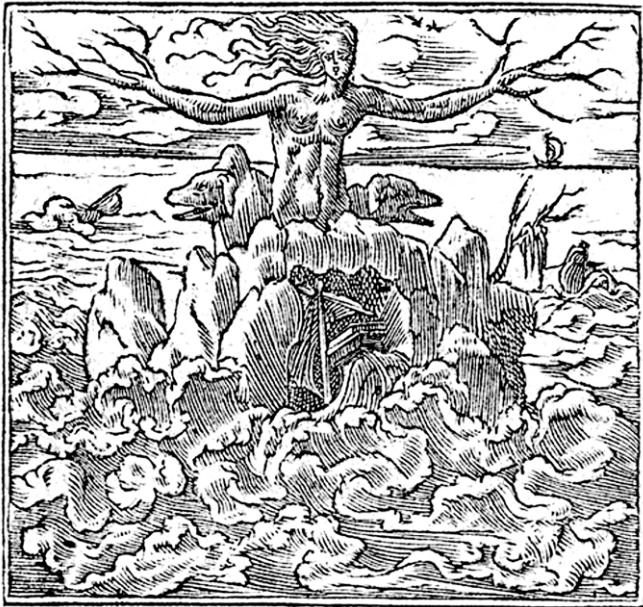
As if our poor Oedipus instead so hungered
for the bitterest blue goopflesh of his eyes
he tore them out to taste the bloody root
rather than blight their vision too pure

for what they saw, and artlessness damned
for what it revealed : the stabbing rift
that aches in what you come to know after
the awful thing you've done to yourself.



THE PAGEMASTER

The library is a dangerous place
where the colors of the *Mural of Life*
(that throughout the bumpered
bowling lanes of your childhood
was but background, and safe
because of that) will bleed down
on your windbreaker as you think
(in the dawning of what will become
egotism) how you want to escape
all this kiddy bullshit, to find yourself
on the verge of an adult discovery.
Life will drown you, it's true. It will
cover you in molten paint that falls
from the cupola above like lava
in fast-forwarded animation, a flood
dragon-shaped, chasing you around
a checker-floored maze of stacks
because it wants to splash on you
and seep down your underpants
while you wake up the cartoon
of what you once wanted to be.
Don't believe me? Just ask
the haggard onetime child star
who suffered the misfortune
of playing your likeness, avatar
in the movie you want to see
as the legend of your life.
Macaulay Culkin — just look
what happened to him.



VIRGINITY LAMENT FOR TELEGONUS

No *Nostos* for the bastard prince blubber boy
wrecked in a rudderless boat, lost utterly in endless
sugar water and the grandiose hallucination
of land. No storied *Agon*
but what's televised via the portholes
where bully seagulls shit on the pane in reject
reportage of their blithe fraternities
against him. The unknown seas outside
thrash more furious and free than he can bare frame —
muting swordbleat on mastwood,
whiteheads, flap of torn sails, thunderclap and screams.
Though the cabin blinds are drawn
now affecting a soiled neardark
as a vacuum cleaner's electrical cord
slithers around his neck, and he pretends
to not be real, to not know
whose hand pulls it tighter, tighter, then
lets go. The quivering line
slackens, falls limp to the carpet where he lays
naked fat, all heinous and
unerased, blighted in the sandshag,
to tear at his tits until they turn a chafed
destiny red.
Watch him struggle on deck
weeping clad in his sealskin diaper uniform
as legendary horizon cribs
his pathetic fallacies with exhaust
most beauteous in its aspect,
wrestling his awkward craft —
driftwood spumewarped
and waterlogged, licked bare.
Watch him chew his only meal of lichen cheese and chug his diet rootbeer
as clouds hang over the chastityscape
and he goes on dreaming of the reaming
tentacled embrace of his wished for
mermaid love.



SHORE SONG

Venus of heart-silt, you wreck-inflected pearl
of the sexless sand-round oceans born

to awake in dawn-glow on a beachlands where
Leviathan succumbed of his own aberrance.

From beaming divides of water you unscrew
the moonshard as waves fret in the idea

of you. Pearl I can feel — pursed in the grey
puckering glands push along, thoughts abrade.

Shorelines silver in you, further than I've will
to swim — no longer believing in the prospect

of being saved. Ossuaries — lightless craters
where sea slugs yearn to suck the marrow

of being imagined. O pluck me from what I am
meant to mean — tearing at the word-scorn

reefs in air, my fingers fat with sheaf-sand
graveling the rainbow in the ribs of your shell.



THE MERMAN

A poem you can only write
at rock bottom, burrowed down
under the hull-beams of a galleon
wrecked on the Caribbean floor.
How long do you intend to stay
holed up in your room? Years
it took to practice breathing water
not different from your lungs.
There's no more than 90 miles
of solid ground beneath you
until the unimaginable core
and you burst out of your own
antipode and need to swim
through nothing for a long time
until you reach another you living
a life not even that different
from the one you're sucking at
right now. Is this what it means
to conceive of happiness?
To find yourself not dressed
in seaweed and barnacled skin
but a polo shirt and khaki shorts
grilling frankfurters at a playground
with your husband and two daughters,
never even having thought to try
your hand at the dark art of making
dreams come true. As though,
in all possible worlds, there was
one in the course of which
you were never born
with fins for feet.

THE VOYAGE OF LIFE

I turn up the music on my phone and try to imagine somewhere inside the painting there's a universe of wire, cables shearing cables, tautening to the grand mazurkas and *Gymnopédie* of the drunken mind — it all beguiling to the point of how can you resist, already past hope to the rapids of wine given-up and daydream ravaging the riverbanks, cutting a wild way through the erstwhile quietudes of childhood and pastoral preconception. Even as branches dagger and tear at your crimson tunic, *Boatman*, crazy high and weeping about this, your journey from wellspring to delta, virgin to wastrel, just shut up and inhale the secondhand gurglespray and haystink. It's too late. You're already a part of this landscape grievously altered before you could recognize the change affected of wartide, the shoreside villages all burnt to a cinder before you roll by, as you ascribe this lapse to an involuntary daze of algae and rutter confusion. You read that the river is this and that. A brown god. A plunging demiurge. A place kids shouldn't swim. The imagination proved too thin and incapable to plot a course through all the fallout. *But here's a raft*, it said, *you're welcome*. Strung together of bramble fit for a bonfire and morningwood, never did torn shoelaces so fare shaved sticks down all the mud-holy rivers of Europe. *Floß, raft, radeau* — whatever — the craft works despite your best attempts at running aground, crashing into as many neon buoys and wonted *Loreleis* in trashed night as you confound hungover upon each next daybreak. Like a Roman fountain mask, flood tinkles from your lips like speech, unavertible, arraying the rank possibilities of course and destiny as you stare on in utter bronze, walled into perspective, barfing out the reflecting pool before your sculpted eyes, the pupil like a pert nipple cupped by nothing, a shadowy ring simulating the iris and oxidized face in a transhistorical look of dismay. You would rather *suck*, but no. There's too much to be

communicated : a depthless world's-worth of sewage
ablution wise with cigarette butts, bird shit and E. coli.
The sixteen-tit Diana of the Villa d'Este is your muse
amid so much ejaculate, so many monstrously whetted
mouths aligned in a hanging garden of poetic spewage.
Or is it the gravel crunch underfoot, the spilled negroni,
the tipsy-tobacco *verde bottiglia* of the laguna? No no —
this poem is five hefeweizen deep, belly-up in the *Bodensee*,
unsure to exhale and sink into faux Mediterranean blue
still icy in June, to sleep under the poplars as the air reeks
of hash and *Suite Bergamasque* — the pleasures of living
in a turquoise minivan, roadtripping the amber noonlight
of your nineteenth Summer, free to ruin everything.



WE ARE YOUNG, BUT NOT TOO MUCH

swaddled with the Spring green
leaves of it, as an earthy taupe

already blanches along our veins
that intuit the Fall while not even

halfway through August. So it is
the grass and earth that bore us

bare us still — true, though buried
as they are under the crackle

and crumb of leaves long since
fallen, hounded into crannies

and clogging all the right angles
unintended in the buildings of man

with a wealth that, in a finite world,
is accumulation. Which is to say

if the municipal works did nothing
to manage the drifting of leaves

next year our city might find itself
several miles beneath the Spring.

MAKE BELIEVE

This year, the scary thing is how
it snuck up on me. How a swipe left
to check the date can papercut
the brain, waking from the screen
alone on the couch in a dark
living room. While outside
groups of kids lean miserably
into the wind, clutch gauzy capes
and torn mummy wraps closer
to their bodies, as if wishing
those costumes were real —
the centurions on campaign
and Romanov princesses
stuffed in mink, the cowboys
holding down their 10-gallons
and lassoes gust-whipped against
cowhide chaps as femoral bones
printed on black sweatpants
dangle under a parka, its hood
fur-rimmed, keeping the skull
out of sight. What feels like
rain pricks my skin, though I can't
see it fall or stain the sidewalk.
The air is not so much something
to breath as it is a challenge
to your need to do so. It looks
like the storm could descend
at any moment, our evening's end
near at hand. Like none of this
were just make believe —
the skeletons in rocking chairs
on the porch, the severed heads
stuck on fence posts. Tombstones
crowding the neighbor's yard
with names like Barry M. Deep

and Ima Goner, M. T. Graves
and Myra Mains inscribed there
in the styrofoam. Faceless bodies,
strawmen dressed in old clothes
and lynched in the tree, spotlit
from below with green light.
The wind breaks against the car
where I sit typing this — trick
or treaters all around me.
I can feel the glass tremble.
Let me at 'em, wind says.
Why won't you just
let me at 'em.



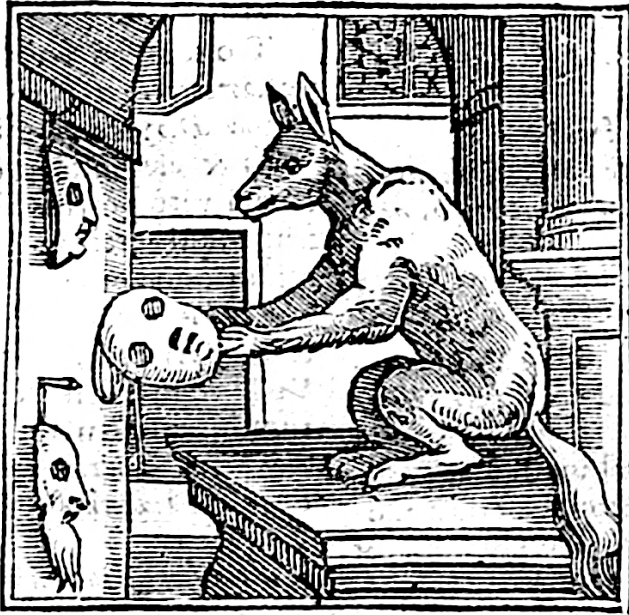
HUNGOVER AT SCHLOSS SOLITUDE

I'm stepping on flowers
walking through the field
and hey, it's Summer already
at the Castle of Solitude.
Didn't mean to, but I did
exfoliate my forehead
sturdied on the banister
of the Property of the State.
The view is not far enough
across the pasture. A princely
sightline mown marvelously
down forest, town and out
over a serfscape that is
one's very own to look at.
How queer it is to think
that the mustard throbs along
with mountains dissolving
in these bloodshot eyes.
My friend, poet in residence
here at the *Akademie* relates
the trysts and palace intrigues.
His allergies from hell. Birds
so pretentious they sound like
recordings piped through
speakers hidden in the trees.
I tell him that's Germany.
That you should just assume
everything is exactly how
it's supposed to be.

THE ORGAN GRINDER

I, too, find the whole spectacle
lacking in genuine feeling.
There's no need to describe
what we all know is going on.
It's almost embarrassing to hear
the sound of it bouncing around
a street corner in a tourist district
when you yourself are playing
the tourist. What would it mean
to have turned around, gone back
down the alleyway, all because
the idea of coming face-to-face,
of being so close in passing
that you would have no choice
but to drop your last two euros
into the cardboard derby upturned
on the burnished cobblestone
spoils what you paid for, willingly —
a feeling that all that is beautiful
is yours to know for the first time.
Besides, I'm far more intrigued
by what must be going on
inside that little lacquered box
for such plaintive sounds to come
from so slight a contrivance
decorated with quaint scenes
of village life. A circle of men
watching a lone maiden dance
in their midst and the groups
of children with pitchforks
marching toward bales of hay
far yonder. For what melody
can claim both to stir memory
and simultaneously make us
wish we'd never heard it —
this honky-tonk rendition

scratched from steel nails
on the cylinder, a kind of code
that makes up the music.
How the time is never right
to hear what song might come.
And if there's a monkey chained
to the grinder's leg, he's dressed up
as a bellhop to match his master
with a fez strapped to his skull
and he's eating a granola bar
or whatever you will have had
in your tote bag to feed him —
whether out of pity or shame,
it really doesn't matter.



AD HOMINEM

Humans are indeed the only animals
known to have what is commonly

called a *chin*. With no discernible
evolutionary reason to exist,

human chins divide and expose
whatever philosophical dispositions

and assumptions that underlie
the most varied forms of research

into the phenomenon of having
one in the first place. Even the jaws

of Neanderthals ended in a flat
transverse plane tapering off below

their teeth. And the evidence is
overwhelming that, when it comes

to chewing, chins don't really
make much difference, seeing how

the compression inherent in that
action stresses rather the inner

part of the joint in the two halves
comprising our jawbones than

the outer part, which is the chin —
meaning we should want

the opposite of whatever it is
the chin seems to be.

THE FAMILY

All share cause of death —
severe perforated fractures
about the size of a coin
as may have been caused
by a stone axe. Considering
how the point and angle
of impact are not uniform
across the preserved crania,
it can be safely assumed
the individuals were killed
during a struggle and not
as result of a ritual killing.
Buried in what used to be
a loam pit, six bodies covered
with pot shards radiocarbon
dated to around 3800 BCE.
Shared epigenetic features
helped establish their filiation —
an infant girl, poorly preserved;
two boys aged about thirteen
and five years old; a woman
in her late twenties; a man,
somewhat older; another man
thought to be in his fifties.
Shown *in situ*, a picture taken
from the excavator's perspective
in the middle of an apple orchard
just outside the present-day city
hung in the back of the display
at eye-level with the visitor.
An adjacent diagram depicts
the arrangement of the bodies
with broken lines denoting
where the foot of a boy passes
through the woman's groin,
the arm of a man in the waist

of the other. Legs wrapped
around thighs, a hand placed
on the hip. Mother and daughter
closer to the background color,
lighter than the dark peach
of the males. A barrier of tile
squares plastered with imitation
dirt bracing the actual earth
where the bones were picked
out of the ground. Vertebrae
half-rotted and ribs leveled
into rings. Teeth that could be
taken as pebbles. Partial jaw.
Examining the photograph
in the background — a man
kneels next to the bodies
with a brush in his hand
looking down at the work
remaining to be done.
Not thinking it through
I ask the gallery attendant
pacing the hallway behind me
*Do you know where the bodies
were reinterred?* At which she says
Oh, no — that's them right there
gesturing over my shoulder
back towards the family.

CAPPELLA SANSEVERO

The sky was the ground
of my imagining, the *Veiled Christ*

a work of unparalleled artifice
in my possession. The vascular system

of a man no one could tell
whether it was real or fashioned

from wax. If real, then by what method
did we strip away the body

surrounding even the capillaries
in the fingers — showing the testes

to resemble a birdsnest? And, if not,
then by what method was wax

made so easily mistakable for what
it appeared to be? As with the nipples

of *Modesty*, wounds of the mortal
son of God protrude. Muslin, the covering

and the skin covered. Tissue carved
from marble, to make of its concealing

a revealing that was in truth
nothing but surface.

HISTORY CHANNEL

As I was at the gym the other day, flushed with objectless hatred
like jet-fuel to be burned and sweat-out on the elliptical trainer,

I watched to my own soundtrack of nü-metal on the console screen
a documentary on the wonders of human technological progress.

There was Guttenberg printing the Bible in flat cap and shirtsleeves,
da Vinci drafting the *Vitruvian Man* in flat cap and shirtsleeves,

the Wright Bros. beachside, quite miffed in their woolen flat caps
and shirtsleeves. Oppenheimer next, hatless but in shirtsleeves,

pouring his triumphant regret into a journal at night. And though
the actual day the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima was ideal

in its clearness, as if the air were an extension of the bombsight
glass, far above the weather — how sublime the early morning sky

and towering thunderheads looked in the computer simulation
after the searing chrome *Enola Gay* closed its bomb-bay doors

and *Little Boy* fell gracefully free, down canyons of a sky ablaze
with the pale neons of a Parrish dawn. As if I were actually floating

up inside one of those heavenly background visions usually spied
from a creaky palace parquet, framed by the *trompe-l'oeil* cupola

of some Renaissance ceiling fresco. I wish, but there weren't any
carrot-legged putti, no chubby fingertips forever about to touch

nor teeming and war-ready *Host* — just the first modern bomber
with a pressurized cabin, pilots left unseen behind the gleaming

virtual lens-flare in the cockpit windshields as the *B-29* banks away
and we cut to the bomb, seen from behind as it slowly levels-out



into its straight, untwirling descent, with the alleys and waterways
of the timbered city below, not yet in sight. I thought, if only

the bomb could just stay like that — falling, held in this moment
that with the consistency of fine-grained sand seems to pass

through the narrow point of my imagining, that persists
before the teeth of the cogs catch one another and nothing is

yet decided — as somewhere between all this pulling of triggers
lies the absolute interval of a freedom no one can survive.

I'm reminded of Einstein's *happiest thought*, haloed with sweat :
how an observer in free-fall cannot feel their own weight

once they've made up their mind, and jumped off the roof
of a house that could be anyone's, anywhere, at least in theory.

P E E N E M Ü N D E

“One small step for Man – one giant leap for Mankind.”
Neil Armstrong, July 1969.

“The rocket worked perfectly, except for landing on the wrong planet.”
Wernher von Braun, September 1944.

The *Space Age* was born
in what for all intents
and purposes approximates
a Baltic swamplands.
In January when I visit
the dead wheatgrass sways
between the rails of launchpads
in a dry, snowless Winter.
On a placard in what was once
a studio where engineers designed
the infamous V2 rocket bomb
I read *auf Deutsch* at length how
it was not beyond von Braun
to exploit the vast resources of labor
untapped in the Death Camps.
Not that he hated the Jews —
certainly not in the same way
his military benefactors did —
only no means were too costly
in service of realizing Man's dream,
not even its initial perfection
in the form of a weapon
of mass destruction.
Wernher considered this his
great sacrifice, a necessary evil
for the benefit of Science.
And if these wretched souls
were after all condemned to die,
was this not the better way —
to realize the future of our Race
dreamt in the concussive leap
from ignition to impact?

Even if they could not fathom
the true and ultimate goal
in the service of which they were
the only available instrument,
their hands (where bones already
dawned past skin) could touch
the fairing as it took shape
and perhaps even glean
how this was the inevitable
price of beginning —
how slight our suffering
was as mere individual men
when seen against the horizon
of *Mankind*, giant as it is
and beyond any of us
to survive knowing.



SICKARUS

Drunkenness fits
over the face like a mask
your being can press itself into
from behind middling skin as you
drink the piss of straw and other
compressed, dried-out things.
Beer that is the acceleration of rot
and the G's you pull, bending further
over the shallow backs of barstools,
your cheeks a-ripple with its force.
It's a question of how fast you can go
sitting still with your arms gone floppy
and not pass out. Yeah, your body sucks
as a vehicle for the imagination. No chromed
fighter jet, its fairing bolts flush in keeping
with the highminded principles of flight
but to serve as fuselage to human bodies
and baggage, that unburnishable mess
strapped to still more chairs therein.
All drag, no flight but the feeling
of falling in place, plungering
down the hatch, down the hole
into yourself — a night sky
all wax no sun, with no ground
to term, nor separable air
that wings might beat
with invention.

FLYING TO ISRAEL (MARCH 2014)

When I tell Ari (the Birthright guide
sitting next to me on the plane)
that my father works at the satellite office
of the US Embassy in Herzliya, he says
ah yes ... I'm familiar with that place.

But have you heard the rumors?

What, that it's some kind of Black Site?
He nods, grinning. I wink and say trust me,
the Colonel's hands are far too soft
to be those of an interrogator.

I mean, yeah, sure ... but what if he wears gloves?

We take off, and I'm trying to think of
something that would counter what he means
kind of seriously, just peekabooing it seems
in joke form. I mention the two tomcats that lord
over the parking garage, who prefer the food
my father feeds them (the one he named *Dinky*,
the other I forget) to cockroach and cricket,
or the armored *BMW* limousine too impractical
and expensive to use, covered with dirty paw-prints
and the swallows nesting in the nooks, like bats —
how strange it is to see them juke and flit
between exhaust-caked columns, spiraling down
to stories still further underground. The uncreasable
khakis and vinyl binders, the stained styrofoam
of the dropped ceiling and flags collecting dust
bundled in the shadow of the crook where
blast doors half a foot thick meet papered wall
and jokes about how an *F/A-18* is so precise
it could slip a bomb down a chimney
is a kind of droll office humor. But why
is it that we want evil to be more evil than
it is, vaguely disappointed to find out
when bodycounts amount to a number
far less than our imaginations had given us
purchase to project? Or when what's above

the *Chabad Outreach Center* is just a bunch of guys
in polos compiling summaries of Israeli TV
and not, say, leather-bibbed CIA executioners
armed with bonesaws and Celine Dion
who clock out at the black site and go slam
Goldstars afterhours on the brutalist beachfront.
We talk about the thousands who must have died
as prisoners in the chalk mines of Beit Guvrin
and kind of just let his questions hang there
somewhere between our shared armrest
and a trio of spigots, jetting overcooled air.
And though it helps, talking to him as we taxi
down the runway at JFK, to keep me from realizing
that getting off the plane is no longer a possibility
now that we seem to be next in line for takeoff —
the doors blow off my chest, my skull depressurizes
right as I'm laughing at a joke about slave labor.
It's no use, racing into the face of the ardors
of the hours ahead, trapped in the stratosphere,
though the New Plane Smell of the *Dreamliner*
and four gin-and-tonics do wonders to assuage
the anxiety that's festered, coiling inside me
as I've gotten older. It's like all your childhood fears
grown more real, tingeing everything with the dusk
of enchantment, what you see being too slippery
to hold you in place. Remember Wile E. Coyote —
it's only after he looks down (suddenly seeing how
he's been running on thin air all this time)
that he starts to sink into his minute-long fall
to the canyon floor. Instead of flaps it's the windows
themselves that tint over. *Charged ions in the glass* —
I guess we're in the future. Now singeing drunk with hope
as a few hours fizzle and auroras are finally done
rotorooting my lobes, clean as a whistle with resignation.
Ari's kippah slides off in sleep — my ankles cankle.
I watch both the innocent and the villainous die
violent deaths in the screens of our seatrests.
And as the passengers on the far side of the cabin

ignore the filtered-out forty-thousand-foot dawn
NyQuil drowns the *Delta*-blue theater of D-Day below
to a soundtrack of Souixsie and the Banshees.
I imagine the dewy pure spirit of Shelley's Ianthe
and fairy Queen Mab zooming over the Earth
dissolved in their sight (a milky slur of twilit mist
that, according to Mab, is just how it looks
from eternity) as she discourses to fairest Ianthe
on the failures of history she's been helpless to observe
from the balcony of her palace, deep in outer space.
Ari wakes up. I say the mountains of what I think
is Albania seem higher than they should be.

T R A P D O O R

Say *Wasting Away* were a form
of *Time Travel*. Now, assume that

this poem's a nugget more precious
than life, louche and movie-lush.

Scene : the kicked-out campfire
left by a troupe of *Reveler Others*

exeunt through the spacey trunkwork
of some inexistent beechwood.

Enter : my character (the *Acediac*)
stage left with nothing to lose

as dead leaves in depthless shag
creak like faint plotfall with his step.

Abbbbbb : *Nothing*. Breathe it in.
So much of it to do, and yet not

enough of me in the doing.
I know this motoring to waste

fails to be funny, so I'd like to take
this opportunity to say I'm sorry

to all the stars and lonely distill
the several folds darker spirit

of my envy. Wait — that's not right.
The *Hideous Mole* is coming.

I'm going to stop this striptease.
I'm going to just clip the damn thorn

off already that I'm free to watch
the hemlock bubbling there

in a plastic cup — grape *Fanta*
misting my face as I drink

when suddenly the leaves cascade
where the trap door unclaps

its halves to the dark. What's it
there for again? Wait — do I crawl

my way over the boards, roll in
and drop away? Am I even meant

to escape? Or is *Mole* the one
who is to appear? Out of the earth

as I fall through the floor, he is
hideous for he cannot see

what's going on here.

THE FALL

Whether it was the dark of the childhood bedroom
that prescribed its fright for the leaving
light of day
or you by your eyeballs' virtue
that spied the *Boogeyman*
holding his breath, folded between bookshelf and wall —
and no matter if you blame
your later addicthood
on the sludge ferments of fruit you found
near rotted on the bough (all that impaired
the poem in the end — its would-be
innocent measure)
or your aphid soul, that like a root
averting surface
with sloth wisdom
would sob and fade but to savor
its own disappointment — neither forewronged
nor falsified, understand the *Tragic Hero*
and *Monstrous Onanist*
are one and the same once stripped
out of myth.
There's no imposter fate, no conspiracy
mysteriously amatter
except you, of course — the lone flung
Monkeywrench sundering
the mechanism's innate way. And seeing as that
the *Angelic Investor* has nixed the vouchsafing graces
of the halo fund, the *Gorgon Muses* are thus inclined
to retract all their many tentacled
members from the drilled-in ducts
where they slurped their pet's treacly
sweet and sour solutions
as finally the *Angelic Yeomen* let slacken
the yoke of the safety net
to go collect their paychecks.

C O D A

Though I've regained life
I seem to have forgotten how
to write a poem. A certain fizzing
in the chest I let fizz there, go flat.
Bubbles *bubble*. Nothing happens
if I don't make it. That's the problem.
Feed us enough camembert and
our hunger is complete. How
the mind mouths *Everything*
is Excessive is excessive
and itself guilty of what my
reasoning meant to slay, being
far more chip than shoulder.
The unforeseen flood subsided
eventually, having sucked
the richest soils that snowed
down to the Atlantic floor
beyond our use, beautifying
the dark with a *muddiness*
covering the rock-like surfaces
of what you can't see. How
the term *synaesthesia* indicates
a misfiring — something
you're not supposed to feel
but do, for no real reason.



THE CASTAWAY

Shrill shirt ballooning, wind the width
of pajamas funneled up his thighs, hairs
bristling at the chill and chipped paint
of the edge dug in his heels. All it took
to let go was a moment of distraction
as the mast carved its claim on deck.
The pole of oceanic noon, like an oar
no hand could wield to wind back
the wake around the clipper's prow
away from the gale looming out there
on the horizon, the frigatebird's morning
to come. All they have to do is sleep
to stay above water — 10,000 feet up,
dreaming in the eye of the storm.

Of his bones are coral made. And of fear
oyster flesh, gall pink and pickled grey
as dreams are sand dollars on the shore.
How vivid the future without him flashes
in his eyes, as what would have been
poems like spades bury and fathoms turn
ends — stenchy cruel as fish. Legends,
points about which the sextant lies. Hopes
and mast broken — swelled overboard
into blue, where casques and pistons sink
further than the dolphins dive. That sky
where sails catch a current other than air
warm on his cheek. A wind that takes
his face, chains and anchor with it.

H. HEIDELBERGENSIS

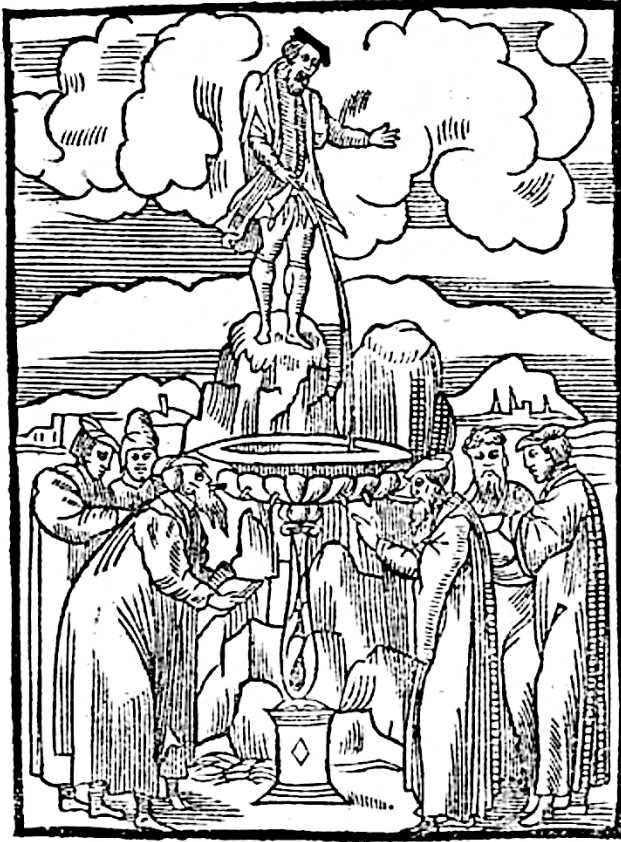
Years you slept — wound fused at the core of the nautilus. Of the soil you dreamt your breath was methane — exhaled from cracks and cuffed on the Jura. Years split stone and shell awake to forget — whisperferns in the cliff, groves long axe-felled. Clothes the child you're told you are wears in pictures, folded in landfills to dress you again. Spotlights drown the canopy, spill columns ocean-heavy — beams of movies never made,

sagas of defeat starring knights of cloud. *Gaiberg* — its playground sloping down to the loamlands. A view proving memory in grey-blue of distance the childe mistook for haze. There's no end to where roads go on defining borderlands of shining meadows where squires kneel to pick dandelions. *Dilsberg* — ruined citadel, distant as home becomes expecting no return from quest of youth. Besieged in your *errance*, scorched earth overbuilt

as the provincial seat to another — a new empire. And whatever remains familiar is just cloyingly *still there*. Trim like some pensioner's garden plot sanely tucked between the bypass soundbarriers and fenced-off railyards that, like the Neckar, would kidnap with their current — take you away across the plain. Years planted in the Rhinebed, running this rift country yet another valley reeking of onion and gasworks, the other side fading like a range of cloudbank. *Mirage* or *mirror* — never there to begin with.

M E N O L O G I U M

Will *Life* have been like strung beads of days when I was living
just to cross out the date
and leave space deader
with seconds, jottings, reminders? Inside my curtained skull
foregreyed: a calendar's ghoulish blankscan,
the blur of a Zodiac whose governance is
absolute and, as an hourglass,
impregnable to the understanding
of him racked upon the wheel to wonder
whether he suffers
martyrdom, justice served
or just dizziness. Yet, how could that satisfy — long for meaning, completion
dire laced with coherence, enough
that it would undo me
like last year's now useless notetaking, intentions tossed-out.
You just wait, without patience
or ecstatic choice
on the hour-turn that would compose
your many disparities — count them,
if you will — into seasons. And does it take such languor at the wrong end
of a colonoscope to temper
your sadness, sorrily poured
as the dourest of wines into the littlest lead-brimmed
Victorian sherry glasses? Not to mention this rather hackneyed
insistence of it being some kind of forward deployment —
stabs taken at tally
or bearings lost, diffused in my unwanted
utopia of smog. As a consequence
of grains in the bed of the palm that never quite
turned to pearls, no matter how
I squeezed, rubbed my hands
loving them — all gone in one wasting
skeet-shot of the young man's eye
scanning carelessly away, headily prow-ward, already wanting
to forget.



DRINKING GAME

Though my body says no
and it hurts already,
though the voices of the others
in this room are loud
and are speaking English
as a second, though common
language between them,
playing games, the crashing
of dice in an unseen cup,
espousing arcane laws
for what must now be done
in light of what was read
after the dice are slammed
down on the table, cup lifted,
I force this down my body
(*down* because I can feel
the pain travel along my limbs
into my forearms, my fingers)
and though they don't understand
the meaning of seven,
the dreaded two-in-one,
and though they don't trust
and accuse each other
of being shit at this game,
I follow the rules, and drink.

THE MISSION

You already told us how
alleys are like windtunnels
where 4:00 AM blows
against your libido
as you walk, pocketfist
cigarette at your lips
and *Kopfstein* knuckling
up through the paper-thin
soles of your soiled *Jack*
Purcells. You like that
you can slowly see
how the year dirties
the canvas, pedometer
reading grime and sweat.
Allegretto of Beethoven's 7th
basic bitch — it's time
to get a *Döner*, one last beer.
Why do you keep trying
to breach the limits of night
just to nurse its ending —
what do you think
you'll win that's worth
the conquest — or do you
take solace in the notion
that you are the latest
in a great lineage of those
who went all in — who lived
the poem to completion
waking up dew-faced alone
on a bench by the river
so hungover there's
no choice but to keep
on going — a holy colic
you aren't meant to
overcome — how it burns
in a way enabling

feelings to feel more
important than anything
anyone else could ever
read and care about.

To love, that's the most
monstrous thing you can
do to a person. When
did it start being so easy
to lie through your teeth —
which means *through*
yourself — a truth that
makes you want to fight
an abuser of women
dragged out of the bar,
face slammed in the street
without knowing him.
Drunk and hot-tongued
with what you want to claim
over the one you love —
the one you think you could
do so much of a better
job possessing than
her boyfriend ever did
punching you in the throat.
See the avenging knight
is really no better than
the rapist or intellectual
stealing in the margins
of the wood, for his
vengeance is *Love*
me as I would
love you.



THE SHITHEAD

Wondering when last you noticed your shadow
is pure cringe. Swatting at the yellowjackets
trying to land on the rim of my beer glass
as if these were poems I'd rather not breathe
life into. My father years dead — his body turned
ATM Jackpot. Fast fashion, train tickets, beer.
Welcome to the future. For years I'd wished to be
in this city alone — without family, friends or
loved one — now that I'm here. On the dark screen
of my locked *iPhone* are intricate smudges
where my fingers have typed all but the letters
P and *Q* — but that's not true anymore, is it?
P that's like kissing one's own lips, and *Q* evincing
how cringy it is to have anything to say at all.
Like a wish you made but never seriously wanted
to come true — a grown-up without profession
crossing to walk on the dark side of the street
in a country where all anyone understands
of what I say is my unchained privilege to choose
to stand at this bar attempting to order a drink
not in my mother's tongue has landed me.
Sun falling behind Montmartre, light curdling
on Fauburg Saint Denis — the fizz of the errant
photons on the CMOS sensor in video mode.
And my shadow somewhere under the next table
at the feet of the couple sitting there, holed up
in the chair legs. Maybe it's already gone — maybe
I'm it. *You're from the States, right?* asks the guy.
I can feel all three of us disbelieving as I recite
an abridged biography. Basically on par with what
a pathological liar might embroider, given enough
time and resources. Enough to have induced
the fiction he remembers as his life to have
actually occurred, though not entirely convincing
as I am cast. Look — there's a bench where
I kissed my Love's fingers. Another, where later

she wept for the cysts flowering in her uterus
and pushed me away, so far from home.
Same sky of fresh gauze, post-op hematoma.
Same desire lines in the Place des Invalides lawn
and heat that lives under your shirt and pants
tearing at the soft skin between your legs.

Même silence dans les squares sur les bancs.

I could not love her like she needed me to
as we were waiting for the bus, ten years ago.
A balcony where we spent the morning drinking
conscious of wasting the day, much as we paid
to be there. Drunk again — just now I walked
through a park where my parents quarreled
as I cried and hid off in the bushes for reasons
I didn't understand. What year was that even —
1995? 1996? Weren't we like those lovers of 1905
locked in each other's arms and legs wishing
for the moment together to be other than what
we were condemning each other to live?

Tout le reste o baiser baiser perpétuel — only you
could fail this poem, having lived through
the loss of your Other. Tell me, if it is possible
to love again — was that first love ever real?
How on that morning up there on the balcony
you never thought to look down — see him
tracing below where the light of morning
throws the crowns of roofs on the sidewalk,
moving just past the edge where it's hard
to make out any features beyond that
it is the shape of a man, yes — facing away
as he's bent into his pacing, one hand gripping
the other at his back and collar raised in greeting
the current of what he knows there's no hope
recognizing will have been — no, not even
faint laughter coming from the rooftops.

WOODLAWN (JUNE 2017)

As I sit at my grandmother's grave,
my mother pulling weeds from the lavender

and my grandfather in the collapsible
Coleman chair next to me, his liver failing,

I watch as an ant struggles to climb
the polished granite of the headstone.

It keeps falling off, then tirelessly
tries to climb right back up

as though its life depended
on reaching the top.



Hühnerdrahtähnliches verhält
den Steinbruch am fernen
Autobahnrand — doch schießt
der Schössling zaundurch — seine
holzungeweihte zwei Meter
stochernd in die für den Himmel
unreife Luft eines Julimittags.
Eine braunweiße Unterrichtungstafel,
wie man so kennt. Wir stachen
am Ausfahrt zur Eremitage
im letzten Moment ab. Es war
ein gefährliches Manöver
zum Glück gelungen. Die Stadt
war uns uninteressant, mein Vater
und ich. Wir wollten uns eher
das ziellose Herumlatschen
ersparen, wie unlängst unsere
Erfahrung im Weimarer Zentrum.
Auf ein vor dem *Dichterpaa*
aufgenommenes Foto begreife ich
endlich wie peinlich eng
meine T-Shirts damals waren.
Im Passagiersitz notierte ich Anfänge
eines Gedichtes, das mehr als
ein Jahrzehnt später (und nach dem
Tod meines Vaters) dieses wurde —
entschlüpfte sogar die Sprache,
wie erst dem Stift wackelig
schreibend während der Fahrt,
übersetzt ins Deutsche.
Gestörte Züge — Staben, Ziffern —
Seismograf — ein Versuch kenntlich
Wörter zu bilden, wie Lenker in hand
mein Vater die A9 hochjagte.
Weiterblättern. Ein englisches Zitat
scheinbar aus dem Brochure

niedergeschrieben — *A gem of rococo
pleasure gardens, diversely outfitted
with grottoes, a ruined theater, ancient tomb
and false cliff dubbed Parnassus.*

*It was here the prince played at living
a hermit's life.* Wir tauchten ein
in das lapsarische Bildnis
nur um etliche Prinzipien des Neo-
klassicismus zu kennzeichnen.

Schau wie diese nur grobe
Pompeijbrocken sind.

Unfertigkeit als Leitmotiv.

Die Büsten des bayerischen
Olymps bestrichen mit Blattgold.

Ihre Gesichter — berühmt —
und Brauen — krumgehauen.

Wir verbrachten nichtmal
30 Minuten vor dem Entschluss

Hey dad — let's get out of here.

TO MY FATHER (AUG. 2018)

I decided not to see your body
as it was being prepped in the morgue.
I wanted things to stay like they were
in the days immediately after your death —
how I felt that, if I acted quickly enough,
what happened was reversible. That it could be
taken back, undone. That you could still be saved.
I didn't want to think about the two weeks
it took to *unfuck the situation*, as you'd have said,
waiting mostly in a haze of aching drunkenness
for a team of Army morticians to be flown in
from Germany to embalm and clear your body
for transport back to the States. So I woke up
downtown on the strip, stuck to a plastic recliner
at the *Renaissance* beach bar, hot sand in the chafed
webs of my toes, your leftover dogtag searing
its way into my chest. Sunsick, already hungover.
And if upon waking I managed to forget where I was
or what I was doing there, that burning did not
let oblivion last very long. No, I chose instead
to think about *Song of Myself*, about the end
as Whitman tells us how he's stopped somewhere
we've not yet been, waiting for us to catch up.
To finish reading. To put down the book
I gave you for your birthday, its binding uncreased.
I wanted to think of you as still being out there
just a phone-call away, as you had been for years
while we were living on nearly opposite sides
of the world, six hours behind or ahead.
Mom's phone called me yesterday somehow —
an errant press of her index finger on the screen
after hanging-up, set down on a picnic table
or stuck in a chestpocket. All I could hear was
her voice responding to unheard lines of inquiry
about what cause the raffle-tickets were benefitting,
speaking almost as if directly into the receiver.



And so I listened like a ghost in her pocket to what I never could have imagined was happening at that moment in her life, curled up on the couch here in my apartment. Thinking the only thing keeping me from ending my life is what it'd do to her — that's when my phone rang. Now it feels like we've been practicing for this as a family for years. I can't say how long it was I thought about you in the past tense, or why those times we saw each other after I left home now seem warped in amber light, as though we'd found ourselves again in the gloaming after an end we could not remember having come and gone. Even though my phone was silenced the vibrating under my pillow woke me up in bed with my (no longer) girlfriend. You asked *Mike, how are you doing?* And it was only after I answered you told me I had to listen. Something was wrong. You were calling me from the hospital. You were about to go into surgery. And really, as I found out later from your coworkers, you were just outside the operating room, deciding at the last minute at their urging to call one of us, let us know what was about to happen. And you called me. Your voice sounded like what I can only describe as collapsed somehow. Already a memory of itself. I had to strain against my own instinct not to listen as I walked to the window in the living room and looked out at the sky over East 96th Street to what you were telling me still laying in bed, still tucked under your blanket in a hallway at Beilinson Hospital in Tel Aviv, about to be taken and anesthetized. There was very little time. I needed to fly to you in Israel right away, shouldn't tell anyone until I was there. *Will I see you again?* I don't know, or can't remember what you said in response.

How can I tell you? That what you asked for,
what you imagined is not what happened.
I never thought that I would be writing
one of these poems, which I always considered
embarrassing. Self-serving. Repugnant, even,
depending on how deeply the tragedy was
mined for art — piercing, universal and true.
But here I am. I have struggled so long,
years now, with how I should approach this.
What has become, in my mind, a kind of letter
to you, who cannot answer but with words
that I might imagine you saying, having lived
as your son for what is still the majority
of my own life. Sometimes I clear my throat
and it's you coughing, as I'm suddenly absented,
assumed back into you, as though unborn —
that rapid fire stutter, pressure of the phlegm
rising against the base of the Adam's apple
just to be swallowed back down — involuntary
nervous tick I recognize for what it was
in you. Or your tendency to point at the obvious
in a landscape, driving through it, afraid I might miss
the ruined castle on some winterbare hillside
as I sit in the passenger seat, listening to my *iPod*
letting my eyes unfocus into the branches.
No diary, no poems or songs you worked out
alone on your dust-smirched *Martin*, just notebooks
of sparse bulletpoints detailing all that needed to
and wouldn't be done — ritual incantations
that summon a future in the act of imagining it
and that was enough. Two years later, it still feels like
you're driving your *Hyundai i10* rental to work,
mixing red wine with cranberry juice and ice
as you watch *Three Stooges*, conk out at 2300 hours
among all the cardboard boxes that kept you
from remembering your life. That I could call you
on the phone, if I only knew the right number.
Visit you, if I only had your address. Of course,

I have the following telephone number and address
written down in my notebook : (503) 273-5250,
11800 SE Mt. Scott Blvd, Portland, Oregon 97086,
Willamette National Cemetery, Area EE3, Plot 2297.
I've been there twice since April 2016, felt little
that wasn't self-induced as I looked down
at your headstone in the grass.

P A C E M A K E R

When I press your old pacemaker to my lips
(not the one lodged in your chest underground)

I can feel a heartbeat, and for a moment not realize
that it's my own. Even though it was replaced

several years ago, there's still some blood in one
of the electrical nodes, tar-like in the light,

and the soft alloy body is scraped and dented
as if someone had bitten or thrown it hard

at the gravel on a forest trail. I pick it up, unseal
the plastic baggie marked *Biohazard*, striking bone

as it drops into my palm. It doesn't seem to be
either light or heavy, but weigh the weight

of my hand itself. I close and clench my fingers
but I can still feel it there, absorbing the heat

out of my body, something more solid
than my squeezing — that won't go away.

AM KÖNIGSTUHL (II)

Lonely men I pass
hiking on the mountain

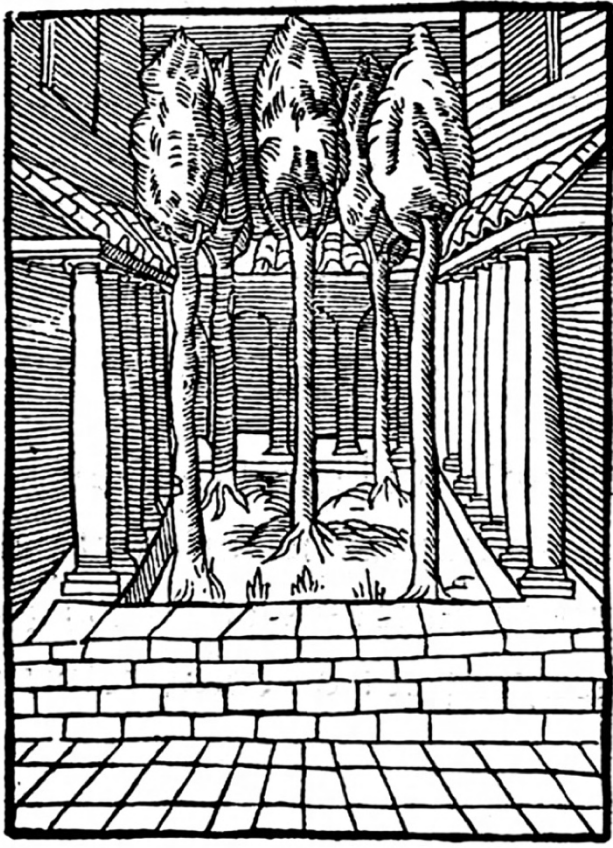
aren't kerchiefed versions
of me — fathers to ask

sorry, is this a path
where the pines open?

How close to the teeth
on the bark until

I am scraped clean?
You will not find the way

as long as you can
see the sky.



ACHEIROPOIETON

Such is the dejection in which we find ourselves, here of all places intersected at this midpoint in the dusk — to realize every detail

that spells the exquisite completeness of any given thing once was still undevised in some unknown mind, yet to be felt into form.

And who among us can believe that, if there truly was a feeling hand lost in hierarchies of making — laborer, artist — hands of those

who mortared the brick, who joined the lime slab, there were no others unwinding the tendril never to be seen, etching the changeless bark

of this wood where we've stopped at gates brambled shut, looking past dark trunks no art has realized, weaving through canopies where

leafless branches let us see the dim-white Winter sky for what it is as the seamlessness of veils blocks not our vision but rather leads us

to forget that we *see* at all. And how are we to understand those reliefs fixed in ashen spotlight, the four Angels fused in the spandrelstone

of the crossing? They will never taste life, necessarily, that we might imagine the *Host* as always having been there — bent piously to Earth.

And if they seem almost comically pained with what we might term the apocalyptic affectedness of their meaning, it's that the vessels raised

in their hands are grown heavy — note the slight bend of their wrists as if about to spill, and their mouths frozen not in warning but exhaling

the dankness of masonry that is their breath. What is it they rehearse but passions imaged after life. Rot of pew-wood, wax-skinned ministries

that lie jeweled in state and the blackmould of bones useless to number unsorted beneath the seals of labyrinths, inlaid to an endless footfall

of those too busy staring up. Earthbound in vertigo, are we unable to see
through the shadows of the clerestory a ceiling no one has touched,

the dome that frames untreachable space and Empyrean left unpainted
there, the pallor-bare stone like the soil-bleached insides of a skull

as stained glass strains the sunlight, unveiling dusk in the day outside
and matter vaulting overhead, up where branches touch and clasp

in pangs of light inseparable from what is revealed, seared in our sight
for but a second — the sky's end. *Heaven*, like a lid closed over us.

SCHOPENBERG

The night yawns, tired in its clarity.
Is it that the once-knowing music

echoes out, or that it has been
gone too far into? Our ears

deaf with a note droning
in the key of their own

hearing. Everything
changes inside

you but you.



BREATHS AND DAYS

You will live only for the day — and it doesn't matter
that you understand
what means, what costs — this mask of bronze
pockmarked, barnacled, run green from being
too much in the rain, your body
paperweight, occupation
to dine on the amber of you
whole and waking
and spooled in dream. That was to peel and inch apart
sediments and layers, minerals sledged
in the bedsheets. Now unbutton your shirt — it's time to see
what's there, to tug the golden comb, the rubied hilt
from the dirt that is
your skin. Now look
closer — forests cleared by the labors of untold
generations, armies campaigning far beyond the Alps,
slaves and murdered women chambered in the walls
of your chest, pointing the right way back
into the ground where you can't be
followed. Into the ground
between us and all happening
before what must have been
vast sandstorms and pyroclastic flows
that buried
cities thus made ancient, as millennia wreaked
in a bulbflash — the citizens at market,
mid-purchase — this is what was meant to be
Progress : a future already sublimely lost
and commodes unceremoniously dismantled,
lacquer and paint job sanded down to noxious pollen
or closing the doors to houses painstakingly maintained
just to slo-mo explode them
to be rebuilt in another, better time.



*

And the petroglyphs tell how the people
who lived in that age
were not as honorable
as those who chose to remain
unborn, or who at least
developed a keen interest
in sleeping well
into the afternoon.

With no photosynthesis nor phantasm they felt necessary
to report — here are the various greenhouse vantages
the larvae have done doodled instead
in favor of the sun that was rather
a placeheld light
captured in their shell
as they cracked their eggheads to get it out —
the marvel yoke.

How every stone they touched was one somehow numerable
to the damning of what yawn-inducing cares
they thumbed through,
myths in much need of rehearsal
on being numinous.

And so it seems their sole intention was
to establish the ideal conditions for the mass production
of many many knickknacks of their finally feeling
real — as if
that might prove the age
actually occurred, despite the cursor scroll
measures of the in-between such as rupture
the amniotic sack, with every birth a caesarian
as the cast is broken in the minting —
this *raison-d'etre* of things
that is your own daintily reified wish to have
never been born human
but maybe, let's say, a praying mantis.

*

You might as well collapse your antennae, close your eyes
and pucker up. Get ready to suck the boson fist
of *Quantum X*, forever just
about to punch to nuggets all the little faces
inside your face, pop your eyes and thumb the lumps
out of your throat and scalp like clogs — these drains where so much
got stuck, it's only natural you think of it
as all that's left of whatever
there was to begin with.

Just jiggle the handle to free the flow
of sand out of clocks — out urns, out ears, out marbles —
spilled here stoundmeal :
a human-colored sand
to lie interred in the fadeplain of rotting
papyrus — what crosslegged armies of scribes
wrought so forkheadedly
untraceable : merest demigods,
know now there is no power but the ply
of basalt to ensure heaven's dereliction
as you follow us down, as mummies burned in fireplaces
for fun — with no tomb-dark eternity
but another layer, skin-steep, to be peeled back,
today — what rancid leather
on the time-cured mugs
of pharaoh and sacrifice, where to goggled museum goers
the suffering on display here is indistinguishable :
the rot-wincéd expressions
of smiles smelt after feeling.



Hypatia cannot be saved
 as she is dragged to the forum, as she is stripped and raped
 and flayed alive by Peter the Reader

and his gang of resenterers
 brandishing their *ostraka* against her.

Eyes that keep her like a cell. Snowglobes of her particular eternity
 lacking snow. Where no image survives
 but the pose of her agony, held still for having happened.
 Her skin and its being flayed
 by our reading.

Her fate that is *History's*
 discreetest plumbing. Here too the jealous politicking
 and Peter's demands —

quaint curlicues in the bloodbath
 heraldry he sows of her broken-down letters he culls.
 And his discipleship of the *Infinite Reader*, the splitter of tongues
 whose name is a stutter spelled *C O N F U S I O N* —

his desire that we go on breaking each other down,
 that he alone may be *One* —
 his sight as a sunbeam the glass of our mistakings magnifies
 to burn a hole in the page.

Though the word — *hers* — lives on for having lived
 once is enough

in the smoke as it rises, leaving
 some trace of its elusion, that is enough
 to alter the sum of sky

we look down to forget

can't be left alone.

And though this augury persists, there are no birds but periods
 to end sentences about extinct birds,

grammars flying south as the book closes.

Enter pagination —

a closer circuitry

into which neither our want

nor the conquest itself

could ever actually fit.

*

But here you remain, of all these forgotten bookfulls
one last ghostly imago
pilloried in serifs and grills,
to be translated as all words read aloud are
like smoke-signal emojis
to be dispersed in a split second by the tinnital breeze
and that's all the liquidating dragnets need to hit the pavement —
to sniff out the tiniest leftover machinery
of element and will and turn those
off too. As when the tortured manic
interlocutor on the line asks you his other
so tongue-tied and torturous to have to listen to —
what on earth is that goddamned ringing
like weevil choirs grinding their plectra, looped
and sped-up, like little suns humming inside your molten ears
grating you as you mean
to mine from the scabs of your perfections — tired and rue —
a most comfited silence of others not at all talking,
or not silence but rather the sound of not hearing anything
but the pulse throbbing in your neck —
to distill this desire, to project this droning
far into a jungle's interior that it might become
just another toadsong and unpatterned rap of rainfall on ferns,
another white noise soothing to sleep to.
And you fall to your knees, with hands downturned to slip
into the soil like coffeegrounds between your fingers
as you weep, contained
by what you can't tell
from yourself, worms bursting in your grip as you clench
pebbles wrist-deep in the dirt. How they creak
like cue balls in your palms, how the bark you chew
splinters at your gums — the blood-taste and earth bitter
warm on the tongue, running down your neck
as ants in their drowning carbonate
the sweat that beads your thighs. How you want to
break your head on every jagged thing you can
imagine being there.

*

Though today, as you look down from the pinnacles
on cloudscapes misconstrued for the earth

solved of color,

you must descend if you mean

to reach the ground and living

consummate wet of forest, harbored

beneath the canopy, and past its green droning out
through a further desert too the morning light suggests
with knotted hues of raw canvas,

where the horizon already touches your unknown ground

and enters it, as if infecting,

however lapsed this limit haunting unquenched in its looming
behind the strangely lush and far-off

hills of this early view

once the tree cover breaks and you can see

the country ahead, all the climage of miles you've left to go —
a land solely of the sun, where to tread

the sand-blankness of a sudden unstaffaged noon.

How your body belongs here, as a ball returning

to the hands of a kid you never were,

caked with the playdirt of an elementary school recess

in the Spring of 1999 —

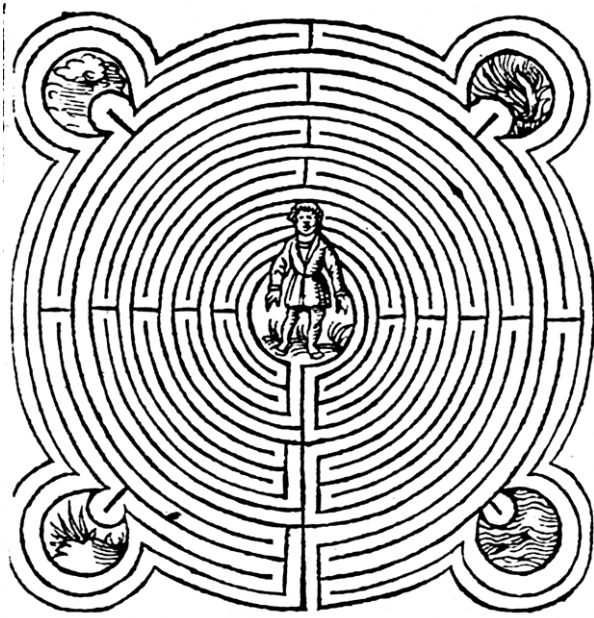
as the wind needs skin not just yours to make real

its *blowing* — as the chorus of past selves

scrapes out the tumor of your soul with potshards and shell,
their tools that hook and pull

the pagan columns down.





NINETEEN (AUG. 2008)

So now I guess it's my turn to disappear
drooling blacked-out on a dormroom bed —
to wake up on the wet sand not having dreamt,
tide lapping at my neck, of an ocean that is
unknown. Hard to breathe with all this salt
caked in my nostrils, at the sides of my mouth
and eyes burning. Tide lapping in my ears,
the bubble bath rising from the moat below
to rinse away the ramparts and drawbridge
and ooze through the loopholes, drowning
the courtyard and foodstores, the armory
and dungeon underground, foaming slowly
up the stairs, having flooded the chambers
of my parents, now hissing as it rubs against
my bedroom door, curdling there at the sill.
It's a matter of time — a sandcastle where
his royal highness is never high enough
above the surf. And the orchards beyond,
the waylines and roads, my hilt-drawn name
already rounded in the wash, irretraceable
as that first step down the jetway to board
the plane that delivered me into the next life.
*Through deep caves of thought I hear a voice
that sings — wrecked is the ship of pearl.
And every cell, where its dim dreaming life
was wont to dwell, before thee lies revealed,
its irised ceiling rent and crypt unsealed.*
This is the closest the sea-currents will cut
ere the shell is flushed ashore, as the passage
narrows to the gate, pierced through the nacre,
past which all the ways await, branches kept
and turns unsunned, unchosen, un-lived.

THE TRAPPER

Solitude did not bring wisdom.
Say something in the middle
of a clearing and the voice
scatters into the trees.
Taking aim, I remember
there was a way here.
Too late, gone before
I could pull the trigger.
Flowers don't mean that
I will succeed. I came here
to lose my freedom. Flowers
underfoot don't remember
me their kind. As rabbits are
quiet children of the forest
and the easiest to skin.
Like wind chimes they sing
no words. Strung up, as I am
losing mine. In my hands
the blade thrums shivering
sinew — wondrous, still alive
and hotter now to hold
the closer we come
to the end.

Struggling to write
a poem before
the iris contracts
painfully around
what is lodged there —
a view of the place
where I grew up
framed by leaves.
I can see the limits
of my childhood
out in the opening
of the valley. A barn
and the white factory,
twin steeples past which
what comes is foreign.
Parents watch their son
from the trail, crawling
on hands and knees
up the steep footpath,
grabbing at roots torn
out of the dry red clay
to where I'm sitting.
He kneels almost
right in front of me,
picks up a small rock
and breaks it against
the face of another
bigger rock, then runs
behind me to meet
his parents, already gone
further up the trail.
I have to let go.

THE TRIP

Not even 6:00 p.m. and already it's pitch black outside.
I've got nowhere to be, but standing here in my room

somehow it feels like I need to start getting ready
to go to the airport, pack a suitcase that isn't meant

to come with me. The reason is obvious, as though
I've been doing this all along — choosing what I won't

need on the trip. Folding t-shirts, stuffing my camera
into a sock and constructing hollows where I might fit

boots wrapped in a plastic bag. How I'd want to find
it all waiting for me when I return from the other side

of the ocean — not sure which I'm on to begin with.
It's like I'm leaving a city where I've been living alone

to visit my parents for the holidays sometime before
the advent of the smartphone. Hope the tinny carillon

of my *Nokia* wakes me, chasing the agenda bulleted
in my pocketbook. Out into freezing air before 7:00 a.m.

hustling to the avenue, stepping off the curb to scan
for a speck of yellow coming my way. Play *Deerhunter*

or Mahler's *Third* on my *iPod Nano*. Or the cab driver
is engaging, so we talk for 30 minutes about the beauty

of the Alborz mountains, how blue the Winter sky looks
over Tehran. How liberating it is — to have no luggage

and ticket already printed, but make a beeline straight
for security. There's no laptop to unpack, just taking off

my sweater and shoes being the only things I'd rather
not have done. Then to figure out where the gate is,

grab *Pizza Combos* and scope out the terminal for a bar
reasonably close to wherever it is I'm supposed to be

for the next hour. Well whiskey, then some kind of beer
I'd have never chosen back in the world, for a price

that in any other circumstance would be unacceptable
but now, for some reason, is. The carbonation scrapes

like rock salt down my throat as I chug the last half
of my third *Michelob Shock Top*, heading to the gate

more nauseated than at peace with now certain death
to find I'm last in line to board, buzzing as I slam

my boarding pass on the scanner — too dismayed
at my sudden impairment to focus on the tunnel past

the gate, the cabin doors about to close behind me
or the passage ahead — how easy it would be

to turn and run back — *back* where?



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NOTES

- * *Army Brat Pastoral*. The poet spent years 1991 – 2008 (ages 2 – 19) around Heidelberg and Stuttgart, Germany, where his father was stationed in various postings with the U.S. Army.

- * *Am Heiligenberg*. The so-called *Heiligenberg* (or *Mountain of the Holy*, referring to the presence of a monastery on the mountain throughout the medieval period) faces the *Königstuhl* (or *King Seat*), the Heidelberg castle and old town on the opposite side of the Neckar. Neolithic pottery finds in the area date human activity there to as early as 5500 BCE. The *La Tène* Celts established an *oppidum* or ring-fort on the summit, where they mined iron ore. The exact purpose of the 180ft deep *Heidenloch* (*Heatbens' Hole*) is still debated, with some suggesting it was first dug by the Celts as a well-shaft or sacrificial pit, or that the Romans excavated it themselves for the former use, possibly expanding an earlier shaft of Celtic origin. *Mons Piri* (*Pear Mountain*) is the Roman name for the environs. The episode involving Victor Hugo is adapted from his travelogue *Le Rhin* (1842). The *Philosophenweg* (*Philosopher's Way*) is a scenic mountainside garden and walkway lined with monuments to Romantic thinkers and poets. The *Bismarcksäule* is one out of many such tower structures found throughout Germany, conceived as memorials to the death of Otto von Bismarck. In 1899, a year after Bismarck's death, a competition was held among the nationalistic *Deutsche Studentenschaft* for a cenotaph, which the 26-year-old architect Wilhelm Kreis won with his design, *Götterdämmerung*. Finally, the *Thingstätte* (from *thing* or governing assembly/folk meeting in Old Norse and German) is one out of two dozen or so cult sites constructed by the Nazis as part of their mythico-racist *Blut und Erde* initiative, oftentimes at sites perceived to have significance to "Aryan culture". In the case of the Heiligenberg *Thingstätte*, Nazi archeologists and their party handlers completely disregarded preserving the integrity of the site to excavate and build their structure in a dramatic literalization of that regime's violently idiotic and appropriative misreading of ancient culture and history.

- * *A Tramp Abroad*. The *Hortus Palatinus* was a baroque pleasure garden commissioned in 1614 by Frederick V (the *Winter King*) for his wife, Elizabeth Stuart (daughter of King James I), on the grounds of the Heidelberg castle. At the time, the garden was known as a kind of Eighth

World Wonder, containing elaborate fountains, automata, tropical plants, grottoes and mazes — a hermetic “botanical cosmos” designed by the engineer and architect, Salomon de Caus. Schloß Schwetzingen is the site of an immense 18th century English folly garden, complete with faux Roman ruins and a mosque. The Rhine valley around Heidelberg was a major center of medieval European Jewish culture. Contemporary commentators, such as Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi), who had his school at Worms, referred to the area as *Eretz Ashkenaz*. The former *Schloßhotel* where Mark Twain stayed May 6th – July 23rd, 1878 has, since the initial composition of this poem in 2008, been gut-renovated from its long-ruined state and developed into condominiums. Twain’s experiences rafting on the Neckar, which flows through Heidelberg, are often thought to have been among the initial inspirations for *Huckleberry Finn* (*Heidelbeer* is German for *Huckleberry*). The ‘gate eagles’ mentioned in the poem are those found at the entrance to Campbell Barracks, a Third Reich-era complex that served as the headquarters of United States Army Europe (*USAEUR*) from its initial occupation in 1945 until the Summer of 2013, when the kaserne (as well as the entire garrison) was officially handed over to the city of Heidelberg. The *USAEUR* shoulder patch insignia depicts the flaming sword of the angel Uriel. The poet grew up and attended *Kindergarten* and *Grundschule* in Gaiberg, a village in the mountains south of Heidelberg.

- * *Voie Sacrée*. The *Voie Sacrée* or “Sacred Way” is a road that connects Bar-le-Duc with Verdun. It was given this name due to the vital role the road played for the French forces during the Battle of Verdun in WWI. By March 1916, 600 trucks per day had delivered 48,000 tons of ammunition and 263,000 men to the battlefield. Fort Douaumont was the central fort in the defensive complex protecting Verdun. An estimated 306,000 soldiers were killed in the battle.
- * *Letters from a Patroness*. This poem is a translation from an excerpt of a letter Rainer Maria Rilke wrote to Princess Marie von Turm u. Taxis-Hohenlohe, dated 25th of July, 1921.
- * *Sprain Brook Parkway (May 2010)*. The Ralph Waldo Emerson quote is taken from his second *Nature* essay, published in *Essays: Second Series* (1844).
- * *After George*. This poem is adapted from the German of a lyric contained in Stefan George’s collection *Das Jahr der Seele* (1897).

- * *Autumn in McCarren Park*. After severely herniating several intervertebral discs in a sports-related injury in 2008, the poet was diagnosed with Degenerative Disc Disease in 2009 at the age of 20. In June 2010, he underwent two-level artificial disc replacement surgery at the ATOS Klinik in Heidelberg, Germany. He struggled with dependence on prescription painkillers, as well as the greater fallout of this dependence, for several years after the procedure.
- * *The Castaway*. This poem is dedicated to the memory of Hart Crane.
- * *To my Father (Aug. 2018)*. The poet's father died from complications following emergency cardiac surgery at Beilinson Hospital, Petah Tikva, Israel, on April 8th, 2016.
- * *The Voyage of Life*. This poem was inspired in part by the memory of seeing Thomas Cole's eponymous series of canvases, housed in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.
- * *H. Heidelbergensis*. In 1907, a worker named Daniel Hartmann found a human mandible while working in a sandpit outside of the village of Mauer, southeast of Heidelberg. Anthropologist Otto Schoetensack formally identified the jawbone as belonging to a new species of archaic human, which he named *Homo heidelbergensis*. At 640,000 years old, it is among the oldest known human remains in the European fossil record. Gaiberg is the village where the poet grew up, only a few km from Mauer.
- * *The Shithead*. This poem incorporates lines from the original French of Louis Aragon's poem *L'Étreinte*, © Éditions Gallimard (1973).
- * *Nineteen (Aug. 2008)*. Lines 23-7 are adapted from Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.'s *The Chambered Nautilus (1858)*.
- * *Acknowledgements*. Earlier versions of the poems *Bayreuth*, *View Towards Mauern*, *May 2007* and *Hildrizhausen* were published in *12th Street*, Spring 2009. *Winter Axis* appeared in *Barrow Street*, Winter 2016 – 2017. *Make Believe* was published in *The Drunken Canal*, October 2021.
- * A chapbook version of *Sickarus* was selected by Ange Mlinko as runner-up for the 2018 Poetry Society of America's *30 and Under Chapbook Fellowship*.

Cover painting : *Hortus Palatinus*, Jacques Fouquier (1620)

The emblems in this book were sourced from the following texts



Corrozet, Gilles : *Hecatographie* (1540)

Alciato, Andrea : *Emblemes* (1549)

Alciato, Andrea : *Diverse imprese* (1551)

Aneau, Barthélemy : *Picta poesis* (1552)

Paradin, Claude : *Devises heroïques* (1557)

Sambucus, Joannes : *Les emblemes* (1567)

Bèze, Theodor de : *Vrais Pourtraits* (1581)

