

Spring 2018

The poem will resemble you: A human-computer collaboration

Zoe M. Morgan-Weinman
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2018

 Part of the [Other Computer Sciences Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Morgan-Weinman, Zoe M., "The poem will resemble you: A human-computer collaboration" (2018). *Senior Projects Spring 2018*. 254.

https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2018/254

This Open Access work is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been provided to you by Bard College's Stevenson Library with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this work in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

The poem will resemble you

A human-computer collaboration

a senior project submitted to
the Division of Languages and Literature of Bard College

by Zoe Morgan-Weinman

Annandale-On-Hudson, NY
May 2018

Acknowledgements

This project is entirely a product of everyone who has ever taught, mentored, loved, encouraged, or challenged me - more names than can fit on one page.

I would like to thank my parents for showing me the world and reading me books. Everything I accomplish is possible only in that I carry all of your examples within me and strive to be half as kind, hardworking, and wise.

I would like to thank my advisor, Michael Ives, for starting me out as a poet, putting up with my project, and for teaching me the meaning of meaning.

I would like to thank my advisor, Susan Rogers, for taking me to save frogs and watch birds and imparting the importance of dawn.

I would like to thank all of my teachers for doing the most important job in the world.

I would like to thank my younger siblings, Lev, Liora, Max, and Eli, for your unconditional love and patience and the honor of making some mistakes that someday may help you make different ones and my older sister, Morgan, for being my best friend/ fun mom/ storage unit.

I would like to thank my Bronfman community for inspiring, supporting, and constantly amazing me. You were the first to hear me read a poem aloud and you asked me to share another. Lili, Matthew, Mikaela, I'm so humbled by your brilliance and treasure every moment I've had discussing questions, both earth-shattering and trivial with you.

I would like to thank my girlfriend, Juliana, for being the warmest thing in my life. Thank you for letting me write poems about you and for being gentle, and wild, and brave. Because of you, my senior project be creative and do beautiful mountains to success.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Sam Truitt and Linda Steubesand, for patiently showing me how to function in the professional world and helping me reach for my wildest ambitions.

I would like to thank my friends for adventures and tenderness and sharing your amazing art and talents with me. Even though none of you said you would still love me if I got a mullet, I do feel creatively supported by all of you.

I would like to thank my grandparents for your contributions and encouragement in my endeavors, and for your stories and pictures.

I would like to thank my cousin Ellen for being my example of an unapologetic woman in the arts in New York City. Your successes but also your ability to remain true, humble, and passionate are the bar against which I hope to measure my own career.

Preface

If poetry is considered to be fundamentally a form of written art that emanates from the human experience and emotional world, what does it mean if a computer can write poetry that is indistinguishable from that of a human poet? There are those who are interested in exploring the notion that computers might one day possess the capacity to feel. Though this may be a goal of artificial intelligence research, computers are not currently thought to be capable of conscious awareness. That being said, I am less committed to exploring the possibility of a digital emotional sphere than in a second speculation: that the ability of a computer to write poetry could point to a valuable process of imaginative generativity through acts of randomness. The reader of a computer-generated poem, as with any poem, makes the emotional and logical connections necessary to find the work meaningful. The only difference is that a human-generated poem has meaning imbued into it with intention while a computer's poetry is only given meaning by the human audience after it has been created. True randomness, itself, is a contested possibility. If the poet's language and the words that fall from the computer's giant universe of knowledge in truth issue from some common fountain, perhaps the processes of arranging them into poems are simply different kinds of random acts. In this case, the human poet is only more relevant than the electronic one insofar as the poet could, perhaps, if asked, comment as to the process behind their work.

In an effort to explore both the definitions of poetry and of the poet as well as the concept of randomness, I have created this collection using a bit of Python code that generates "randomized" "poetry" from a corpus I compiled in an ongoing process of adding and collecting. The corpus contains an assemblage of text pieces that I hoped would represent my own consciousness, in order for the poems to differ from my own as much as possible only in that they were not in fact written by me. It includes, more than thirty books, among which are selections from the Torah, *Moby Dick*, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, *A Brief History of Time*, and *Metamorphosis*. Several articles from the New York Times, posts found on my Facebook newsfeed, all my old poetry and some of my college essays, the text from several placards at various art museums, and sections of the Talmud are also sprinkled throughout. The code uses bigrams to generate text in which words that appeared next to each other in the corpus will be more likely to appear together in the "poems." This is to give the "poems" a better chance at being grammatically correct, as well as to create the semblance of voice. This voice, character, or flow is vital in order to avoid the poems sounding simply like a list of words. It is possible to teach computers grammar but, for this stature of this project, I relied instead on bigrams and my own editing. I also fed the poems in this collection back through the code individually to create computer-generated sections that serve as mirrors of their own content. Any given line in this collection may be entirely my own, entirely computer-generated, or a mix of the two but all was human-edited and curated.

Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Preface	2
the “oh, God”	5
everything was burning	6
the women endowed with courage or	7
lake water, vomit	8
once congress	9
hers is a peculiar sort of speculative genius	10
a marvelous cloud cover	11
baby leatherbacks moved across damp sand	12
we measure space in silence	13
she returned home under	14
today I saw the sea	15
our boat sat light upon the waves	16
in a terrible urge each day	17
they became agitated back in the homeland	18
she was simply a sailor	19
lured two mudskippers	20
coequality killed three anniversaries	21
a radio station came and went somewhere along the road,	22
in order to travel through hypnoses	23
au revoir most untinned precertification at dusk	24
ascepiads, cyclists, and shoppers on the Palace Green	25
An island is not only an island.	26
condensation on the windows on the 49 to White City	27
the swimming vision has reached dangerous saturation	28
The amphibologies that keep half breathing	29
cummerbund snivel picked nannyberries	30
a self-forgetful semi-pro plagiarist	31
the fig and warm sunlight	32
after all the different lives and quarrels	33
imagine the layers of Earth’s crust	34
There is the her that I know	35

being → becoming → nonbeing	36
The son of heaven	37
Wood chips: a nonlinear history	38
It's so embarrassing to mistake a human for a seal	39
Cycle of Toxicity	40
Parental linguistics	41
Unreasonable noise	42
The summer language	43
Suppose she is	44
Deuteronomy 34: Moses sees the promised land then dies, aged 120 years	45
The new Messiah	46
Bowl with Citation from Mishna Zevahim	47
The handmaid's son	48
Moisture, an unstable airmass, a lifting force	49
Last night she started with charcoal	50
Thackery H. Ainsworth III	52
Gay late	53
Precisely as shallow	54
Kearah	55
Did she die or is she something new	56
The equation had too many variables	57

the idiom unloads a season:
 "oh, god" or the eminent piece, my hanging havoc
 I would have given up
 or into
 onto
 the floor
 so totally interrogated by critics
 imagine what you can see looking back through doors you've already opened

walking where one has already
 congratulating oneself on just what we do
 keeping the months only kind of
 all this spraying of lovers with the arbitrary jargon

meanwhile I, briefly a scholar and nearly having lost it near the Garden
 mysterious no longer
 feeling a bit like a mature giant tortoise
 watched as the world slipped and hung off,
 dangling by the northern Pacific Ocean
 I remember when it was born from those sacred words
 and to these I had adhered
 until recently: the longer of seventeen
 her colors/ household
 she crested
 wave-form, reached the evening
 and withdrew back
 the room, with its peculiar whims
 meant to see the window
 where she might come again
 or perhaps at the door holding a violin

see the world slipped and, nearly having lost it, was born
 she might be sacred
 the styptic piece
 the "oh, God"

everything was burning

any lower farewell rolls under a heart
analyzing, exegizing
everything stopped

within the unrealistic ground where there lay buried questions
and next to them, fear

a static chain hashing a tangent analog alongside the prone form
of something tangled

and in the middle of the fever, the steady pulsing of blood
small indentations we press and forget

everything stood perfectly still

the curiosity awakened
so far beyond any particular wrongs
or implications

the laws that govern society
and the softer corners in which they cannot
reach

as long as there existed an inequality
there remained a desire to find things with
our mouths

the women endowed with courage or
vulnerability
or divergence
or hair
since generalized education have been
branching into barred rooms,
sliding headlong into potentialities
and sensibilities –

above all, shouting into the wallpaper
these disastrous discussions
then licking the edges and sealing them shut
for so long as we have as many votes
as there are men

lake water, vomit
the pink granules of
fruit punch mix
disintegrate and
absorb to fuel
this dying animal
always starving

when you mention
fatherhood
we happen to drive
past a plaque com-
memorating the village founder
He built this fence

once congress
had been reduced
to flesh in a pile, and
rarely if ever
a blank head struggling to raise
they set about to destroy
their molten idols
and demolish their high places
their popular opinion
their property and rites

the naming of oneself
Moment/Agency
as a ___ who killed a person unintentionally
the cities you designate for yourselves
are replete with dirty water
roses unrebuked

hers is a peculiar sort of speculative genius
she is mortal, granted, but lacking physical fetters
strict and quickly moving
she is an act of multiple souls
she found as clearly as she could
not just a parachute but a carapace
something to shed

this animal-like curse of watergazers
enveloped us in a good and clumsy mutual capacitance
amazed at first she too would be lying here

I want to sleep in ribbons
to find as clearly as she would
a good and quickly-moving cover
something which fastens but does not constrict

a marvelous cloud cover
spread over the city like wool -
some dangerous pump, I think, indulging
a pelotage-continuum fantasy

well outfitted and unalone
we got used to ocean waves
ponytails subsided into the old persians
their fringed edges
splaying vulnerably and melding

our frozen and sandy feet carried us
to the doorway - warm
but mother was careful to shut it quick
we washed our ears in the sea before supper
sustained on all that saltwater carried

the hills never sat upright
they sloped and leaned yellow

at last, I dwell in people,
in that I can know:
je suis, je m'appelle, j'adore...

baby leatherbacks moved across damp sand
the mizzle breathing also onto achimenes
leaves jumped against the window
dozing, she came to an understanding
of why we use stones

the wind turned around
growling across this almost vertical face
a mountain that served as a suffix
as if she let the noble creature breathe

the wind buried her
not with malice
but with the indifference of a heavy inheritance
it did to her hair what it does to the sand dunes

the north clustered
on her innermost soul
the way stars
settled into furrows when she dreamt

we measure space in silence
stare into each other's
eyes: grand, hooded phantoms

a long-lensed digital camera snapped the wind
then, finding an expanse to the left
was painfully insistent on
locking in on curves rather than lines
and again threatened her name
I am nothing
I am nothing
I am nothing
I will not let the consequences of it into my time of violence
helpless, assigning blame for something beautiful
the bone of a broken elbow points back home
I cannot subsist on that which is bitter and hot
even pity requests a way through the chest's junky fill

this evening,
she returned home under
the usual sky
above: a heavenly
opening
of rising
and abatement

she knows
the reason
the hidden
kept her
silent

she knows
it will steal
from her
hold her
from the last revelation

She?
She

climbed up
a valley
where she
has no sense
of holding
or breathing

completely still
eyes shut

not a silence
not a
singularity

this is not death
she says
it does not begin without ending
like a ball of thread
it is not brilliant
I have simply
fallen asleep

today I saw the sea
go grey in my left eye
and blue in my right

the wind I coaxed to bring in
a message or a sound or a floating medal

between the red hut
where Aristotle saw the hectocotyli
and proper procreation

maybe a thud
but all the cave heard for eons
was about being pulled down
into marrying up

that sort of oil and vinegar
joining
without mixing

our boat sat light upon the waves
the warm wood pressed down upon the sea

our cells tasted the edge of the hours
and our bones found new orders of movement
clearer than light but slower

we spotted the coast
or the sloped back of a sleeping leviathan
for a moment, it looked like hands

no shame or euphemisms
could incite the beast to violence:
in heaven, no one gets hungry
and those who waited for signs
who fought urges and denied themselves
remained below, stiff as the doors they locked tight

in a terrible urge each day
 a fever cruises the fingers
 the uncontrolled way her arms spread out
 moving her dangerous creaturehood

it is still a good morning to raise the north star
 modestly dressed and already at the Wall,
 we see nothing
 and for that
 the closed-eyed God
 loves us so

seeking under Jerusalem's ribs
 we are fragile, virile, and on the floor
 employees, actions not our own
 but coordinating the conclusion
 athirst in forced seclusion
 we roll bone dice 🎲🎲🎲🎲🎲🎲

may both the marriage moving this will
 and her picture hang in the celestial sphere
 sentences the wall said but did not tell the rabbi
 her chest, her closed eyes
 already at the water, parting

they became agitated back in the homeland
evening talk, the moon,
a beautiful plastic movement of finality
a sound
sleepwalking for the good man
whose face is everywhere and removed from her
a hiding lath
watching from the walls, having become their very boards,
his least resistance deigns to lets her smoke indoors
of all the ways he owns his monsters,
inventing her name was easiest
it came to him in a dream
he thought, the highest gods' creation being mine own feet
he crouched, said please and stood at the mountaintop
experienced pride, the cleaner irritability
a life has a few square miles
the ranch provided the parameters for his consciousness
the cattle of his dim preferences grazed undisturbed
but her quarters flooded
she must pay her body against the riverbed,
the premises, and mr. thinking
his head was the only dimension
and she became agitated, remembered
the sound the moon used to make
their joint acoustic funeral
was all the more wasted
for its asynchronism

she was simply a sailor
straight from the name of I am that I am
her boat slipped
from the sky's sapphire pavement
tumbled down the Nile
was diverted in a flood
to these cold grey waters

her smudged maps and charts
began to repeat themselves,
she could only derive righteous lies from the alphanumeric code
these documents she carried with her being so exceptionally fastidious
had any person come near her waters
they may have thought her a zealot
or a light-headed sage

she had set off within her little room
carrying the family in silver amulets
to find it had entirely stopped speaking to her
the habits to be acquired she would not like
and yet in bed each night with them
her body was a factory, churning,
unable to cease whispering in its own ear

they say the key to the mind is fresh air
but sailing in circles, finding no friendly port,
freezing, unable to wear the skin she carried
she became exhausted
her waters, her body stopped speaking
she would think each night with the little room in her
of galut, that Egypt of the mind

corn husks floating in the tide pools
lured two mudskippers
their eyeballs skimming the surface
indeed a microarray, and all those traits
drove more finless, fading, drowned
the thieves would have to
love without means of navigation
and seemingly lie there flat
the reflection of air traversing above them
the sunshine might belong
to the sterile crawling about it
fish befriend round numbers
innocent of problems or striving
the man who sat on that rock
I suspect had forgotten he had already freed himself

in better times, out in front and as revenge,
coequality killed three anniversaries
seventeen non-theatrical homes
thirteen non-discoverable malpractitioners,
researchers in the field of the hyperlink
played murder and sang their misfortune
thirty fun-loving comrades,
(people caused by the helplessness that God is)
were horseman unaccustomed to activities or agents known as “comprehensive”
ninety-seven of the ways of late summer
became a force one sits and looks at for some time
exquisitely wired, they glowed like gold
seven company men climbed Half-Dome
or the top of fame (we cannot speak of this)
nor can we of father, that evening, or other employment opportunities
forty-eight cigars, legally acquired in the United Kingdom
comprised a loan used to buy a few hours
the nine officers attached to the case
by themselves and with the intention of another report
in combating some being, as it glanced against the doorframe
and appeared before them dead and covered in graphite
found that the horrible remains largely unmysterious
and relatively quantifiable

a radio station came and went somewhere along the road,
said that “framing” describes feeling a body like measuring
a problem of slowing in place
we get dressed for the funeral to earn the memory
one of the many great distances that sour and bite
the high stiff collar of suckers
we discuss cancer to accept his restive peace
the processing plant went unreported
due to the deftness in tightening factors
of humans the formless coast pulled with careful aim

in order to travel through hypnoses
take your mark, reradiate

misconstrued knitters of the universal tablecloth
undertook evolution, and after that a cloak for it
all else that were just elbows and counting
morning and heat and work going global
held and alive

they plunge their hands into death and return
they make slow a chain of nice disturbance
the unseen exhibit, the pose

they welcome greed and medicate discomfort
on behalf of having the sheets' thick envelope of warmth

rushing to spread out, to sort
these high dignitaries
they feel bad
they suspect the sky or some European country
or perhaps Canadians flooded their kisser,
their only veil for love

au revoir most untinned precertification at dusk

Dorian Gray eyes, the mouth all playing, the dead just catch

lower lip configuration carrying yes by thank you or something phallic

subdued voice: do you want water? we will be got

significant cold cell issue as introductory lobby or active principle

nonaspirates either catalyzed un-envy or thine ghostlike fax

asclepiads, cyclists, and shoppers on the Palace Green
move quickly, recognizing without signage or labels

nepotism is law and I find myself not in the family
though well able to blend in
this melting pot city - strangely stirred
not only by way of pedestrian's determined strides
but by a notion of beasts at the door

the traffic has the right of way
and fisheries which did business with Balfour
keep their ice, though feebly

when asked to explain myself
I say cocktails
at the end of
and between meals
gin, of course

shouting, whispers, holy reckoning
how odd the change in the weather

rain falls wearily against hair and headscarves alike
spectacles speculate a la mode, watching stitches
to see whether they crossed and when

An island is not only an island.
The grid overwrites national borders.

I poured flour on the ground to see your footprints.
You exist most potently in all those spaces you've left empty.

My devil's tongue virtue wakes up in a cold sweat
dreaming of how, with your word, the world opened up in my room.

Miles work the mind flat like rolling pins,
they pour me into the seabed.

These stretches as destiny, you cried, "keep it!"
There is a terror of sharks disproportionate to their danger -

it is not their dark eyes nor jagged teeth,
but their inability to remain still.

Our tentative spine,
as we grow it stretches, bulges,

bone spurs and herniated joints constrict.
I've woken up in so many spaces,

grids, footprints.
My time is a Fresnel zone.

I pronate ellipsoidal,
obsess over distance and time.

condensation on the windows on the 49 to White City
smears the city into a red glow,
drips London at the corners
he flattens his coiffure with headphones
to focus on his magazine:
stolen donkeys and
spoons of medicine that fit together like people
on this ample block
the wood, transported in all that ever was and now and the time before
the smell of malt vinegar and rain
so clear they had to mediate it with birds that flew in a cloud like exhaust
he wonders if he can still be a pilot
sand or gravel crunches under the tires
he cannot
is a pursuer of civilization and should be seen firing into it
was a god
is there and if he rose up
did so with large quantities of money
that indeed several months ago upon the lower bedpost
allowed not sleeping
the breadth of his head now all of the basement
the normal swimming position
getting somewhere in place
asked to please not be extremely harsh
with gleams of his rapid eyes
he wonders if he can still be seen firing into a cloud
all of his head now all of civilization
and the smell
they fit together like exhaust

when the swan pond starts to look like a nice dip
the swimming vision has reached dangerous saturation
the static along the periphery will begin to snow

someone is crying about glue
substance and might in repose
a series of primary brushstrokes
seldom specificity
glitter clasped in the nostrils
suggesting a vortex

a hankering city
a grabbed handful
of irrelevant millions
lived to tell the tale of a house
in history's waxy grip
a thought of valor made it modern
or merely made it shine in the morning
dipped in gypsum plaster and sand

The amphibologies that keep half breathing
in their blindfolded sleep training methods
harden off the neritic shore of Eure-et-Loir.

The younger one in front, evolved
into long periods of static
and praised the genius of robbers.

It's a two-person bluff, a few modest pleasures
of a militant never dying worm
alive and in possession of the day.

There was a new way into the hedge
between the body and the other body,
which foresaw that the once prescribed

menacing voice would feel the physical law of years,
old knitters of the never flat sand trap.
they were intelligent children, but that's about it.

cummerbund snivel picked nannyberries
 unpoised ninety Olympic reclimb subpreputial
 plopped Brooklyn in this unseasonable
 state pressed to go somewhere near south toward
 delineation heavy for avoiding ambiguity about art

each being descended from truth
 flatters in secret acrostic of the few happinesses
 a two-hour reprieve at the frontlines of a lover's quarrel
 Niagara but at night, another top-heavy galaxy hangup
 a thought that would provide more would be foolish
 and clearly with a keen interest / question to ask:
 what's more often skinned than left-hand pushed?

that which remained cold or
 rooms rapidly and numbly found
 beauty, some blossoms from the laws
 eating anything to civilize the teeth

this way out and carried off
 where formerly was kept a superior smile in the Philippine islands
 perdition finally gave say to copy
 all the despair that thing
 tried to earn an axe to clear vanity

syntactic stairs finished their conversation well
 and western hemispheres: the very deep or very southward got up and
 on collectable mugs along fleet street
 had wanted to leave but never did

a self-forgetful semi-pro plagiarist
used to remember names
a crack in a long figure stretched out
ready to become someone who climbs
slipped out of the area in a nightdress
didn't quite make it to the stairs
mournful gloom brooding over those steps
perfectly cold, open, and faltering
a nature continuous from parents through the night
father picked up every toppled bike in Amsterdam

a trainee at home if not a something of a memoir
nine kinds of the self that runs
a touch of the first told at the end for this establishment
goodbye feet

knowledge rather sharply peaked with the backward
shocking what we were
what we kept trying to complete
very remote in seriousness
clusters of cowardice
obvious relief in the garden on that particular morning
the savior couldn't attend

leaves sprout early this year -
the fig and warm sunlight
generating jobs and uncertainty

the ground under the conservatory -
how it was drawn into the sounds
of the after-dinner face

an abyss of slowing but not helping -
the way Saturn breaks softly
and the maids split and everything goes silent

she sat upright filled with oh covered with
the secret, the not known
the room where there was all her

any real woman / atmosphere
cannot be one in the hand

trailing fingers paint it as it might be
till the sky into illuminated furrows
drip calligraphy onto the Hudson

even through a screen she is warm
like sunlight

after all the different lives and quarrels
you kiss me like a windrose – north first
like smoke you come nearer, crawl closer

as the harsh gold light of a day's final movement glows in leaves
I watch a brachial artery throb
illuminated, the veins bake warm, yielding
vetiver works into the tips of our hair

traceries of shadows cast by monarch wings
lengthen toward the sun
as violets murmur our bodies into clay
tiny insects zoom, glowing sine and cosine on the horizon

these translucent petals burn
to allow the eye
at any given moment
to see all colors at once
and separately

imagine the layers of Earth's crust
are an indulgence,

solarizing various carpogonia
begat a choanoflagellate begat a sea sponge begat a cnidarian
predefining revulsion
of any hanging, drooping femininity
before poacher's abscessed bodies
padded any cell
she rounded infinitely

left boy/boys in the valley where they hunted
holding within her the swaying vein, the world

this was, long-course,
nothing but a dream

she was cursed to be only
absolutely silent knowingness

striking upon a quiet as deep as a womb
while nerves and land happened

There is the her that I know
and there is the entity within her:

massive, fathomless
the beauty in that which is unbearable

not an abyss but
a universe.

And she -
immeasurable

we erase backwards:
being → becoming → nonbeing

draw the Leviathan's suckers like
orange slices to make them less terrifying

tu es

tu as

their blood in the water
or
there's blood on my fingers

in this murky sea, I lose my feet
and then my hands

The son of heaven

They used to carve beautiful shapes into their guns
Men/tools/war/art died glorious and unending deaths
These pillars of bodies
defied their formal limitations
Hunting, inspecting the territories,
hooves marked time on hardstone
Uniforms with seamless shoulders
marched past the sheep that lined the spirit way
stood like 62 vertically riveted plates

The creature would arrive soon in the delicate village
The monster's bloody shoulders like lamps hanging
Hellish light and the reincarnation
shone through doors standing ponderously ajar
Weakness, that feeling made of eyes,
circled like vultures and the goods they ferry

another chief concern was whether life was going to be like muscle tissue
 or a bit more forgiving
 when she didn't run everything felt a bit less certain

the various allergies of her family members sat in her forehead as red boxes
 along with the rules of monopoly and risk
 the nearest fire station and the rough grass that hid the biting ants

Wood chips: a nonlinear history

her body warms in the sun
 the watering can sitting unused
 among the leaves, concrete, hair
 reconciles its new position
 with regard to a multi-function garden hose
 her hands had been soft and wrinkled

she spent her time in the garden quietly
 as her hands turned the soil her mind grazed gently on faraway beaches a baby girl

when she was younger she
 focused on her future daughter
 she would have golden ringlets
 and they would eat what they grew
 and swim where they lived

in church they sang about
 a way up and a tipping point
 and what she knew about men

she wondered about lust
 and whether our holy parents
 only love us because we look like them

It's so embarrassing to mistake a human for a seal

invisible sharks spent most
of their hard-earned tooth money
off the western side of Bora Bora
suffering, forgetting their own language

eager for that still-pending September testimony
as if the sight would make capital
the punishment of seeing that which one has destroyed
begin to scab over

they escaped with all the rags of an internet scammer
their stomachs filled with partially digested SPAM
and pineapple juice
they want you to know they're not always hurtful

Cycle of Toxicity

The boy elapsed within his bedroom.
Strangeness stirred in his breath.
He watched his life from an aerial view -
landmasses were figures
defined most nearly by what we mean when we say collateral.
They became smaller.
They became mere blotches of color.
He was little more than jangling keys,
scraped ankle bones,
thought processes behind the lying face,
the void stare.
The maps he made of his world encompassed a matter of yards
or measured by an indifferent Orion,
just visible over the shore's mucous membrane.
He governed graciously the little choruses
while his mother became the upstairs window.
A luminous absence,
she decided the life he suckled from her breasts would never return.
And he grew, an arrow shot with kingly pride.
He became every man she'd ever hated.

Parental linguistics

working-class people who rent their way into the camp life
not farmers but they do burn offerings
drifting idly along the surface of religion
they profess to crawling under the windows
so the neighbors won't know they're home
a contractor falls into the unfinished pool
all the myths of physicality
evaporated as they awaited a helivac
they were inmates of the dollar
of partially hydrogenated soybean oil

*

children in Cameroon can sit by themselves
close their eyes and create the world anew
a psychologist thinks it's because
their parents are always where they say they'll be
and they never lie, never create false rewards

but I think it's a question of grammar:
first the idea of flying
and then the thing that flew

Unreasonable noise

a shame you
wore pajamas to court
not guilty by virtue
of lime or arsenic

know your riot act
your age, home
address, eye color

eyes that hold like
loose fishnets
long legs in the
grey lightning

don't knock
just slip under
these blank sheets

no straight lines
in our pay-per-genesis
re-creation as revision
as ashes to
ask me another question
but tell me
the answer first

The summer language

the seed targets its bed under the cheek garden
tights, ripped at the Achilles, stretch further
to water alyssum, marigolds, succulents planted in honey jars
and explosions of air plants in glass warheads

eggshells filled with sesame oil and milk
lean balanced on humane mousetraps
cashews and other nuts secreting fear
opposite the outstanding rash -
a tingling in the throat

each cricket pencils the furthest quantum
their stridulation is small-scale
and reminds us that "leap"
describes neither proportion nor zeal

Suppose she is

the sea that drives against the shore
foams on the rocks and presses
between every grain
that goes back into the sky
into the clouds
when it recedes
gathers itself, it patiently
and eternally pulses
it plunges back to Earth
it washes the rocks
bathes them in salt, minerals
microscopic and exfoliating arthropods

the sea is a void
the sea is absolutely teeming

there is no logic
there is flawless design

perfection, sinking nor floating
suppose she is pure feeling
nothing more

suppose she is
patiently and absolutely teeming
a feeling of flawless design
every grain is microscopic and crashes up
suppose it is pure
a nothing eternally pulsing,
recedes, gathers,
it rains,
presses between perfection,
suppose she is the sound of water moving

Deuteronomy 34: Moses sees the promised land then dies, aged 120 years

a weather sword hums across the sky as through butter
sails filled with wind, the voices of a chorus

the last prophet lay dying
oxygen exiting the form of one who was perfect in his generation
herding another national aggregate
he walked under God

dips and valleys, fiddling within our intimate flesh
it had all become corrupted

the stone walls are held together with only their own mass
the throat that burned but was neither consumed nor extinguished
plastered eternally shut

a heritage overflowing and a tiny ark
throughout the golden and famous household
disappointing attributes echo
they walk in two's

The new Messiah

He was, as he saw it, a Messiah:
there would be a new Exodus
and from it would arise the nuclear family in all its glory.
He brought down a hailstorm of unplugged time,
and new couches, bigger couches.
But there arose a professional,
disguising the opposite plague,
a pond that did not part.

The Messiah's ambition
was tall enough to corral within six million square miles.
We will be that noble herd.

God made a little golden key,
and between the last three reputable acquaintances,
it seemed necessary for, not a paper reading,
but to speak (I never do).
The question ignored pluralities.
As prisoner I wanted nothing with little or golden fleeces.
It is neither difficult nor exhausting to ignore willfully.

Altars, the greatest fury, the hall of this truth,
our father's forehead was swollen with doctrine and good intentions.
Why can't the decreasing ice evolve a nastier culprit?
A razor exploded in the tube.
There were no casualties except perhaps a small dog
or a carton of double-yolker eggs.

Bowl with Citation from Mishna Zevahim

the birds, knowing the rain,
praise lightly like its falling
a twist-stemmed vessel has roots
in the earth's dark and breathing corners
her obfuscating concavities
that keep truths from us
hiding ⚡, hiding ⚡
hiding dawn
*bound and sealed are the demons and Liliths
their blood is received in a vessel of ministry*

The handmaid's son

the handmaid's son cannot sleep tonight
his mind holds his mother as she wanders the desert
the unleavened bread in her arms
crumbling, mixing into the sand
he is alone
looks at the hair on his arm in the sodium vapor lamp
he thinks they stand like people
if only they weren't so dark, so dense

the constraining number stares back
that is, besides bulls, rams, lambs
there is a he-goat
a spirit of satisfaction
functioning outside the integral surplus
the persistent ideal
and crystallized disappointment
is left behind

this governing mathematics:
the desert winds that take the shape of women
a well dug by her merit
and her name, hidden in the numbers
there is no word for what it is to give
in the very rare absence of requitability calculation

do you speak to God
as you speak to me?

Moisture, an unstable airmass, a lifting force

when I touch her
the rain comes down in droves
we don't hear it until we fall silent

breathing
she tells me I'm a two-fer
I cut through the jungle brush

to see whether her eyes
will show me what that means
she goes around with an Opinel no. 8 -

olive wood, and it's greener every day
a creation of goodnature, an open palm
no man can shake, only the tides

I hold on to her and a wave hits
all she's got on
is a soccer jersey

and the people who can save us
really just want to watch
sometimes I put on a red dress

and I let them

Last night she started with charcoal

we hovered in the room
we desired and we obliged
we couldn't be held
working but not understanding
speaking from under the little frame
for mystical vibration

when we realized no one else could hear us
and if she seemed to me to be

little more than a door handle
and my question to her
a turning of it until it stuck

the ozone becoming a stiff collar
around our bruised necks

what remains of the quiet
creates the sense of Here

having come Here for something soft
something we obviously did not build or earn

more for the crumbs than anything
to get to the living
she held tightly in anticipation of
shaking, slithering, for our sake
panting loudly as we moved in our body
Here it is made to lean on,
and in fact she leans all her weight on it.

Vexatious phlegm

his lunch was flavored by the damage
the split ends fraying his synapses
butternut squash, wax, clear plastic
he rolled up his deficiencies like a dung beetle
his latest blame ball an ineffectual epiphany
that the kingdom – even rebuilt – releases the same raging bull
again and again
only because he continually fails to prevent it
the overriding contest
prefaced with self-deprecation
a terminus dreadful like hemorrhoids
and his sandwich just tastes like the same old pickle
when can the doomsday complex
finally purge?

Thackery H. Ainsworth III

it stopped happening after he left the hotel for the second time
no sooner had he fainted
no sooner this mood
like the leftovers from breakfast
congealing outside his door
while he in private, sat atop his stuffed markhor in the nude
how you wash the beast is the satisfaction of the thing
he crossed himself
to no avail

his sister, on barbarous coasts,
an island, the dirt embedded in her knees
and into his lap fell the task
to sort the colors and the carpet
and above all to forget his old age
that burning pain one refers to as a mere unpleasantness
he lied about his trembling shoulders
he lied about the ice

he refers to it as one pain:
above the knees: the dirt, his trembling
how no propriety ever crossed the hotel desk
and yet the audacity to comment
upon his private mechanisms

he rolled himself tightly into the white linen sheets
forgetting his animal immortality

Gay late

desire snagged
nerves like a bitmap
and managing to hesitate
I had been listening
when she let her hands in
a tear in the holy of holies

we stayed awake
slumber patrolling pleasure
vectors dive whizz swoop
cake if only just for saying

we continually reassess
the common core precepts
of notches and carried threads
the things I dabbled along
these walls saddened her ears

full of subtleties
fractured and tentative partners
guess who was shocked
and then came back for more?

Precisely as shallow

she was a fish
and if she did not move
she became tided over
that is toppled by the flow
certainly never satisfied until

the vaguely grey sky and the almost hedges
combined to shade the yard
grass dried, algae crumbled, coral bleached

out of food and continuing to eat grease
she began to feel self-serving
the business of removing heart sinkers

she hates wearing holes
so she cut herself out

they say she is confused
with regard to the life cycle
of the little pools
in which everyone else
lets the garra rufa nibble their dead skin

Kearah

we never learn
to find God
in things

in rules or
roles or days
the magic is

awareness
knowing
the ungraspable

phantom
we flip a
bowl

on top of it
and leave it there
for good

Did she die or is she something new

Perhaps you can recommend an abattoir.
The compass of the breeze gently tugged
against bare branches, staring dry-eyed,
the miniature mechanical hand pressed down.

This is not how meat is supposed to look.
I reached the synagogue bathroom
where the tree I leaned against,
as carefully as a smart blue corpse might -
revealed itself to be made of paper mâché.

It was happening there.

Immobility.

There were no signs.

It did not become.

The equation had too many variables

he couldn't remember part G
let alone connect it to the relative efficiency of swallowing
or was it waking
an experiment in personal quasiperiodicity

he watched her eyebrows twitch
rolling in regularly furrowed patterns like brain matter
the facts were concrete
it was the moments in between that kept him hungry
looking for a new word to describe a family of shapes

he thought about train stations no one used anymore
folded towel diffeomorphisms and smooth noodle maps
how some things you remember but others
disappear like bruises

maps of shapes matter
the stations between them were variables
too many hungry-looking others disappear

describe swallowing
or remember part of it
like how new concrete is molded by shoes