Those Other Flowers To Come: A Poetry Collection

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Those Other Flowers To Come

A Poetry Collection

Senior Project submitted to

The Division of Language and Literature of Bard College

by

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Those Other Flowers To Come
for Ann for everything and every other thing
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**Table of Contents**

**This World**

4 - Very Specifically Here
6 - The Vacant Sense
8 - Obscure Births
9 - The Substitution
10 - Contra Abraham
12 - Before Me, I Enter
13 - from, to / Nouns, Lost to Me, Returned In Emerson’s “Love”
22 - The Word for Going is a Way

**This Other World**

26 - Those Other Flowers To Come
28 - The Scrape
29 - Adrift, Reading Eliot’s *Little Gidding*
31 - Epitaph
32 - The Debris of a Shape
33 - If, In The Seventh Seal, I Entered
34 - Most Stars Are Dead
35 - Anagnorisis
36 - The Summons
38 - First Ode: The Problem of Setting
40 – Afterword
I am imbued with the notion that a Muse is necessarily a dead woman, inaccessible or absent; that the poetic structure — like the canon, which is only a hole surrounded by steel — can be based only on what one does not have; and that ultimately one can write only to fill a void or at the least to situate, in relation to the most lucid part of ourselves, the place where this incommensurable abyss yawns within us. – Michel Leiris, *Manhood*

Our bodies communicate. This is my calling. This is my world. All is decided and ready; the servants, standing there, and again here, take my name, my fresh, my unknown name, and toss it before me. I enter. – Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*
The partaker partakes of that which changes him.
The child that touches takes character from the thing,
The body, it touches. The captain and his men

Are one and the sailor and the sea are one.
Follow after, O my companion, my fellow, my self,
Sister and solace, brother and delight.

- Wallace Stevens “Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction”
Very Specifically Here

My land is not the land of the tiger, the watermelon, the lemon, the tea leaf.
My land is not the land of the aqueduct or the turret.
A man called me a rose and a thing. He said women were typical and I was not. With his help I could escape my typical difference and enjoy what refined sugar he could carry through fields to my house.
I replied that he grew in an alien climate and did not understand my genus.

His land subtracts an ocean, an old-growth oak, all the sumac’s blood, in order to find me and name me.
I read hell, apologies, cities, dander, resurrection and it did not explain why this year there are markedly less banded woolly bears in the fallen leaves at the sides of the streets; the farmer’s almanac still holds that this is a mild omen: the winter going to slush and honey sunsets.

Two hawks punctuated my afternoon walk: red-tailed and a stranger variety with a bone-colored head.

My land is not the land of the screen, the subdivision, the wire, the vaccination. Guidebooks honor these specifics by excluding all other nouns made elsewhere, not grown here three miles from here, very specifically here, where I live and walk daily.
My land is not the land of days, or progress.
Land can turn or continue. It never escalates itself or becomes other.
Time continues, water bows, then shrugs off its surface under a thinner moon; nothing is added but another tree to take the place of the one that broke open in a hurricane.
My land is not the land of the language.
Certainly, those who live here have mouths; the mouths are used for hunger and clamor.

Words have a difficult time attaching to our noise.

My land can say. But it does not say things. The sound itself is beautiful and conforms to no typical sense. The beauty is about itself.

Our open mouths produce tones that restore the earth its elements:

a high pitch turns Styrofoam liquid
and electricity slows into yellow rope that falls in tired lines across the absence of a landscape.

My land is not a landscape. Hard as I try, a line cannot be fixed between the fir trees and the mountain: no horizon adheres to the vegetative tides turning each blurred tree into a smoke that hides even the idea of an edge.

A man called me a rose, a thing. I said the soil here knows no roses; a thing, if planted, will not grow.
**The Vacant Sense**

Proposal to dull the words, something like
blizzard
but I forget it and sevoflurane

so that the words, blizzard or the flakes of the whole, fragment;
enamel, eiderdown, the snow attack
on the hill like blood cells
without blood inside.

It is hard to realize when the ability
to realize is made
into pink matter, relaxed and mute.

On the fifth dawn after the Cold Moon, early December,
I am unmedicated and still cannot
for the life of me
remember how I got inside and outside an eight-hour sleep;

where is the port hole? venipuncture?

No purpose for the bandaid on the inside of an elbow and
yet it keeps quiet the place where the joints show
I am not a unity.

Dreamless night, by virtue of contrast, shows
how the narrative keeps me mortal:
if the story starts with golden hair
it must end in a glimmer of milkweed
buoyed by air, unattached to the head.

Eight lost hours do not
happen and neither do I; the duration is a nullity:

my skin stays this size, the stomach does not
empty, my full
brain holds undigested comrades, intimacies, I thought to
make into a facet of my older self
only yesterday.

If there is a void where story
should rest, missing
kidney, word for my mother’s odor,
is there a girl afterwards?

I can’t place a before I fell
asleep, into the brine, into open hands. The morning
seems unlike itself

without the evening, book reading, wolf hour,
behind it.
Is there a morning to wake
into? Or is stagnant water
the same hour?

If something has been
surgically
removed, then
it is the nucleus of a history I cannot use,

refuse to name.
**Obscure Births**

At what point did the holiday become exile?
Maps detailing the escape route cannot show the point from which I began; was it my mother? or before?

Lucidity strikes for a wolf hour and then I am fast asleep again, forgetting things known briefly: my original animal, the shape of the world’s first country.

The beginning is off stage, or in another life. In the wings, invisibly, a bird’s signs about the tough work it was breaking through egg shell. What kind of bird? A sign? Wings up or down? Or was the bird singing and this overheard is a way of sensing what is now life was once a word for somewhere else entirely. Personally, I find the water like tar, the lack of purpose widespread, disheartening, the ability of the poem to support an emotion almost impossible. And yet was there not a moment when this alien climate seemed a superior version of my hometown? The plants grew taller than expected and the men noticed my body each time I brought it outside.

The wings of the birds were so wide they occurred offstage. In time, the word for bird meant something else entirely. A visible wedge of the original coming to stand for the whole.

Are the limits of the wings, absent in recent years, a fiction?

The language here, although similar to the one spoken by my mother, has no room for the fricatives of color I believe occurred daily in the world of my birth.

Grown now, a loss accumulates, and the whiteness blooms unseen in me: a hemorrhage behind a lovely face, somehow spared the worst of the car accident. And if the bird, never witnessed, dies, how will we know the end of the song?

The sign agitates.

Is it a silence? a pause?
Relief in the festival: smoke somehow
    avoiding the white flags, the chants
conforming to the memory of their sound
from last year, men stripped
to the waist, engaging in petty combat. Survival,
although difficult, is possible, we think and
believe, if the right words can be located
for sacrifice. Life is blood and life’s blood is
a word for it. The girl
    is bathed, protected from
the threat of inclusion in a system
of meaning. She must remain separate:
her body, the only word.
    Our abundance,
muskrat fur, oven smoke, oil,
dirt depend on our
ability to keep her unaware
that the world exists
and can touch the skin.

After her work, the language, almost overfull,
is unburdened enough to mean
    for another year. The crops can be their seeds. There is room
each year to say my mother, my father.

What of it? She is like grace before a meal.
Afterwards, the world, dull and resisting touch for so many months,
sheds its dry season. We eat again. And again each year

she appears, under the flags,

free of ornament, and is one day my own

relief in the festival. The distance between us closes.

Already the wind lifts.
A young girl can cure the land.
Let her, unflinching, with the traditional instruments
demonstrate a way of speaking.
Contra Abraham

I'm no closer to understanding
the whale song or the nature of what
I desire, what it looks like, but
I can't help but give physical

body to my suspicion that I have been called

into use: pewter in his beard, a father, stranger, brother, lamplight, anything attempting

a secret. Scripture informs me,

although he is smooth as a vegetable, uncomplicated

form, he carries more words than I.

What do you call a woman? Sacrifice? Provision?

I think you call a woman Isaac.
Abraham isn't silent or Silence. He speaks for me
everyday when he claims

I stay mute the whole way up the mountain.

No revelation required from faith's object itself

or is the secret a kind of ignorance against my loud thought that I know the tender cuts of use. I knew you called me many names, Rachel, burnt offering, mother, son, lamb.

I know the blade is an extension of your ability to be. In order for the knight of faith, to transcend his body,

blunt instrument, he must have

his love to carry uphill.

I'm no closer to understanding a song, a whale song, the depth of it, the oceans of what
tragedy or my name.

Is my name his love?

I felt my body begin to symbolize. It was painless but I was quite aware as we rose up the side of Moriah like sun following steam.

Clearly, I am the thing you call names other than mine. I am the thing carried, surrogate of the lamb, a son, the unspoken knowledge that the firstborn of your seed is just a frame for spilt blood.

The instant is always punctual.

Death is not a deed done but a shadow cast beforehand. I am done in beforehand. Before I realized I could not call myself, I was already without a tongue.

The knife rests above my mountain and your hand is stayed by the arrival of any voice other than mine. I do not speak.

Is my name under your hand? Is it your love?
Before Me, I Enter

Up until the age of when I got beautiful, I existed.

My affirmatives were strong and high
like the sound envelope
of a hawk in the black fir trees. I could nod

and know my moving face was sheer enough
to reveal the signature of my brain. My body was
just glass in front of an unobstructed view: two tall lime trees,
some tufted grass,
the genderless swell of a distant hill;

no fled spark from a bonfire ever noticed
me nearby. Nothing caught the frays in my blood.

But a world is a world in time.

For a time, milk was always on the table in a glass
and there were blue stones in the vegetable garden
the exact weight of my baby teeth.

Time happens and is a way of making beautiful.

Just birthed, no girl looks any way or another enough to elicit desire. But now

I have heard my mother say bird when she means

look at anything other than me, look for a bird,
look to the sky.

I know there is a distance between a mirror and its material.
It is frighteningly possible to become lodged in the chink of air between

a face and its flat light.

Time is a way of putting distance between the body and its good words.

Garden, stones, a glass of milk, my mother’s words.

Saying yes, now a process of undress;

I must remove my sight,
habits of touch,
in order to ensure my brain can be seen
giving consent:

flower on a stick.
That which is *a love*, may be trusted to the end. I thought
*and found it*
blended with what is more, the book, the word, clouds, more and forever.

“The statue is then beautiful when it begins to be incomprehensible, when it is passing out of criticism and can no longer be defined by compass or measuring wand… The god or hero of the sculptor is always represented in a transition *from* that which is representable to the senses, *to* that which is not. Then first it ceases to be a stone.”

When it begins, it begins
to be, god or hero, or sculptor, or first stone. It begins to be, when it is passing out of sabbaths and jubilees:
twenty, thirty, eighty years and years. Every *thing*
is beautiful;
details are always melancholy:
time and place and canker and care.

*The rose of joy*
is grief.

*All mankind*

love
*a lover. Dearer than*
a lover is
*a skein of silk or a sheet of paper,*
or dancing-school, singing-school.

*Scholars, great men*

*are*
a parcel of accidental and trivial circumstances.

*What I want to portray is*
the experience of mere pictures as
a lover, dearer than
every thing.

iii.
Be our experience in particulars what it may:
dawn, music,
poetry and art, purple light;
our experience is still
a parcel of
a window,
a glove, a veil,
ribbons, wheels of the carriage.
The figures, the motions, the words betray themselves as themselves in transition from the sign to the beloved.

Object are images, are like other images, are water, fire, the study of midnight.
Stars were, are, letters,
flowers ciphers coins air,
and song
men and women,
and the streets mere pictures.
Almost the notes are articulate.

iv.
Bird, bough, tree, cloud, faces, waving grass, flowers
green dear.
Dearer
the wood and a fine madman, sweet sounds
The causes have sharpened the perceptions of
a new man, new perceptions, new purposes and a religious somewhat person, soul.

v.
The cause of

a man and a woman,
of all select things and virtues
summer diamond the song of the ancients,
land, roses, violets, dove’s neck, the plastic arts, gets perceived as

the same fact. The same fact is a new man and
may be observed and measured as a mere picture,

statue and

transitioning from
to that which is

not

stone, painting,
poetry, fire,
visions, high

shadows of real things.

vi.

What was lost articulates

almost as the purpose of

the man,
a person,
the female sex,
the form, movement. The persons resign each other

as standing for the details. For love

a book, the same book.

The cause of

the world gets lost and
is old; new is

Pluto, Plutarch, Apuleius and Petrarch and Angelo and Milton.

Pluto, Plutarch, Apuleius and Petrarch and Angelo and Milton always represent a transition from that which is, to that which is not.

Then first it, the man, a person, the female sex, ceases to be a stone,
upper world,
cellars, powdering-tubs, marriage
thrift,

and that life.

vii.

Details are always melancholy:
time and place and canker and care.

The rose of any thing is grief
and canker and care.
The rose of all mankind is. Love a lover.

All mankind dreams a detail
of the pond, or the light or,
from an orb, the rays,
every utensil, toy, the house and yard and passengers of
politics geography history. The detail may be observed as the time and place of
what was lost

when the sign became necessary.
“by the necessity of our constitution
things are ever grouping
themselves according to
higher or more interior laws”.

viii.

Neighborhood, size, numbers,
habits, persons, degrees, powers
higher to the lower, all the particulars
the house and the yard

are becoming more

impersonal every day.

Every day the necessity of

things is

according to themselves.
Things, every love, rose, grief, act

according to a higher

transition from , to .

Our experience,

that of a man and a woman,

is accidental particulars: dawn seen by hero or god, music heard by

Plutarch, Apuleius, the man, a person, the female sex

sharpens the cause

only by its own design.

The necessity of our transmutation
is a trivial circumstance.

ix.

I lost,
and lost , but found

the precious fruit of the long hereafter. This new,

quite new
And the body is wholly little stars, heaven fine, night, day, studies

from
talents and kingdoms religion.

The details are melancholy, exactly the whole web of relations in a list of years, years.

This form is full of this which is all form.

x.

Beginning with the remembered image of the other, I wonder does that other see cloud, the same book, the same now and delight?

The body is found wholly to be the beautiful, the beloved, the beloved head, one hair, these children, danger, sorrow. Love prays a new value to every atom in nature. The love is the form of a new, quite new, man and woman.

It transmutes the whole web of relation in
to golden, new, sweeter elements, pearls and poetry and
the remembered image of
that other
from the beginning.

xi.

What is more?

Home/heart.

A parcel of accidental and trivial circumstances.

The causes have sharpened
the purpose of the form: to
transition from somewhat
a person to
signs, purposes and a religion.

Everyday, the necessity of signs begins and so on;
signs appear and reappear and continue to attract,

but the changes. The whole, known, texture of man, of woman changes. The statue is then in a transition. It ceases to be that which it is not.

What is more?

A stone. The god or hero in transition.

A rose of the world, all the angels, the windows, the vices, all the schools, all the homes
breast violence.

The remembered image is
what begins to be wholly embodied: the beloved, cloud, the same book. Form is
fully what it gains. What it gains to, it becomes from.

xii.
They resign each other without complaint. They resign each other,
now man,
now woman, now cheerful or object or each other’s design.
They de sign each other.

xiii.
That which is a love, may be trusted to the end.
I thought and found it
blended with
sacred, magical play, charms, years, years.
It is there as form, as body wholly embodied:

a man and a woman, so variously

forty or fifty, early infancy, deck, bower, and nature, and intellect, and art, and the melody, and the epithalamium.

It is a rose of each other’s design.
All mankind.
Love a lover.

xiv.

Thus we are put in
for a love, not a sign for

nature, tents of nights, moments.

The man and his

is and woman and hers.

They are for each other

a statue, ceasing to be
stone.

Clouds blend.
We can lose any thing.

In the end, these relations are

planted by
what
is

what is more
and so on.
The Word for Going is a Way

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. – Matthew 7:14

The way, a word that extends, gets projected thoughtfully or retracted, curved according to where I believe I am going. Yesterday the Maidenhair sent up a seedling. Today it snows. I walk under a tree and then, when branches throw out varicose ribbons, unwind their inner white, orange, coral blooms, into the wind,

I decide to take another approach, lower my head and push under.

The way under does not lead to aquifers thick with runoff medication, blood pressure stabilizers. Other things have run off under: me, an implausible conference of American chestnut trees, dead to the world above, and biding time beneath, all the forsaken

seeds, catalogued in the stone as fossil but still with their genetic kernel intact, still possible.

A word extends from the underworld and gets interpreted as the way, in spring, finally growing visible again. Yellow nubs of leaf decorate the plastic trail markers. A mark from deer feet in melting ice shows another way to go.

Here are the dandelion lines, beads from a lost rosary, crumbs that look as if they tell a life: spring leads to summer and forever onwards, the way leading expertly between heat and its opposite, never losing track. The heat does not disappear; all winter, declivities press

in the white plains and hidden steam directs seasons from the underground.

If this winter comes completely, and the snow collects, then spring, blowsy with snowmelt will exceed all expected celebrations; the birds, overeager, break their V on the way home. The sky disorganizes.

If then clipped to the clotheslines like pins, trying to keep
what is spoken, from me to you, or to another, seeming to be a line or a way. If the stone shows up in my path, then I will turn and walk another.

If this world runs out, then I am reassured the word extends beyond. If then can be spoken, the woods, water, will part and show that another earth with renewed wood, water arrives. Then there is no opposite or underground. In the next world, I'll do better at meaning; the spring will conform to warmth and I will walk straight. What I can say about this prediction points, not necessarily ahead, and, tugging on impossible branches as momentary leverage, I continue to follow myself to where I am going.
This Other World
The profoundly ‘atomic’ character of the universe is visible in everyday experience, in raindrops and grains of sand, in the hosts of the living, and the multitude of stars; even in the ashes of the dead...Like the tiny diatom shells whose markings, however magnified, change almost indefinitely into new patterns, so each particle of matter, ever smaller and smaller, under the physicist's analysis tends to reduce itself into something yet more finely granulated. And at each new step in this progressive approach to the infinitely small the whole configuration of the world is for a moment blurred and then renewed.

-Pierre Teillard de Chardin  The Phenomenon of Man
Those Other Flowers To Come

The Book

There is no such thing, and yet
it gets written. In nature, everything
recurs, sometimes similarly, but is slightly
different by number of thorns, buds, or the patina of color
in the fruit’s skin. The lupine is always on the hill but
each occurrence is higher or lower according to the way
wind happened all year.
If there is a repetition, it exists only
in the book you write about my simple life. You said I was the next rose, reified.
The book seems to have come
straight from the dirt’s coil. But I know you transplanted the words

into the wild, under cover of a dead season. Inside the front page,
an image explains the author’s first world: seeds scattered
like static in the low wind and one rose imprinting the idea
of all those other flowers to come in the middle of another yellow page. The words replicate
in the flat spaces of grange. Am I a thing?
If I was, would I even know?

The Portrait

Through the light box, the flower is seen, abstracted, and then

pinned by a seeing brush, made many.
A bouquet is a still of one rose,
flesh blended, attenuated stem,
made a plural. The artist can’t find so many beautiful things
outside; he paints from the one that strikes him most complete. I am the still life, living variously
with each blink. A single model of myself approaches

the outer orbit of your eye and asks, do I lessen when seen?

Have the subtle parts of my real body
become trapped in the tomb of a bright color?

In the bouquet, one rose turns its head, smudges, and rejects reification. Someday, I will appear singular again: a thing hardly moving, my stem uncut: a green needle extending underground. Hardly even a thing.

The Mirror

I woke and slept to find myself on the other side
of the mirror. In the real world, I can see a glass vase with cut flowers
on a table in a dim room. A woman reaches a hand towards
the limits of my glass. Slowly, I feel an eye replacing my eye. Is there a repetition? I appear daily, for a few minutes, as I see myself, always a replicate of the last time. If there is a rose, then I am the next rose, flattened gaze of the flower’s extension.

What ends here is a fingertip touching the image of it’s own sensation.

Still, life continues and light fades on the room, the portrait of the room, the room’s book. I stand in the dark unseen by glass, untouched by words, the first version of a self.
The Scrape

Every blocked river was recently, called a “dam”.
And the man too begins to fade
under the pressure of my description,

He is handsome, strong. His eyes are blue.

He had no name, no letter for one. Only sticks that could
scrape earth, disturb how years of dust and snowmelt settled.

What a surprise, I call him world.

Salt dries on my thighs. Here, the tide has marked several
different versions of itself. My legs disappear under the waves
of what happens to them

when they grasp the centaur, the ocean, the other body,
riding towards another way of naming.
Between two waves of the sea,
where we were standing,
you questioned,
“And where were you before?”
I did not know. Do not now. Before? Before? Before? The gate is the zero of summer, as you said.

And I passed through thoughtlessly. I cannot tell the way for it did not happen in a way that can be told. The staff holds the waves apart, and the lips parch in conditioned air. That is how I came to be among the waters. A word harbors a list of words. Water is not more of itself by being said again. By the time over, over, over, over, finishes, the word cannot mean an ending. When this moment is over, it will be a rose. Or whatever you said I was like. Was I like a thing?
The thing I am like, closes its open petals.

Then the ocean eats the Egyptians.

Across the river, into my hometown, along the pavement illumined by the streetlamp where love always stands with a timetable in his hands (is he timely?) handsome as a linden tree lit by the square windows of a building behind.

I try to utter and find my mouth cannot happen, closed skin of the petal. The rose I am is closed. I am the ocean also and can close. The ocean before
it is tapped open to provide a way through, looks

like a landscape you could step across. The ocean of here and now
is like a thing, a rose.
**Epitaph**

Details are always melancholy: gray
clots of mushroom on the hill mean some
thing rots below, a rose
affixed to my breast is a way
of showing that my name often bleeds through.

Pavement darkened as if stung by rain stays dark
even though the days pass and the sun sucks up all other

water; a human shadow stains
the world permanently in order to preserve the bomb’s time.

Bundled iris of the pyre, fresh cut twigs
shiver with premonition. The fire’s spine looks red

but is a woman. A word ramifies. Surprised by impact, the world
pretending solidity, reveals for an instant

its brute vacuum. A signature was supposed to validate
this document, but the hand counterfeits.

The sign soaks through. At the end

of the ritual, which is a living duration,
will it be covered over? What flowers erupt? The bones revive
slowly as dew, moss, fungi, although there is no stone
to hold my figure down. Did you know scattered ash still falls and stays?
This piece of dust on the ground is not a seed

but a thing blooms there. If I am

scattered it is because

I refuse my object, do not recognize how it will remain
while I go. I’ll sign her or here there, but the pen withholds, my hand imitates
another hand.

Here dig, where only crossed twigs mark the place:
no name, but a presence.
The Debris of a Shape

Like the muscles of Magritte’s sky, ether churning within walls, like breath cornered in a lung buoys up although the mouth is shut,

or as the mountain pass is so misted that it becomes its own weather, like so, and words roll from their objects, press the ground, bruised.

Inconceivably, although the ancient calendars assure us, the subject of the poem threatens, but does not arrive.

We walk blind, one foot in and one out. Of what? The what is propositioned somewhere beyond the cliff’s lip.

And the entirety snowballs, white accumulating white as, in the dawn, the memory of the dream erases the dream.

Things rip apart. The animals are flayed; the jaguar is torn. Furless, the parts work without touching. A clause is surprised that it depends on absence. Like a murder without its woman, the victim is the bloodied floor inside a closed line.

This vibrates within the debris of a shape. Neruda looses the pulley and it remains itself.

Magritte’s clouds stay clouds, overflow the center. This is the poet’s duty: to shake the word roughly so that the joints dislocate, and bones collide within a fixed space; and yet retains its letters: animal, form, finally, injured within bounds.
**If, In The Seventh Seal, I Entered**

The knight, reunited with his wife, lets his mind's grip on strawberries relax and where is the squire? Or my own beloved? The end of a long journey and a meal, hot with water and salt, cannot slake my desire for another. Or the dream shifts and Max Von Sydow is younger, freckled, the same age as my father at the time of my birth; I am satisfied by the unexpected consolation of a familiar face in a new body.

Impossible to guess the train’s velocity with the windows blacked out. Death could be a misfiring so immediate the sound uttered by the one who suffers is unquotable as electricity. I lap at a bowl offered, overflowing with milk, and take it to be the only sign adequate to tell what is afoot. What is happening outside the train, the castle? I can see only as far as I can reach: friends around a wooden table, strawberries, the film reel turning into black fire at the peripheries.

Is the woman possessed? She falls from grace in the wings of this moment and I can only imagine her innocence or guilt. Am I the woman? Is she another? A better question awaits our situation. Cold rain on the flagstones heard through open windows cannot be a melody but is, for now, enough noise.

Our hands join in grace and the grace escapes us.

In the final scene we will dance down the hillside; are we now alive, the only ones who survived the crash, the plague, the bad weather?

or, holding each other in the safety of a room, are we the other ones, sent from our minds, the train having, at an unknown speed, arrived?
**Most Stars Are Dead**

I am standing on my porch, drinking
my first cup of coffee, years after the salt in our
exchanges, last words muffled by arriving trains,
when the light
from your first self,

*those yellow years before I knew you,*

finally arrives.

In a distant world, Joan’s fire
is just appearing. And farther yet, reflections
from the metal in a bird’s eye
weakly reach the atmosphere of a blue planet.

History reveals dampness, dirt thin as ash,
but no relic of the burn. How may I pray to her remains
if none exist in this world’s time?

I could follow the fire to where it still

appears solid: millennia condensed

in the stem of a telescope.

Falling inch by inch on the plains
of another climate, my own brightness,

just born, is the color of new grass;

the light I can honor at a distance,

still begins.
Anagnorisis

It is a relief to touch you; I never thought I would. And the lake too is making things as they were in the dream. The water smells clean. Every detail falls down

like snow in order to accumulate what is real, what is really becoming true. Here, a tree. And the dock now is solid. My molecules have known words that, when said, feel like something you live inside: bicycle, lacuna, indigo, rhubarb.

But the summoning is not a word. My whole life and every long walk got me here.

My hand is on your chest but I don’t have to tell you. You are telling me as you write this poem.
The Summons

i.

You is a distance: I address the one who has not arrived with inappropriate intimacy.

What is yours? What plants are green in your world? Alive? Can I imagine it as it will be, and offer myself as witness?

The space between pen and your described face compresses. In a nucleus of bent air, the shape hovers over the word I am writing in order to summon water down your back, the cup you left on the table, black mouth print of moisture, your hands, huge, steady as boats. On the next page, I outrun the years still left between myself and your impossible arrival. Years occur and nothing shows. Pages thinly accumulated are still only the thickness of snow on a warm stone. Your eyes described are found lacking by you reading, in a distant hour, about your eyes. Are you offended? Impossible to articulate what will only emerge in tidal pools if the water never moves. The properties of aging are denied you. I write it so, and backwards your name rejuvenates what I do not have the right to tell.

Flying ahead, always an asterisk of another system, my desire detaches and hides behind the particular nouns of another world: another, wherever, stones, blue. I long for your snow. Tell me, is it a thing that hurts to touch? Ahead, the you flies.

I give chase, make the chase substantial, something that can be measured and carried forward: traceries of blood, a line, thread. I can’t help but believe I will own something by calling it, you.
You are dressed as an image: good friend, innocuous suit with a bad tie. Or in another version you come yellow as an icon, clothed only to the waist, and not in robes, but in water.

The weather is good. Wind gets stuck in the nose of my canoe. Can I claim ownership of the vision if it begins to approach without need of my summoning hand?

Across the deep crease of the river, you travel. The stones that guide your feet remain invisible. The first time you occur without existing,

at least in my words or the world. I mistake you for visual snow: atomized blooms caused by a chemical issue. I ate peaches without offering thanks. Perhaps this is the cause.

The air straightens; my boat lifts higher inside white water. I would hold you forever more, hold you hearing the geese through an open window, the milk in your face turning to blood under a warm hand. Fiction can save the body from which it erupts. It saves mine.

You, at first barely a nerve, branch into my extremities. My hand on the paddle knows the pressure of your touch, rowing the water with deep cuts so as to write into image, the end of the river I deserve; the distance between the you and your arrival closes.

Somewhere beyond the hypothetical delta, where boats skid and stop, the trees release the yellow atmosphere they have imprisoned over years. Electrons disorganize above the water, refract through solids; the thinnest skinned parts of me turn the light red. With each filtration the idea of your face comes closer to embodiment.
First Ode: The Problem of Setting

i.

Not a flower. Not a smell.
Not a word, although the word helps.

Not a hunch of mountain, an efflorescence
just erupted in the bush, or weather. Not a

music with the voice threaded under
the saxophone so that it surfaces once. Not a

tree. Not the thin spit coming from a beak
puncture in the black maple’s heart. Not a heart,

although it has one. Not a love, although it can.
Not an it, although the word works for others. Not

an other. Not a population, precision, or
generality; four legs in dirt or transfixed vision,

green ash on the pond surface, the heron;
not the ability to know, although it knows to

know. Not an animal. Not a woman.
Not a nudity or fur or texture. Not water

or anything to live by. Not a world,
although it eats world. Not in time,

not clocks or hours, although it
dies, by another name, according to schedule.

Not the ability to stop, to regrow, to return
although it takes and takes. Not a home. Not a way


ii.

These are not your legs, your ways
of saying hello. Insert birdcall, the one

that comes most easily to ear. What will my novel
be about? Turtle dove. Your voice, impossible

to transmit reel to reel, must be symbolized.
Through a window I see your profile opening

and closing in order to talk about abstracted
water, oil, word, word. The problem of color

is a problem of world. I say she was blue.
You are not. The reader makes a picture

out of the love most ready to hand: bed,
window, the morning of this hour and day,
a bird, this real bird. To explain the plot
I will gesture with raised hands when suddenly,

from behind me, an imaginary animal yawns,
learns to speak. The words let go of your hand,
fly to mine: paper-light, immaterial. Have you
reached the scene where nothing happens? She is

on the edge of a field, wearing a yellow dress.
Justice can only ever be done to a part: you,

her version of you, my eye, the field like
crumpled parchment. The scar on the under

of your chin is unusual enough to exist,
and yet now that I look for it, all I find is my nominal,

*scar*, but no scar. A body fits inside a word,
one word: you. Here, insert character. Insert name.

World, by the time I begin to write,
how far are you from my words?

*iii.*

Did you know future time constitutes this
world? If mankind had died before Newton

named gravity, all the apples would still fall
down. The name *time* is alien to the material

it implies. Have you ever seen morning happen
for no one? Is there a mustard seed in the house

of a family where no one has died? Riddles
are important; they trick the human

back into cells. The answer
requires a different biology. But don’t despair.

If you cannot, at least the stones will know.
Although the alchemists failed, they did make gold.


*Afterword*

What is the work?

The first world of this *work* deals with the realization that my writing habits are haunted by the desire to accept, enter, and enjoy the easiness of a language and a poetry that encourages my own objectification.

I seek to question why it is easy, even pleasurable, to relinquish control and enter this primal sense.

A poet friend, a male poet friend, asked me about this project recently: “Were you seeing anyone while your wrote this? I always want to know who a poet was with when they were doing the work.”

I was alone when I wrote these poems.

I am reminded of Maria Mies’ investigations in the “Social Origins of the Sexual Division of Labor”:

“What characterizes women's object-relation to nature, to their own as well as to the external nature? First, we see that women can experience their *whole* body as productive, not only their hands or their heads. Out of their body they produce new children as well as the first food for these children…In this sense, the activity of women in bearing and rearing children has to be understood as *work*.”

It comes as easily as nature. It is rain, snow, anything that arrives with a season. I relinquish control. I cannot *do*. I am done *to*. Everything I do is an activity of nature.

What is the work?

The answer seems to come to me too easily: *I am the work.*

The first object is my own body, my first work. For a man, the first object is another body, another work.
My words are unnatural. They attach to worlds I haven’t entered yet. They effort.

I would like my words to be effortless. The connections would appear, branch, anastomose as easily as the veins in a leaf.

Names are little efforts. Every thing reaches a hand towards thing.

There would be no effort in my language; there would be no object. The subject would always be on the brink of looking in the mirror and understanding the self, the body, as another. But this moment would hover deliciously and never arrive. Everything would refer, not to my body, but through it. The world fuses but is not confused.

When I write, the ancient conflation between the female and the natural occurs in a way that feels gentle and organic.

Why, then, when this same conflation comes from the outside, from the dominant culture, does it feel violent?

Am I a thing? A nature? Am I a Nature Thing? A rose?

How should I understand my attraction towards a kind of meaning-making that seems to reinforce my own objectification?

When I write poems am I trying to say something new or am I building an old way of making myself into an object, a flower, a thing, an image?

The other world of this work investigates the assumption that many in the world, and especially me, harbor the belief that we deserve something else that will occur on the next page: a better language, lover, poem, experience, world. How does the distance between this world and this other world
create a space where poetry can occur? Is the space of the poem’s yearning and expectation fertile or sterile ground?

Where are my words walking?