

# Interrupting The Conversation Of Sleepwalking Clocks

by Michael F. Gill

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This is Blank Start Book #5  
Made in Boston  
Contact: [michael@bbtp.net](mailto:michael@bbtp.net)

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“Why interrupt the conversation of sleepwalking clocks?”  
– Greta Knutson, from the poem “Foreign Land”, 1933

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## The Hunger to be a Witness

I want to see my body commit a falsity in public,  
engage itself in ravenous grips of sin that swell.  
There is at least a split second  
during the first stretch of your legs  
where we want to be told a singular story,  
to experience an event that's been  
exclusively exuviated  
for our cupped hands.

On a Saturday in the near future,  
meet me under the hemlock  
where we can sit and watch  
unconscious crimes emanate  
out from my mandible and into  
the crush of your vestibular nerve.

## Ginsberg Provokes Me To Ponder My Friends

So many people I've met  
have had peyote and tangerines  
stuffed in their mouth voluntarily.

I have crates of Alaska in my pants  
that reincarnate like roses  
every time these colleagues  
jump off the roof of their feelings  
and into my arms.

To them I am a naked power outage,  
a sober couch on desert rock.

I will tolerate their shouts of  
*Bread and butter in the shower!*  
*Bread the pumice, Butter the lather!*

I will look past their bodies  
being mustached above  
new lips every night.

I try not to judge.  
I treat their company  
as the slice of live decadence  
that swims in my sushi.  
Their semblance to  
lotharios and libertines  
form the handwriting of my city,  
even if cursive has never been my specialty.

Yes,  
I see how the morning dew  
calls capricious phoenixes  
to rise post-coital with undaunted mettle,  
how their flutters  
are more florid than ever before.  
I don't ignore them -  
I speak freely in their presence.

My eyes ramble at libido in  
transfixed hallucination,  
shifting from hunter green  
to dotted yellow  
to pale cotton,  
with the fluff of my heart  
proliferating  
in an ongoing alchemy  
of surplus sensitivity.

I look to the sky.

Friends are showing me  
epiphanies that  
I haven't achieved.

Like the idea that  
salvation is being a criminal,  
making a lobotomy of respect  
in exchange for meat trucks of  
jazz and toilet sex.  
A small price  
for a small cleanse  
ad-libbing through your abdominals.

They say when you over-inflate  
the size of your heart, it never fully deflates.

Some nights you want to be able  
to read someone's palms,  
caress their extroverted calves,  
and enlarge their waist  
with two firm irises that read:

*I want to be  
the stripes on your retina,  
the zebras on your skirt,  
the next drop of blood  
on your pillow.*

But hormones are just propaganda -  
I don't usually buy what they're selling.

As every Monday morning comes,  
the cracks on my cement longjohns  
continue to grow thighs of hunger.  
They itch like ivy in these  
barren breakfast spaces.  
They tell me gluttonous things  
over English tea.  
They say *This is the time  
a person should start to eat.*  
And that I need something  
to stuff in my mouth.

## 10 Aphorisms From An Insomniac

#4

I have a recurring dream that the world has nearly run out of air,  
and the only way to take in the remaining air  
is to put a saltine cracker in your mouth  
and breathe through the air holes of the cracker.

#17

Traffic across the mind all day long.  
You need to wake up your brain at 4 am local time,  
and think in its clear streets.

#26

I didn't realize it was a rash. I thought it was the red hand stamp I got last night  
at the club.

#32

"It's like listening to the perfect song while having a horrible headache."

#41

If only my life could match the intense focus I have when I'm running to catch  
the train.

#55

All my spontaneous actions from the past become intentional when I dwell on  
them.

#70

Loneliness is when a person has an excessive amount of love inside them but  
not enough people to share it with.

#89

If you love  
with no end  
you also love  
with no purpose.

#93

the heart is a lonely hunter  
because it needs nothing

#108

What happens when you get too comfortable?  
You fall asleep.

## Jillian

*It's missing sensuality*, she groped with a pant. Pertain recoiled a couple of  
emotional muscles, then reset his camera for another try. Jillian was punch-  
drunk on the sea-salty air and meandering her body in semi-artistic waves.

*I want to see ripples* - her voice coiled in the wind and unwound in Pertain's  
mouth and nose. He had to mentally shut off his ears. Jillian exerted such  
fragility, that he was more annoyed with his inability to capture her  
conviction than by her idealistic daydreams of art.

All he could see was in front of him, the life coming through his two eyes.  
She wanted the moments in between his eyes. Pertain's face was in flux.  
How was he supposed to do this with such a small frame? Was it  
impossible? *Look at me*, she said, *without your camera*.

Jillian gently leaned against a small wooden fence, painted white a half-  
century ago. She was at once "unaffected young" and "film noir" as she  
casually clipped her moderately-sized sunglasses to the front of her shirt,  
between her breasts. For a second, Pertain saw what she was talking about.

All those moments between her sitting and clipping were oozing around  
her, perhaps in fact defining her. But the camera in his hand remained yet  
again a machine and so did his defaulted hard focus. Jillian was elusive but  
she wanted to be found.

Pertain felt the outline of his forehead as he wiped away some sweat, and  
pressed the camera against it for a ravenous session. Jillian twirled in light  
circles with her arms slightly outstretched. Sometimes she stared at the  
cloudless sky while zigzagging her neck ever so slowly.

Pertain breathed with a noticeable push. *Maybe take off your shoes*, he  
thought. As if reading his breath, she perked up with *This isn't drama or  
romance. This is the aura of the wind*. Pertain should have rolled his eyes,  
but Jillian's spins were enough. In the futility of it all, his pupils endlessly  
clicked.

## Rose Kennedy Green

Inside what was once  
The Central Artery,  
the tips of every blade of grass  
stand as alabaster quills  
stretching long into the air.  
In the floral profusion,  
tiny mushrooms sprout to munch  
on the lawn's toasted tan  
until the black ruffles  
underneath their shells  
have fully grown.

The fallen leaves  
from the arbor above  
have rusted a deep wooden brown,  
autumnal to the touch.  
If you look closely  
you can see little blots  
of the sun's spray paint  
on their foreskin -  
the shape and direction  
of their once arbitrary life  
has been singed on indefinitely.

When you crane your neck upward,  
the tree that dims this area  
will have most of its bark rubbed off,  
leaving only a few slabs of skin  
that would pass for peeling wallpaper  
to the chronically farsighted.  
It's a reminder  
that wallpaper was once a tree,  
and when wallpaper peels it's often just  
attempting to emulate its forefather.

Close to the husk,  
you can survey  
the tree's concentric rings,  
and see how they hang

on top of each other  
with parallel and overlaying  
experiences of time and identity.  
Touching the buttery paint  
of the thinnest layer of bark  
is rather sensual -  
as if you'd unexpectedly stumbled  
into an alternate kind of intimacy.

Surrounded by granite and vehicular smoke,  
this soilstrip is olive brown  
anchored in the earth,  
a mosaic evolved from  
fossils of ferns and horsetails,  
a set of gestures extracted from nature.  
It's what we should strive  
to look like in the sun,  
to be that small patch of wood and grass  
demarking the opposite ends  
of an urban infrastructure.  
To be that filter which absorbs  
metropolitan pressure,  
pollution, and weather  
while still tanning its surroundings  
in an organic shade of bronze.

## Sensible

I am sensible to the fact  
that my head is  
a sectarian bowling ball  
repeatedly lassoing the same pins,  
aiming at the same pretty people,  
looking out for organisms  
who are arranged in still-life.

I know that the small fonts  
printed across my cranium  
will step down from their vitalic podium  
in the steady liquid lurch of lipid  
that leaks from brisket to biscuit.  
I recognize my animated sensitivity  
will be knocked off this television brain  
filled with yttrium and long standing  
tipsy hugs from eager spirits.

I am sworn to the inevitability  
of holding these mad macaroni fingers  
until they fade into brittle acidity,  
and time overcomes  
any strength that lingers.

I will let all this happen  
in order to find my identity.

For when you can finally name yourself,  
it means your body can disintegrate  
into the memory of laboratory and lips.

## Itchy

My back is a ticklish number  
itching in all the places  
that are hard to count.  
A safety scissor  
proceeds to scrawl across  
my spinal lights  
with deep red breaths,  
and invites an acupuncture ant farm  
to disperse each stretch of my scoliosis  
into the rub of office carpet.

On my finger  
a strong numbness ripples  
and on my mind  
a broken compass arrow  
overhears dull aches  
it can no longer point at.  
My unscratched numbers  
burn with the potency of  
gospel choirs and lottery tickets.

This skeleton  
is a conjunction of cathedrals  
that chant in cacophony,  
and I sleep inside  
a mammoth pipe organ,  
unable to see the catalysts  
of my fugal drones.

Somewhere  
there must be a spot  
of resolution on these pores,  
a place where I'm no longer  
orbiting this earth,  
but actually approaching it.

Somewhere  
I breathe  
without a helmet,

activate the zen  
of a bull's eye,  
and stop this gravity  
from being spun  
out of order.

Somewhere,  
fingernails  
are not done touching me.

## Candlelight

*Collaborative Poem written with April Penn & Whitney L. Sauvé*

There's an antiquated notion infecting my sleep.  
She lays silent next to me, fluorescent's wax-dancing cousin.  
Ceiling brightness tears apart our conversation:  
I don't believe in artificial electricity.  
If the light that surrounds me is natural,  
the energy I produce  
is drawn closer from the earth.

Her flickering brow hopes to remind her  
that she's still human,  
that she still moves and  
and stretches in gelatin shapes  
and human projections.  
My eyes keep dancing to this rhythm  
that my brain can't resist.

We lay opposite a square bathroom mirror  
that has never been to the beach,  
and try to leave ourselves undressed  
without an artificial light  
shining secure on us.

It's so hard to see  
what's left burning in the dark,  
what still matters in the void.  
Yet in this room  
where moonlight drops  
heavily on the rooftops,  
the sink says no words  
but water always fills its throat.  
Silence has no other option  
but to cradle us  
on this dim and flickering floor  
that contains all of our wilting clothes.

## Reflection

Even as a brimful of water rinses through my hair,  
the answer the mirror gives is a vague infection  
clotting swiftly in red mute fog, steamed breath.  
I self-press against glass, colonial mouth convening  
unleavened smudges that disperse and fade out.

It's only when you press an index finger  
on the small pointillistic patches of my back  
that I come into focus, sharp.  
When you pivot my pigment  
in slow and steady precision,  
a concrete color allocates across my face.  
It reflects its complexion through silvered glass  
encased with the fundamental tune  
of a fully resolved Rubik's Cube.  
This is how I center my focus  
into the fragrance of confidence,  
how these pupils begin to pierce clarion angles,  
how my body becomes petrified stone,  
a light shone on all the unglued fields of fortitude.

## Fidget

Everything is still  
as she lays on her back  
with a coffee mug  
balanced on her torso.

She needs her meditation  
to be unshakeable. In times  
when great concentration is needed,  
she fills this mug with water  
or places more mugs on her body.  
Often she will do both  
in hopes of producing  
an unstirred set of consequences.

She's cultivating stillness  
without a drop of water hitting the ground.  
The day rises and her mimicry of it  
is an erect emotional posture.

Everyone around her is a ticking clock, a restless fidget.  
She stands there staring at seconds until they refuse to move.  
*I* have been refusing to move.  
I'm looking for her, and I need to be as still as possible  
in order for her to see me.

## Hieroglyph

If you could be  
the hailstorm hieroglyph speaker of your lifetime,  
would you sing your outcomes  
in the vocabulary of the forests they happened in,  
or would you choreograph them  
in a vernacular foreign to poetry but fluent in future?

I grabbed on sideways to sun-dried memory  
and spoke it the way I am speaking now,  
in the fisticuffs of a present  
slanged out in twenties and tens,  
guessing games of permanence.

Am I dancing with you  
or does common sense  
stick only to pectorals in my chest?  
Does time soldier on  
towards some ironed-on ignorance of my affairs,  
or will library patrons & the debonair  
hoist my body into their manila folders?  
Somewhere between  
yesterday and tomorrow,  
I entrust that  
this mouth will always make sense  
in the wind marks of trees  
and the indented ardor  
of a ballet futurist  
arabesquing near holy water.

If I couldn't be  
the hailstorm hieroglyph speaker of my lifetime,  
you would never uncover  
the fact that my forest exists.

## Thieves

Sally beams her eyes at a rusted iron door.  
Her body palpitates as they climb  
the seven floors to a loft where Trincet assumes  
his first sexual experience is hiding.

Techno was blaring, Sally was swimming in it.  
Savory men began chlorinating her anxiety  
as Trincet sat in the dimly lit corner, swaying his body.

He started genteel small talk  
with a series of shadows  
who hovered over the quarts  
of orange juice and vodka  
in a thirty minute loop.

In the 6 AM neon it became clear that  
a school of tiny thieves had robbed him.  
His dinner from the previous night  
would be the last entree  
he consumed without neurosis.  
Trincet felt kin to a metaphor  
many of his classmates  
past and present had used:

He felt like he was  
a ripped flag lying on a bed,  
getting an education.

## Meeting April

I've only known you for an hour,  
but I already feel our friendship  
as a reality to come.

It's not some far-fetched fantasy  
that pops into focus during  
the house parties & artistic happenings  
where I yearn for reoccurring faces.

It's not that overoptimistic hope  
for stronger friendships  
that can easily trickle away  
unfulfilled and unanswered.

No, I feel confident in the shared anxiety  
which broke the ice between us.

You have got  
such an easy bubble around you  
that when I walk inside  
I instantly feel connected  
to your resonating walls.

When I tripped onto your presence,  
I was quick to be enclosed in words  
that were enthusiastic therapy -  
you easily brought out perspectives in me  
that I rarely saw with my own eyes.  
The holes in your consciousness  
manifested with propulsive  
and recessive colors:  
wandering sets of borders  
I could pictorialize myself in.

The smiling  
after those sixty minutes  
was a chant to myself,

"I feel I will see you again,  
and it won't be  
out of charity or obligation,"

- and I believed in those reoccurring words  
for the first time all year.

And that was enough for my breath  
to have a smooth rubber ball strapped to it  
for the next few days, to be able to  
speak with tennis spheres  
bouncing between our mouths  
in a healthy volley.  
To be one of two people  
who are speaking and experiencing  
the wide range of possibility  
that comes from a mutual good feeling.

## What Does It Mean

What does it mean  
when you dream you're sleeping next to a grizzly bear  
and its fur is so soft when you squeeze against it  
that you are willing to swallow  
the fears of being mauled  
for this utterly fleeting sense of comfort.

What does it mean  
that right after you allow yourself  
to close your eyes for a second  
the bear has turned into  
this girl you've seen a couple times before,  
but only as a character in previous dreams,  
and every time she kisses you  
she sends a text message.

What does it mean  
that while you are lying there  
savoring your good feeling  
by making out in the slowest way possible,  
you end up exceeding the time limit of your dream  
and waking up before you've even taken off her shirt.

I've learned that this means  
there's really no difference  
between my waking life and my dreaming life.

## Autobiographical Film

I've spent months  
dying the yolks of these film strips  
surreptitiously.  
I am forming a necklace of panels  
to feed my feline projector.  
There will be an unapologetic crown  
circulating around the screen's pixels.

If only this wreath of panels was fatal -  
my film could then rest in establishment!  
It would be in the reach of corporate clavicles,  
a newborn crack baby for the public's eyes.  
You could feast on it 'till you burst,  
each glance aging me like wine  
and plucking my nose hair  
until I breathe  
in a less overbearing style.

Every reel of this pink confection  
must shimmer briefly,  
like the lighted fire  
of a smoker's fingers.  
This is my autobiography  
in a revolving wheel,  
a set of brooding bruises  
and intoxicating armpits  
shazamming down your pupils.  
A well-honed palette aiming, aiming.

These are the colored yolks  
I create for you to consume.

## Cassie

*(I originally wrote this not having met anyone named Cassie in my life. By the finishing of this book, I had met five people named Cassie or Cassandra.)*

Cassie, if you could see this coming, it would mean nothing to you.

These forks on the road are alone on your face.

Here you are on a mountaintop, freshly buried under a foothold of pale snow, with two skis making an incision upon you.

I will talk as quickly and clear as possible, because you probably think you are being delusional right now. We are both caught in a lightning flash, and that's all the time I have to be with you. See it coming see it leaving.

I know too much. I will have an axe thrown in my neck tomorrow. The axe-thrower hates that I can see this coming, so he wants to get the act over with as quickly as possible. What would you do Cassie, if you could see this coming? I have lost the gift of exploration after knowing all the answers.

Cassie I want to be back in the same world as you, I want to be born again with a fresh memory and not this terrible genius, crippling omnipotence. My life is a textbook that I finished reading years ago. Oh it's all exciting at first to die and become a god in the afterlife but what I wouldn't give to not see this coming. Tomorrow I will have this massive indigestion. In two weeks I will vomit, a day after I finish cutting my hedges in the shape of a perfect hexagon. It's too bad I forgot to remove those strips of poison ivy because I will be having a nasty infection in a month thanks to them.

Cassie you don't want to see this coming. My joys are pre-planned as well. I am about to meet my wife in the afterlife next year. I already know all her little tics and quirks, what the first time we made love felt like and how she comforted me when I saw hurricanes coming to destroy an island next to the Philippines. I know every time I'm going to win the lottery, the outcome of every sporting event I play Oh Cassie - I bet you wonder if I can see this coming why do I still do it? Am I just playing along and acting surprised all the time?

The cruelty is that there is no predestination but I do set the chains in motion. I have complete control over what my future is but I also can't help myself from knowing all the ramifications this current event will have on my eternity. You may wonder why I have chosen to vomit and have an infection in the future, but I promise you this is more favorable than the other potential outcomes I can see down the road.

You must be perplexed about why I'm speaking to you Cassie. I hope you don't think I set that avalanche on you, or that I am indulging in a little sadism. I wish you weren't still lying there under many feet of snow with lodged skis, believing that someone is going to find you and help take you back to your warm family and friends. But I know the unfortunate results of this situation, and I want to prepare you for what's to come. I want you to be ready for the ability to see things coming.

This existence of mine - which will soon be yours - is no stroll in the grass, and you would be benefited greatly by bringing your mental and emotional toughness with you. Hold on to it with all of your might. Raw emotions just cripple you here, it's better not to care so much Cassie.

Cassie, do I know if you are listening to me? If you are hearing what I am saying, if you are taking me seriously? If you are planning to follow through on any of my advice? Yes, I do. And it's breaking my heart.

## Improv

Are you glad to see me?

Does my neurosis rub off on your tonsils?

Do you think I am improv-ing my time with you?

Do you like candy...corn...dogs?

Does the thirteenth piece of candy know that it will not taste as good as the first piece of candy, and will it file charges of discrimination because they are both composed of identical ingredients?

Why does the door to the bathroom stall keep opening?

What does my name sound like in your language?

Can you subtract one letter from every word, and use the term "Greenwich" to describe the antagonist in *The Wizard of Oz*?

Why do these people have computers in their hands when they are supposed to be eating?

Don't you want to go up to these people and say: *Can my hand-held device be your hand?* or *Can you be my emergency parking space?*

Where is a road where the minimum speed limit is the same as the maximum speed limit?

Has your non-functioning car horn lost its first letter and become ornamental?

Can you possess my heartbeat by tapping an elevator button twice?

Do you realize I have a land mine in my head and I want you to touch it?

Will your pale dress look good floating in a chlorinated pool?

Do you feel safe?

Have you ever been taken hostage for so long that you fell asleep at gunpoint? And what did you dream of?

When will an artist draw my blood and will the Red Cross approve of the painting and be able to match me with a person who is in need of it?

Are you mad?

Should I read into the fact that you are naming your dog barbershop "I'm Gonna' Cut A Bitch"?

Does your voice on the phone sound like graffiti traveling through telephone wires?

Will you politely applaud every time I leave your brain?

Can you do it right now?

I want to start over and say all of this again.

## Taste

*For Lucie M.*

I need to stop avoiding reality in my poetry.  
I need to start peeling fruit. Vegetables.

The coarse orange rims rest inside honesty,  
two lobster claws collar a garish set of memories.  
The butterscotch roof tiles have husks of pillaged cherries,  
while lavender lentils swaddle the thick doorknob of trust  
(open this door and electricity cuts through you  
like empty window panes gushing harsh lemonade!)

Farmers are knitting plant life from the ground to the mouth,  
and all my spoons and forks slide from stitch to stitch,  
thread to thread, hand to hand.  
Outside, bayonets are roasted loose around Boston.  
I seek out their friendly fires of  
almond and butter bullets,  
the reenactments of civil watermelons  
spreading juices across tongues.

I was an abstraction machine.  
Now I'm peeling produce,  
letting the long strings of fennel be the balm  
that brings my poetry closer to real life.  
The skinned orange naked in my hand,  
I can't help but wonder:  
how plump does your mouth have to get  
before a tinge of tasting truth  
comes standard in every flavor, in every bite?  
I feel like I'm eating the brains of civilization.

## The Best World Swirls In Smoke

I am walking through a bank of fog  
that is in the shape of church.  
I am praying to the laughter lying here,  
newly born from my throat.  
All I can catch myself doing is hope.  
Hope for these thin lasers of pleasure  
to linger long, suspend their dinner  
across the enjoined knees  
of twenty-five kneeling priests -  
the ones who line the cumulus aisles  
of my misty Massachusetts.

The best world to live in is a chalice,  
a globe where the top half is just a removable lid  
housing the broth of life's condensed codes.  
An open invite to dive your face  
into the exiting swirls  
of spineless saviors.

## Fractal Cats

This just in:  
you can now buy a bushel of fractal cats  
on a shoestring budget.

All you need is a rogue phlebotomist  
who's willing to inflict abuse  
on a chorus of feline ankles.

From these blood droplets  
our experts can engineer  
a crystal cat in fluorescent flight!

With the healing power of psychic surgery  
embedded into these purebreds,  
your life will sprout more and more hats  
that cloud the lamp lights of gnats.

All it will cost you is shame and a cookie  
(phlebotomists are hungry after they take blood.)

## Forget

You all came to me  
with letters that I never remember sending,  
and the clever ones I kept and returned  
back to my consciousness.  
I wonder what else  
has jailbrokeed my head  
without my knowing?  
I don't need to serve justice  
for my fugitive thoughts  
but once in awhile  
it would be nice to get a postcard  
from a mass murdering invocation  
and know he was still thinking of me,  
and proud that I was his father.

## Generic

I want to touch melancholy  
without it touching me.

Every time you write a lonely poem, it means less than the previous one. No matter how much or how little sexual activity you've had since the last lonely poem, there will be diminishing artistic returns. You've been across this ground a thousand times. If one could make loneliness sound fresh then one wouldn't feel so lonely anymore. Loneliness should feel less painful this time, but sorrow does not follow logic. It might take fifty more lonely poems for those hunger pangs to start to diminish. This poem is not going to improve, especially when I dodge personal issues with meta concerns about sorrow, and then refuse to directly describe my problems which you would correctly guess as being generic. Yes, what it boils down to is that

you are able to touch me  
without me touching you.

## Etched Winter Glass

Four panels on my windows,  
all letting in a different season:  
    sticky heat  
    brown brittle leaves  
    the nuclei of nightingales  
    a perennial frost

'Tis the latter I am most enamored with -  
a head-strong solidity,  
a mockery for all things  
gaseous and aquatic.  
In this the closest season  
to perpetual, tangible life,  
there's a promise  
nature bequeaths  
to me in sculpture,  
a reminder that comes  
through the frosted ends  
of my paneled glass.

## Copper and Abstracts

*Poem in the voice of my first four chapbooks*

Hey! Stop that!

You know what you are doing, right?  
With some staples, copy paper, and cardstock  
filled with esoteric cryptograms,  
you have basically created copper pennies  
and stuffed them with wads of abstract shit.

And this abstract shit needs to go into therapy,  
because it's having an identity crisis.  
Can you imagine someone  
seeing or smelling feces  
and then getting a weird,  
ambiguous feeling about it?

*Ehmmm, it seems that the composition  
hints at the fragrance of mashed up kidney beans,  
and I feel there is a subtle political message being invoked.*

Listen Michael, as the father of this abstraction,  
take these poems to therapy.  
Support them, try to make sense out of them.

I know, giving birth to poems  
seemed like a good idea at the time,  
but neglects hurts.  
Poems can develop autism.  
They are often intolerable  
and dense with twisted sets of logic  
that only they understand.

But Michael, if you just sit down, relax,  
and tell your poems exactly what they mean,  
it would be a big help.  
We are all so confused.  
We are just copper pennies.

## Cracking The Ice

To sit in the lap of someone's  
buds, brainwaves, and buzzers

To have the holes of your personality  
run through red ink instead of white air

To fill bodies with patterns of the ocean  
that have been sung to you each night

To bang your head against the ice and  
slip yourself through the right set of cracks

To be molded by hand and find a tide  
your biology wants to walk through

To sit ,  
    have ,  
        fill ,  
            bang ,  
                and bee .

## Eccentric/Rational

If you stood there, you'd see a castle full of lily pads that he had collected from the swamps of North and South America. It was an important rapport he had with those pads. Their footprints spoke of home, rest, sleep, and a deep contemplation in sitting. Mr. Centric was in his gymnasium. He was playing squash, a game that he named *squash* because of how he felt on courts where walls rise from the ground in erections.

That Wednesday was cobblestone bright. The ground was used to being trampled on, but today there was an elegance to trample over. A horse arrived at the castle's front door, mounted by a blind man lost on his way to heaven. As he rang the door-bell, the seeing-eye horse pleaded, "Let me do all the talking."

Mr. Centric greeted the horse. The blind man dismounted with an eighty-year-old ashtray of a face and asked to swim in the castle moat. "If I swim around long enough, I'll make it to heaven." "But the moat is only 15 feet deep and runs for less than a mile." "So be it, I will find my way." Mr. Centric let the man swim and started to think about logistics.

Next Wednesday, a hawk knocked on the door. He asked if he could circle around the weather vane on Tuesdays for his voodoo flightdance that was gaining popularity in internet meetup circles. The reply was again yes but Mr. Centric was growing dizzy as he said it. He began to think of his fear of elevators which originated during that one month he was a financial intern. Every time he got on the elevator, people were wearing the same white button-down shirt as him. He felt squashed.

A few Wednesdays later, on the way back from March Madness, he was propositioned by a talking boomerang. The boomerang exclaimed that he was an expert at finishing jobs. Coming to a full circle. "Would you like to throw me around your castle?" asked the boomer. And the owner thought it was ok with him. Might as well continue and see where this metaphor is going. Perhaps this was a dream. Mr. Centric kept going to bed at night and sleeping.

There was a girl in these dreams he would follow. She would fill him with peas and pasta, give him smiles as warm as a toaster. He begged her to run away with him to reality, and leave this fantasy world behind. This was not

easy, for she would have to give up immortality and travel through many layers of consciousness. And it's not like there were any perks to reality.

Centric decided to go on a long train ride. He was watching the passengers, waiting to seize moments. A tall girl was about to leave the train, and she had two medium-sized hula hoops slung diagonally across her shoulders, like a messenger bag or large purse. Electric Christmas-light sweat went off, and Centric stepped in pursuit. She walked fifty paces ahead of him onto a cornfield. On a back road he caught up to her with sketchy outcomes going through his head. He never found out the reason she was carrying hula hoops, but she did offer advice for his circular situation:

"This is the world. The only way that something out here becomes *weird* is when people project some kind of rationality on things, some set of beliefs. It is very possible that all these outrageous things that have happened to you - the talking horse, hawk, boomerang - are just delusions of your mind. I'm not saying they didn't happen, but your love of eccentricity has colored your vision so much that you only see the ridiculous in everyday normal things."

She parted ways with him on an eighteen-wheeler. He sat down on a grassy marsh and zoned out. Returning to the castle, there were visitors he had never seen before. One man with dark sunglasses was by the moat.

"What are you doing?" "I am practicing for a biathlon of swimming and horse racing. You should come in, the water is heavenly."

A woman with a headdress and Bermuda shorts was studying the wind conditions at the upper balcony. "I am preparing for a weather club meeting."

Seeing an attractive women wearing skimpy athletic clothing and holding a boomerang, Centric figured she was a teacher. "I'm glad you are home. Would you like me to finish you off?" Her eyes pointed downstairs. "Come on honey, out of all my customers, you are the one who keeps coming back." She smiled at him warmly, like a toaster. Centric was now noticeably distressed and standoffish.

"Oh, I could never runaway with a client. I love fantasy too much. How's about throwing me around the castle just like the old times? I'll let you be rougher tonight." Centric now realized that he had a fetish for girls with boomerangs.

## Geocaching meets Drug Dealing

If you are on a scavenger hunt, and you find a personally left narcotic gift interesting, it's a good bet you are interested in what happens to you when this narcotic deposits its gift inside you. Because that's where interest usually lies, in the effects of a personally left narcotic that's now been left inside you.

Narcotics are interesting to you, and provide you with a personnel of interesting behavior, as well as access to an interested set of people who are glad to wait for you at certain GPS coordinates and then send you to specific locations where personally left narcotics are waiting for you and are holding your great interest inside them. You need to get that interest back, and return it to where it belongs, inside of you. That's something you would *pay* to see happen.

And once a narcotic current is surging through you, who could stop the interest in your body from happening? Not your brain, and certainly not your friends, who now want to register as clients of your services because it will present them with narcotics they can actually find, and it will personally connect them with interests that are interesting to them, and then maybe they could see that they are still interesting people.

So now you take pride in your narcotics trafficking, and you put so much of yourself into this job that these personally left narcotics now represent *you*. *You* are made up of a series of degrees, minutes, and seconds, and *you* have a lot of people who are interested in meeting you. How now could you ever stop this interesting era with so many people looking to interact with you, and experience the effects you leave in people's bodies.

You and the narcotics, you personally leave so much joy in each other at 42 degrees north and 71 degrees west. People will argue with you all day long to leave that joy behind. But when you're walking away, what's left of the personally left narcotics left for you today? Not much.

## Manic Intensity

The world has exhausted its resources into a small set of people who burn uncontrollably with every sharp step. They're carrying trace elements of a nuclear fallout ripe with effusion. We hard-headed soldiers will never learn to tame the intense thrust of these forces - injections of irrationality are not something you can run away from. Around my legs are their sleeping biceps; the world looks so faded and dull without the vibrating strength of their illusion!

What I've learned from staring at the sun is you are not the person you would become under all other illuminations. Your mortality poisons burning hearts with an immediate humanity which you never felt on that manic day. And for the next week your sunburn will pout because what's left of your torn skin is art.

## Anti-Moonset

If we are going to sit on the beach all night  
and talk by the fire, I want there to be moonlight.

Now, I know how cliché this is – *Breaking News:*  
*Poet dies due to lack of moonlight. Friends mourn*  
*him with alcoholism. Mark Strand to give eulogy –*  
But I've been on Plum Island  
with the moon prematurely tucking itself  
under the horizon's bedsheets. Moonset is  
depressing like a cave, like spending your entire life  
walking through the black of dreamless sleep.

How elaborate a reflection  
the celestial beings throw upon us.  
They welcome us as a new part  
of their constellation, make us feel  
like we are cheating night  
with their illumination.

They are what bring us  
from the void of slumber  
to the hexadecimal colors of dream:  
an Elysian lantern  
for one-on-one communication  
between you, me, and a campfire on the water.

## How I Was Made (My Family Tree Grows Me)

Where they are meeting and what they are doing to make twice,  
Germany.

What they are making and what will come after they do what they do,  
Ireland.

When they don't do, and what they are again and again is what they are,  
Sweden.

What's repeated inside them is repeated in their children. What he makes  
and what he does is functional, which he is, and what he makes on several  
occasions is what she makes as well. When she is about to make me, it is  
what he makes so often and it is also what she can produce, and the  
whereabouts of what I am is also found in what they've obtained, and what  
they're obtaining, which is what life does in time.

Thus, what you make and what you display is twice what it is: you are what  
you are and what you produce. What we make and do with what is done is  
repeated and repeated. What it does and what it is when it leaves is so very  
appealing.

I have repeated things which were part of him, and have obtained what she  
obtained, which she got from the moment when the moment left someone  
else, and now it's become this thing, twice. What it makes, who it makes,  
and what it does not make is what this life really is, when you get down to  
it.

She is part of what he makes, so this is something that she takes part in,  
repeated. Who he is and that part of him that gets what he should get is who  
I am. He gets what he gets when it comes out of what she does, and she  
does what she does twice, once to be herself, once to be him, and then  
there's me.

What he does and what he doesn't do, it makes a condition of who I am.  
What she's getting is what she gets from doing what she did to time.  
What they do after what they did to me is to do it to someone else, create  
what they did again and then share it with friends. What she doesn't do is  
stop being who she is.

My life constitutes you, repeating. It wasn't that long when he and she were  
making repetitions, making me: a copy that is profitable to several times of  
the past, and several times in the future.

I will reach my children equally in the participation of repetitions, which  
are the things that many of us go for, repetitions, something for people to  
analyze and have a proliferating amount of reactions to.

Twice they made it, and what makes it do what it does is Germany.  
What makes it do the things which are what it doesn't do is Sweden.  
Where it repeats and what it makes with the results is Ireland.  
That's the sound of my family, repeating.

**I Shall Follow The Example Of St. Augustine  
& Take A Bath In Hot Water**

*(Title taken from a letter by Ezra Pound)*

I shall follow the example of a scattered brain  
and place a subterranean toupee on my homeland.

I shall drip an excess of my asymmetry  
across the underfoot of all American hot springs.

I will do this for you  
and your balmy and scholarly  
22nd century macrobreath.

For my life is a cascade of cemeteries  
bathing in your employment.

And you life is a sticky film frame  
that seeks out a gossiping membrane.

Be wary:  
I am one of many  
conic balls of carcinogens  
that sickles pleasure, addiction,  
guilt, and temptation  
onto your dissertation.

You must decide if  
walking your barefoot lungs on me  
is worth the prolonged risk.

You must decide who to follow.

## Inhibited Furnace

I am a bowl for the  
drunken furnace  
that keeps spilling out  
all of its heat  
in tipsy confession.

Furnaces tell me all about the lice  
infections in their armpits,  
how the doctors built ladders  
to their colon,  
the sexual trauma of war,  
the house fires of friendship.

It only takes an hour  
for me to sip from  
all the calendars  
that hold this person's life,  
and I do it without the heft  
such a beverage should imbue.  
I do it with all the clarion senses  
one needs to bring down  
bushels of birds from the sky.  
I am not drinking tonight.

It's a sweat storm of exhaustion  
out here in the speakeasy,  
exposed to the body temperature  
the thermometer always reads.  
I drop severed verbs in water  
and watch them come alive.  
I witness people murder  
a clock on the wall,  
and hear its nervous, steady ticks  
dissolve into silence.

Every alcoholic rambler  
will seek out the poem.  
A poem is always one on one -  
a very present

and personal audience  
right in front of you.  
I am an eager  
liquidator of conversation.  
I am the bowl,  
as the furnace  
begins to sweat out  
more of the inhibited life  
that rests inside both of us.

## It Really Was This Fool

It really was your hand cupping your breasts as you slept.  
It really was my ear lying on your inverted glass of skin.  
It really was too damp in the room for nothing to be happening.

Fuck me for forgetting  
how possible it was  
for the lines of a body  
to lay opposite celebrity.  
That one can hide all their magnitude  
under their clothes  
instead of the other way around.

It really wasn't  
an abnormal night for you,  
downing Ambien  
and living it up  
in a disenfranchised  
folding of arms and legs.  
It really was all about  
this fool right here,  
fumbling in the dollhouse,  
exodus sloppy and clumsy  
with the taste of your dried plums  
in my throat muscles for days.

## It

*It* is modern and personal. *It's* entertaining. *It's* stimulation. *It's* something to stare at. Something to laugh out of. *It* is malignant against tumors and spreads nasty news to their brothers. *It* clears treasure from the minds of seers. *It* is after a period. *It* is followed by words. *It* is a leader, it takes on many skins. *It* is used every day as a new thing. *It's* a gas! *Tie* the world up to *it*. *All* the other words are jealous of it. *It* has all the fun. *It* is put on a pedestal. Want to be it. *It*, holy infallible word. *I* am half of *it*. But *I* can't punctuate! I am the "I" from the "It" who is left hanging. Without that definite base of "t," I rambles on I never stops I won't shut up won't take a breath. *It* can do all of this. *It* stands proud, stands ready for definition. *It* completes every phrase. *It* always follows through. *Every* sentence with *it* would retain the strength of a spiderweb if *I* was used instead of *it*. *It* has no feelings. *It* just makes sense. Including an *I* make things awkward. *I* makes me sound silly and dumb. *It* is so much mature in its style. *I* jumps a waterfall vs *It* jumps a waterfall. My supporting cast could never match with the supporting cast of *it*. My words are meant for me. *I* can never be like *it*. Perhaps I will morph myself into a mythical creature or become a rainshower. After that *I* could become an *it*. People will address me as *it* - "*It* came from the ocean, that crazy rainshower" - and *I* will be an *it*! How exciting. If I died I would still be an *I*, but if I lose sense of my brutality of information and the inundated flow of work, *I* become *it*. *Oh* man oh man make me an *it*. *It* is modern and personal. *It* was once *I*, *I* was once me. And that's what *it* is.

## My Monument A Little Incomplete

You stand up underwater  
leaving monuments of yourself  
in oxygen bubbles  
that float to the surface.

When I breathe these in,  
my mouth is having cereal  
made with sugar syrup  
and flakes of chopped-up  
hallmark cards;  
this heart falls asleep  
just to dream harder against excited skin.

You stand up over water  
leaving monuments of yourself  
in other people  
who go about their morning  
as handsome as a museum.  
There's a well worn kiss  
squinting on each of their muscles,  
locking into place  
a library of melismatic moans  
that my ears can't conceive.

Not being privy to your siren's coordinates,  
I have dug myself into the gaping lungs of textbooks.  
I'm wondering what these dustcover flaps  
will carve into the wind  
when my breath finally exhales  
from its flaky shell.  
It will be the incomplete monument of my.....

## Next Door, Three Dogs Circle Her

*Riff Raff Ramble Rumble Right-To-Think.  
Riddle Middle Circle Purple-Prose-That-Stinks.*

Male dogs will circle around  
a beautiful food dish blindly,  
with loudmouth chanting.

*Enable Fable Please Set The Table-To-Eat.  
Squirring Worming Triple Nipples Land-At-Our-Feet.*

The female dog hears these melodious canines.  
She knows her white fluffy mane has been associated  
with both food and sex. Damn you, Pavlov.

*Start To Part Her Shoddy Little Body In-A-Spread.  
Prancing, Parsing, Stripping, Strutting Smut-On-Her-Bread.*

The woman refuses to move from the center of the trapezoid.  
The males continue to lemming in funnel shapes.  
I am their next door neighbor, an anteater.  
I have to inhale this shilly-shally all season long.

## On The Farm

The tall shrubs on the prairie  
draw up the fleshy molds of tomatoes  
and then leave them to the hands of gravity.

The glue of the ground is calling  
for some gnarled pulp in its mouth,  
some fillings in its belly,  
but a blanket full of extinguished cigarettes  
is all it gets on its sorrowful wet skin.

Joining the study of dermatology  
are morsels of fallen fruit  
that have passed their prime,  
so overly ripe that their paternal vines  
chose to have a scar of  
high maintenance rather than  
hold on to something real.

These mature seeds,  
alongside the dying lights of cigarettes,  
are victims of gravity's innate destitution.  
We have left the floor  
as a rotten decomposition,  
a gluttonous expectation  
that is flying far from anything firm.

## Orgasm Never Learned How To Crawl

Out of all the times I wanted to leave my brain  
blacked out inside your fishnet schools,  
Out of all the wheelchair-bound races where I  
wanted to be nudged to the finish,  
Out of all the times I snuck up  
behind lovers with a match strike -

I never once hesitated  
in letting myself be burned by the fire between legs.

At no time did I let the serotonin delivery  
be anything but express.

I never once held our Siamese heads  
low to the ground, and  
mournfully shuffled away from famish  
into the bitter sprint of ecstasy.

I may have sat you down  
to strip off your mysterious wisteria,  
to brightly resuscitate life  
in the black embers of moonset,  
but I never shared with you  
a mutual ejaculate melancholy.

I just let us burn, burn without any thought.

## Identities

The mirror shatters in four pirouettes  
that swirl our bodies in the letter L.  
There's our vertical reflection in walls  
and the jagged edges protruding out  
the unwashed sentiments from our skin.

Right now is my peace. I've always wanted  
to be the face that the mirror recalls,  
even when the songs I sing tear the nets  
that hold my fixed identity within.  
Even when the things I do make no sense,  
they still produce tones that make glass walls yell  
in disintegrating ballets about  
how there's really nothing to hold on to.

Nothing except your own shaking presence,  
dancing calmly in the reflections where  
mirrors used to stack up limbs so haunted.

I love all the sounds I make in your voice,  
they remind me I'm such a fragile stare.  
Look twelve seconds, I'll break twelve cracks anew -  
*I won't be able to stand up by choice.*

## Pablo Picasso On A Boat

Disoriented information casually passes out onto the ground, and when it  
wakes up it will take its breakfast. The fish are ravenously stepping off the  
ladder of their bunk bed. It is said they will never drink a gun discharged  
into their mouth. A low lickerous respiration drives up my nervous  
digestion. I'm a janitor, and sweeping this boat has been good for me, but I  
am now going to cast my set of dice into the sea.

Grabbed by the horns, a small anchor grows berries, and marries into the  
species of clocks. I love to gather flesh under a buffalo's throat said the  
stopped watch, who was now divorced. The street is plugged with fire and I  
sit here at sea with an otter, stuffing a cushion.

## Plehenos Emos

*Wayside School is Falling Down. It was purple.*

my thoughts.  
in my head and are controlling  
grains have entrenched themselves  
backwards - because these two  
is why i am telling you all of this  
point of origin: the brain. this  
every day in real time at the  
and watch our thoughts unfold  
of humans. sand pellets will sit there  
final step: in between the ears  
of animals, and then, the  
sit on the tails  
of marine flesh,  
and heap all over the backside  
go further than that today  
trains but no, they would  
of insects and over the undersides of  
time to look into the nostrils  
to find - and it was a prime  
railroad track - not too hard  
like. all it took was a county  
once and see what it was  
to live, and perchance, to die  
beginnings. now they wanted  
had been 4000 years since their  
innocent dust and sand had passed. it  
in a day. for the time of  
thousand times if they could  
would not do it once but a  
created thoughts. and the sand brothers  
another beings' consciousness with newly  
a chance to poison  
out there for someone.  
the first bite is always  
it, they just needed a subject.  
and insignificant enough to do  
out there? they were small

taint the virginity/vision of someone  
always exists. could they  
that's never seen but  
they wanted a glance at something  
more than the earth concrete,  
knew they wanted something  
food. the two specks of sand  
sets us on a journey for  
return of hunger that  
sandpiping, like the endless  
it was an eternal call, that  
to relate it back to the reader.  
but he or she will try  
reference for what happened next  
narrator does not have a point of  
heads. it is sad this  
which hung above their  
system and the leather freckles  
sound that rattled their nervous  
time alone, there was a great piping  
were facing sundown and some  
on this particular day, when they  
and jetsam live forever.  
disposed among humans. the noble  
it is only the finest sand that was  
them and jeopardize their lives.  
attract attention to  
they could produce that would  
another, there was no spectacle  
them from catching up with  
windstorm that could keep  
years. there was not a  
were and had been friends for  
two speckles of sand they  
came up to their thighs.  
and parted when the grass  
they ran all the way home.

## **Processed Food (Addiction)**

The restaurant is filled with equipment  
that's tired of looking in your mouth,  
tired of wrapping sandals on taste buds  
so flavors of pavement go down easy.  
Another day, another full shipment  
of people who ingest these earrings -  
sharp food pellets that pierce skin and hang there,  
watching your movements as they're appearing,  
taking notes on your body's reactions.

The equipment is exhausted with you.  
It will fall asleep inside your soap suds  
and leave you the results of a craving  
that has nursed you on dinners so queasy.  
Machines are controlling you chemically,  
and are making sure you are behaving.  
You're stuck with nutrients that have gone south  
and addictions as pervasive as air.  
What's left of your free will is a fraction,  
fractions that would grow exponentially  
if only you let lust run overdue.

## Learning To Speak

It was only a short time ago  
that I was a simple fisherman  
lying underneath the blanket of my bed,  
my words echoing in a dramatic  
and solitary intimacy.

The fish I would catch all looked  
and tasted like me -  
me and my gigantic suitcase  
filled with inside jokes  
and invented words.

Everything was moving along  
until I started shivering at night.

This past winter was so cold  
that the blanket of my words had to  
be incredibly thick around my skin.  
And when my body continued to tremble  
throughout the fall and the spring,  
I started to think my obscurity  
might be giving me a terminal disease.  
To save myself  
from my own echoes,  
I started to sing my melodies  
far from the lake where I lived.  
What was sung back to me  
was simultaneously logical  
and unpredictable.  
I decided this was  
my new blueprint for poetry.

To learn how to speak,  
to learn how to breathe,  
my thoughts must be  
really honest with themselves,  
and not spend  
every single day  
amusing my brain  
with descriptions of events

that have never happened to me.  
You can't send phrases  
out onto the street  
without a purpose,  
without a connection  
to the life you really live.

These light words do not mask  
their inherent hollowness.  
The only echo they make  
comes from their breath  
mingling with yours.

If you could, let my know  
what I sound like in your language.  
I'm trying to carve my feelings into the air,  
and my voice has yet to sit still.  
My craft has yet to be honed.

## Mixed Gods of Burning Thirst

emollient    balsamic    wet whistle    enkindled

These people were my mixed gods with burning thirst.

Emollient, I heard they cut your lip and now you can only speak in clichés. I stalked your voice on the internet and I think you found out.

Balsamic, you are dressing thirty-two men and one woman every morning. You've added both honey and vinegar into their suspenders but you still end up carrying each of them into daylight.

Wet whistle you are gentle on the phone, a tender tone on my answering machine. But your online persona fills my drink with more oil than any wet piece of humanity ever has.

Enkindled, you keep thinking people will forget about your voracious appetite so you keep belching in public loudly. Your blind love for the past is your only source of joy in the present.

I have left all of you.

I have left you in emollience, balsamics, whistlings, and kindling.

## Reverse Joke

You can't stop it. When someone says or does something very funny, you laugh! It's not like you planned to laugh or thought about doing it, it just happened naturally. Just as when you clap your hands the air doesn't wait around and ponder if it should make a sound, or consider what kind of sound it should make. No, it just does it. In a instant. It couldn't help it!

My artistic goal was at first to master the attack of the joke, the ability to produce pleasure from somebody as if turning a light on inside them.

But I have an even greater goal than this, I tell you. After the joke, I've started to tell reverse jokes. I start with laughter, with light on the inside, and then we start talking, going from the punch line to the setup, with humor gradually fading away. Soon it's as if no joke ever entered the air. Everyone loves a good icebreaking joke at a party but what I'm trying to do is re-freeze the water.

Think of the time in your life where you laughed the hardest and the longest. What kind of person were you when you were laughing? You were not your conscious self. You were timeless.

Isn't this exuberant laugh the fountain of youth one finds in a person, previously hidden and shielded by inhibitions? The problem is that there's never enough time to swim in this laugh. I only get a fleeting tingle - a splash you might say - before it dissolves. Enter the idea of a reverse joke. I take that laugh - that pure water of spontaneity - I take it and I freeze it. I want to keep it preserved, I want to grab it all and leave nothing behind. It will be as if the laughter was never on the person's face.

Am I being selfish, cruel, stealing laughter away from people? Well, they gave it to me! And the freezing process is completely natural as long as I have my nets out and ready.

You may wonder why I am always laughing and giggling at the most random happenings. Why I'm always cracking up about the silliest things. It's because I've got too much laughter in me. My cup runneth over with the laughter of others who line the library stacks of my brain.

## Space

With a blue drained from the sky,  
a cold wall  
prints all my commas, pauses, gaps,  
and other punctuation stops  
in a book displayed with  
unfathomable distances  
of space on each page.  
A huge grinning head  
packed with optimism  
and rosematter  
looks upon this book  
and gets sticky,  
dancing  
in the fripperies  
of its flavors  
and its true facts.

## The Lewd Heart Yearns For The Past

vhs skin marks  
sit in a never-ending hamster wheel  
of my circular breathing

an unquenchable string of yarn  
falls from my lips  
with each murmur I make

yarn activates  
strings of memories,  
skotch-drenched tape

i examine myself with  
red zealous intrigue  
and an archivist's lung,  
dusty but trailblazing

the scent of old christmas trees  
is molding on these nostrils

home movies  
endow me with easy torpor  
and quiet malaise,

quiet confidence fading to shame.

## the deep breaths

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Everything rises in the body  
in order to come out.

I inhale freshly washed hair  
and the  
long, long pauses between lines.

Children ask what its like  
to lose someone you kiss regularly.

It's like having a shadow  
which craves you and your form -  
but then all the streetlamps go out suddenly.

You live blind to anything opposite from your body.  
You live blind to anything opposite from your mind.

The body and the mind were dating each other,  
but they've recently had a bad break up.

They don't need to read each other's thoughts,  
they just need to remember that they are beautiful.

Beauty forgets itself  
in order to remain beautiful.

Beauty creates words  
that are vicious and untamed,  
but it does not let them  
reside in its quarters.  
The raw creations of beauty  
are always sent out into the world.

Living  
with the very absence  
of these harsh words  
feeds a deep content  
back into beauty.

Beauty forgets itself  
in order to remain beautiful.

But on the external side  
of the exit wound,  
in the deep breaths between dating,  
poetic animals  
roam around  
this spare urban terrain.

They are looking to lure in  
all those who are  
currently remembering  
beauty too much.

What follows  
is a legion of red hair  
where a heart should be,

and a long line of therapy  
that yearns to take every crutch  
off of one's brainstems  
and breathe it out  
softly yet purposely.

## The Mother of the Shaman

The Mother of the Shaman  
feeds me a diet of pigeon toes  
and broken Alka-Seltzer tablets.  
My tongue is a waterslide  
where yoga is practiced,  
and burn marks heal in  
sessions of squirrely sex.

The Mother of the Shaman  
has breasts that are -- grain by grain --  
the coarsest source of love in my life.

I was once a doorknob collector:  
the only hands I would hold  
were the ones that granted passage.  
Now I crave only window shade and  
the dark caress of someone's shadow  
pressing against mine. A hairless person  
squatting directly below a cloudless sky.

I thought I could fly. *My insides*  
*are made from pigeon toes*, toes  
easily digested by all the crushed Alka-Seltzer.  
But being as they are only toes,  
I'm still grounded on the floor  
and beaten into submission by  
these sexual alchemists of enlightenment.

## The Operation

When the operation was finished,  
we were able to open your mouth  
and take out all the moth balls stuffed inside.  
You had too much desire in there  
and those hallways  
were cluttered with vermin.  
You kept confusing beauty  
for overly heavy bookcases -  
they were not only  
a pain in the ass to move,  
but they dripped  
their cumbersome kiss  
over anyone  
who would have it.

With your new sterilized breath,  
maybe you can finally touch me  
with a weightless tongue.

As you know  
the roof of my mouth  
was also littered  
by the carcasses of moths,  
sweet-toothed annoyances  
with the brains of a bobble-head.  
I have felt their insides  
too often under my fingernails.

The dead moths,  
they kept on multiplying -  
We were both contaminating our voices  
with a dying light that kept on multiplying.

I had the same operation as you  
and it didn't go well,  
I still look for too many things  
to put on my tongue.  
I still want to steal every word I hear  
and make it into art. It's juvenile.

What I needed was the honesty of unclad skin,  
because the way I put clothes on my mouth  
is not artfully done.  
I have to be with someone  
whose traps are empty  
to insure that mine stay  
equally vacant.

So I arranged for you to have the operation.  
I disinfected your gate.  
Your clothes look so attractive on top of my nudity  
Your nudity looks so attractive on top of my clothes

Those are the only times  
when I feel that the words in my mouth  
die  
when they reach my tongue.

## Southern Florida

An alligator has bitten my left arm,  
but I have purposely allowed this to happen.

The limb is still attached to my body  
because the alligator does not know how to chew.  
My arm requires more than one bite to swallow  
so the gator has been forced  
to grip my elbow in his jaw  
and wait for my muscles to rot  
into smaller digestible pieces.  
I am not in any immediate danger,  
the gator's immobile tail  
has left him unable to spin his body  
and wrestle off any of my flesh.

Feeling around inside him, I can tell  
this is not the first time this has happened,  
as there is a colony  
of large turtles and antelope  
fully intact just beyond his jaw.  
These swallowed animals live like they were  
prematurely housed in a lousy museum;  
they are middle-aged creatures  
who act like senior citizens.  
The disregard for movement and upkeep  
has led to the frailty of their bodies  
occurring sooner than it would otherwise,  
and the high humidity is mentally taxing,  
because it does not allow  
any of the propagating thoughts  
on the animal's skin to evaporate  
in a timely manner.  
When thoughts pile up on skin  
too high and too soon,  
it's easy to lose the urge,  
the drive to climb back out of this well  
of crocodile dentistry.

I am here to provide a long arm,  
a long rope back to these primal urges.  
I am taking preventive measures for my future.  
You know, it's not surprising  
that if a human stops baking their daily bread,  
they degenerate into small pieces of prey  
that are able to be swallowed in one bite.  
It's not surprising that the only area  
where alligators and crocodiles  
live side by side is Southern Florida.  
Southern Florida is filled  
with seniors ripe with deterioration.

After 40 years of doing the same job,  
my father has retired this summer, rather involuntarily.  
He's a man who, by his own admission,  
is perplexed by the idea of hobbies and interests.  
A man whose incredible discipline  
and work ethic is instilled inside me,  
but try as he may, can not commit  
to keeping his body from being overgrown.  
He's reluctantly planned some repair jobs  
in and around the house for the next few months,  
but I can already hear boredom in his voice,  
I can hear the swamps of Southern Florida  
calling him with the full force of their apathy.

Saving a life is only temporary at best.  
I do not know how my father will cope  
with the amount of empty rooms in his new life,  
but just in case Southern Florida prematurely strikes,  
I'm ready. I've got my long arm right here,  
waiting for him, inside the jaw of an alligator.

## **Fire In Portrait Self**

*Fifteen responses to the fifteen poems in Chad Parenteau's chapbook "Self-Portrait in Fire." Each poem is written by using the first and last words of Chad's lines as the prompt.*

### **I**

He loved  
her oversized coat  
that wore old shivering lovers  
as if they were new parkas.

He yelled and flailed  
in her nothing arms,  
inside her open windows.

### **II**

So just then what how and why came.

It's an understanding during sex  
how forgetful you are about  
putting on your turn signal.

You keep making sudden jerky movements without warning.  
Don't stop just because the bathroom wants to use birth control!

Quietly coming,  
she opens her mouth in the shape of a yawn,  
which is the same shape her mouth makes in ecstasy.

If you if the will to be she with,  
If you if the will, you will, be. With.  
If you if.  
If you \*if\* it.  
If you \*if\* her.

You're wondering how much orgasm  
is still left inside her.  
Your orgasms have barged into her  
and they don't know what to say  
after you've left them there.  
Maybe the wind from the window  
will blow them out,  
and your breasts will have  
to go to the bathroom and urinate  
a flower of bees that tastes like  
mother's milk mixed with yourself.

### **III**

The mind is fine on its own.  
It declares that it might return to you  
if it could find the manhole  
that leads to your body.

#### **IV - Too Many Orgies**

It seems that  
with either of the people  
that I'm sitting in,  
I'm shot with sparks.  
And I wonder  
if the shuffling and trying questions  
I place on my genitalia  
are just watching  
my bedazzled mistakes  
instead of  
trying to resolve them.

I hear the light is ecstatic for those couples who kiss alone.  
But nostalgia for this feels like arms wrapping you in laughter,  
a finger-biting laugh  
shooting through the solid world  
and offering you two choices:  
one partner  
or many.

#### **V**

I'm a slob with a pizza job  
and I just want a drink.  
I once hung around  
choking on my own upchuck  
while standing at a red light.  
I was never looking back  
or reaching out,  
I was just standing still  
while wanting a drink,  
hoping to stop my trachea  
from dissolving.  
The drinks say to me  
"Thanks,  
but you're out of luck -  
you've run out of throat."

#### **VI**

Your head is a blade in my cucumber heart,  
and now death will see more employment  
having my heart as a new client.  
Death sees in my heart a lot of sheet-thinning potential.

Why, why does the skin of my girlfriend rot?  
It does so, so its youth can unravel all over my face  
like an old shirt that has stuck it out all these years.  
It does so, so that the lines of my face  
can continually defy the laws of time.

#### **VII - My Clothes Caught Me Sleeping With Someone**

To all the coats  
who looked at me when I woke up -  
Don't worry!  
Her robes will be leaving from my bed promptly.  
The atomic bombs  
she set off in my mind and groin  
were only warning shots  
to stop the world war between the sheets.  
Hear me out clothes,  
the answers we've found together  
still shine brighter than her!  
I have not given her all my secrets.  
You are still the canvas I wear everyday to share my world!

The next day my scarf succeeded  
in trying to choke me to death.  
The long coats in my closet were forced to do the dishes,  
and the photograph exposures of me at war with myself  
looked incredibly holy.

## VIII - Queer

A person is watching the genders inside them fight it out.

A person who is watching the genders inside them fight it out will tell you stories like this:

There's a boy acting like a girl  
and a girl acting like a boy  
and they both end up  
as a yellow-white decision.  
She notices his back,  
She looks, sees him,  
decides to spill some  
of the boy shrieking  
and the girl sitting  
all over everyone.  
She spreads genders  
inside cups of tea.  
The pellets of she  
sink down his throat,  
they both screech and smash  
their containers of blood  
now covered in boy.  
The boy smiles in the room.  
The room notices her blue skirt -  
it likes what it holds.  
Her tea is like burnt wood,  
a reserved table  
that everyone would like to see  
their shoulders hanging above.  
Can she crayon true art on his back?  
She turns around in his chair on another lap.  
He's mad and wants a sip of tea  
that will stretch down past his shoes  
and into the pebbles and grooves.  
He tosses the girl into a china cup  
and drinks from her chair,  
his body still in her hand.  
The girl sees spots  
and cries to be disciplined

inside a classroom.  
She dislikes wandering  
the hallways of a person  
who is watching and dating gender,  
but never asking  
for the genitals' hand in marriage.

## IX

Opposing sides are paused in mid-air.  
They briefly marvel at this frozen forever.  
Lives will collapse when the pause is released.  
You will collapse after the pause button has been taken off your body.

Start throwing yourself in a standing position every time you land.

## X

I of a or on I oat.  
I of a or on I oat.  
I have an oar on my boat.  
I of a or on I boat.

When I took you to the séance, you were still alive.  
But then I watched your face bowl over  
as you got *the death guarantee*  
from this circle of soup,  
this circle of friends with wet mouths.

I will take your ashes  
and place them in a photo album caught on fire,  
and it will burn in a fibreglassed morning.

## XI

In a night that was boarded with wood,  
a night that was too busy to be alone,  
you quickly took me outside and we waited for the train.

The handlebars of my stomach no longer screamed with touch.

After that train took me to my destination,  
I never wanted to use the word *destination*  
unless it meant a place I actually wanted to go.

## XII

With her, as her,  
to sleep on her cracks.  
To sleep and fall through her cracks.

Her smell diverted me into the kitchen,  
And from behind,  
her imagination whispered to me,  
assuming that one who has been in her  
becomes the very air in her throat.

I've inflicted her world  
which comes with many roommates.  
I'm in her scheduled life  
and I walk through her doors  
which are silent with forgiveness.  
I marked off heaven on my to-do list.

## XIII

Her poems are a dangerous metronome in the morning,  
a tick that drips prune juice on your back.  
So you leave your house,  
and head into the homeless city,  
memorizing and respecting  
the street corners  
you must dwell in  
until she starts reciting  
in other houses  
and you can finally stop your heart from beating.

## XIV

The time after playing chess is endless.  
Chess pits me against you, in a room.  
Our chess pieces expire.  
A fireplace consumes the bare floor,  
and experience smiles as it sits down tired.  
In the real world  
where the remaining pieces  
are the only things still allowed to win,  
show me swiftly how to repaint  
my fallen colors, my fallen statures.

## **XV - Conclusion**

I date people with the same frequency  
that I hear payphones ringing in city streets.  
It's an obscurity of latitude and longitude  
that only coughs up some luck  
when an atomic clock skips a beat.

My sketchbook sleeps with  
new white sheets of you,  
the first drafts of your words.  
I watch how they become  
more tight and meaningful  
with each new revision,  
each new meeting.

It seems like I will marry the person  
that I sit next to the most in my life,  
but I haven't ever been able to sit down.