Farfalla: A poetry thesis

Vanessa Leigh Huff

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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FARFALLA
A POETRY THESIS

by

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Bachelor of Arts
University of Nevada Las Vegas
1998

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing
Department of English
College of Liberal Arts

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ABSTRACT

Farfalla: A Poetry Thesis

by

Vanessa Huff

Professor Claudia, Examination Committee Chair
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Farfalla is a book of poetry of the lineage of poets who believe that poetry is not in poems. It is itself alive, and ruptures from poems. All poetry is political, as it is inevitably a product of the time and place in which it was written. It is affected by politics and effects its change, as Shelley has written: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

Thus striving toward "legislator" this work in progress is seeking to be in continuous motion out of the confinements of poems to a place where purposes are real and methods are issues of morality. By dealing with personal and political I am being faithful to the temporal, hence moving (as dictated by time) the poems are unbridled by a desire for autonomy. This freedom enables one to understand what Keats meant when he said that the poet must be Nobody. Such methods of composition refuse to limit any part of what we call Being.
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PREFACE

The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul.

(Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar”)

Tradition is now

(Robert Creeley)

This group of poems (tentatively titled “Farfalla”) has been inspired by amazing poets who believe that poetry is not in poems. Rather, poetry has further to go; as energy, it surpasses the mass and manners of art, passing through words along the way to life. It is itself alive, and ruptures from poems. (“Energy is Eternal Delight”--William Blake.)

Carolyn Forche, author of The Country Between Us in 1980, wrote poems about her experiences in El Salvador as a 28-year-old journalist caught in the middle of a civil war. Though called "political" by some critics, the poems are in fact unbearably intimate and personal. They do not capitalize on a terrible situation to make a poem; they use the beauty of language to find affirmation under even the most abhorrent conditions, an “archivist of the incomprehensible”. She writes: "There is nothing one man will not do to another." Forche claims that all poetry is political, as it is inevitably a product of the time and place in which it was written. She insists, though, that “political” poets are no “less poetic because they had a subject matter and were naively representational. I wanted to argue that rather than reading these poems as representational, we can read them as evidence of the wound -- as what happened to the language when these things happened to the poet and the poet’s world.” This understanding of the political is in accord with Hannah Arendt's idea: "To be political, to live in a polis [means] that everything [is] decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence. In Greek self-
understanding) to force people by violence, to command rather than persuade, were pre-
political ways to deal with people characteristic of life outside the *polis*. Poetry at once is
affected by politics and effects its change, as Shelley has written: "Poets are the
unacknowledged legislators of the world."

Thus striving toward “legislator” this work in progress (“Farfalla”) is seeking to be in
continuous motion out of the confinements of poems to a place where purposes are real
and methods are issues of morality. By dealing with personal and political issues of man
and woman relations, women relations, and the sociological bonds we experience through
such relations I am attempting to write poetry in motion, so one (reader) is moved to
action by action. By being faithful to the temporal, hence moving (as dictated by time)
the poems are unbridled by a desire for autonomy. This freedom enables one to
understand what Keats meant when he said that the poet must be Nobody.

The sincerity of the writing is born out of keen emotion towards life, for anything less
than life is not alive. An important influence on my writing has been Donald Revell. He
claims that anything short of action is corruption. Poetry "springs" via the poem "towards
life." In this movement towards life Craft is nothing; sincerity is everything. It is possible
that one might read Paul Celan's poem, "Death Fugue," written about Auschwitz, and call
it a beautiful poem. It is possible that poetry can take the most horrifying experience and
transform it. Say it clearly and honestly and it becomes beautiful. In addition to Revell’s
influence has been the influence of my “mentor” Claudia Keelan. Coming from the
influences of Keats who told her what the poet must be; Whitman who taught her what
to give; Williams defined imagination and showed her the living lineage of Beauty as
partial and convulsive in his essays and especially in *Spring and All* and *Paterson*; Stein’s
courageous *Composition as Explanation* taught her a syntax dedicated to the processes of
time in time with “continuous present”; Creeley showed how her reading and writing
must not subordinate the present historical moment to the past and the idea of line and
duration of perception; and Susan Howe illustrated how to be a redactor, someone who
revises a book simply by reading. Keelan has come to oppose the urge towards false unities in artistic practice. In addition to the above, she has inadvertently shown me, that honesty and clarity are the qualities that connect your readers deeply to your experience, and one can only be honest when living. They will go back and read it over and over, no matter what it is about, no matter your philosophies if you are involved in a perpetual becoming that compels the reader to act. She clarifies it best by claiming that “poetry itself, great poetry, never empowers a singular perspective.” Such methods of composition refuse to limit any part of what we call Being.

The souls of poems do not rest in form. They go. We follow. We read to go where poetry has gone and to preserve the possibility of a delightful contact. In "The Poet," Emerson describes the universe as the externalization of the soul. For poetry, we must look. "for/ christ's sake, look/ out where yr going"--Robert Creeley, "I Know a Man." Language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, for conveyance, not for homestead. It is good to be going, and I would like possibly some of these poems to show the way.
CHAPTER 1

ZIPPORAH

And it came to pass, that the Lord appeared unto him as he was in the way, by the inn. The Lord was angry with Moses, and his hand was about to fall upon him, to kill him; for he had not circumcised his son. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and circumcised her son, and cast the stone at his feet, and said, Surely thou art a bloody husband unto me. And the Lord spared Moses and let him go, because Zipporah, his wife, circumcised the child. and she said, Thou art a bloody husband
Unseasonable Dress

At the edges of re-dressing
each succession in taffeta
hand-sewing slows the pace
for pleasure of investigation
I can get near by.

Much summing up done,
what keeps going is conversation.
What makes me care is why
I am interested enough to inhabit
where an accountant is tiptoeing through grass.

Laugh of obfuscation
quotes from arguments
had with other men;
scabby mountains are descended.

I dance through Dutch country
part tulips with my toes
leasing long this rented charisma
limberness, utter movement.

I laugh only for my friends
an offering of tears.
I stopped wearing mascara
as a pre adolescent.
So don’t say something for me.

Leaping forward, adding pathos
to an over soppy situation:
We went to custody over lost years --
not certain what really can be saved.

I do not feel sorry
for the woman alone.
I wouldn’t kill her off
in an unexpected way
because we are tired of the story;
we think we know occasions
by talking about them --
Put on this unseasonable dress
of hope.
Undercurrent

I.

After settling in our house we cleared remnants
Of second-hand dirt I know you cringe to find.

(Unlike scraps of random afterthoughts:
your Aunt’s second ex-husband’s
diet list found in your novel
has become what you eat this month)

A contortion develops on your lips during cleaning
Reminding me of overachievers who ask questions
Probing surfaces, sure that you have,
In one way or another, covered each inch touched
By whoever was prior to you being there.
Touched so that it becomes relevant.

In this is understanding
Of you wanting the radio off to drive:
That voice pursues you, propels you
Through all the silence you seek.

II.

In our garden
I always work on my knees
Not to leave imprints in the soil
But to force earth’s impression on my skin.

Smell our hyacinth,
I’ve an abiding wonder for this scent;
Endeavoring to under plant it
To have my skin tang yellow and white…

My knees are mutilated.
III.

Your fingers reach for my collar bone
so my eyes will close.

Beneath color of sky we notice
the peach tree after years
of blossomless seasons suddenly
supports flowering pink.

Grass is dense now
rock and cactus beginning replaced
with new tender fescue, Kentucky.

I cover your hand
not to set boundaries
but to emboss this tranquility
on your mind.

III.

Our printer is making that sound again.
The sprinklers leak, they’re drowning the strawberry plants.

To you it’s not consumerist to enjoy cheap commodities,
“All we need is a couple of smokes, two cups of coffee
Conversation, you me and five bucks.”
Must be brilliant to feel not under it.

The clothes were $1 each, furniture free.
How can you see no difference?
Another t-shirt. Is this worth four hours of your life?

Books are as much matter as electronics.
Embrace the problematical
With awareness this furrow is crumbling.

We’re on two ends.
You keep me there.
I still think India is for me.

I have been to India,
you wouldn’t find
any less desire.
April: tender crystals of a temple
ruining your creases
with insistent fingers,
carving
my initials in pieces
shimmering with particles
of fine china historic women
donated to its construction;
devoted to losing life
for virtues sake.

water rushing
over my parching face
not with filling intent
for emptiness is encompassing all
by letting fleshy rain
settle in surfaces you see
what’s not available
to your sight isn’t
sacred, rather solitary.

May: congressional confession: where have all the closet Catholics gone?
emerging, they begin the parade.
our logicless bravado is empty
spin doctors dolling out indulgences
regardless of intent,
breaks relation of choice
to uncontrollable nature.
choose your costume
enthralling!
the multitude is parts,
together we rise
making colors fly

June: touching them
“He wept”
i would like to have talked
to Lazarus
who returned from that country
hello. where have you been?
here all along
enter if you want
do you? Come.
Seize the door way
Stuck in light

The emporium is empty
it has been ripped off
so I let myself express violence
gain courage to go along (or alone).
Some of us fall; don't take it
as a tragedy.

We are all living
in a trailer park
at the edge of something.
Learning courage
with no way to resolve –
only a coming together
In a moment of rest:

wrapping around my waist
his hands touched
completely surrounding my center –
hands inherited from his father
of strength, industry, healing.
I wanted him
if for nothing more
the breadth of his grasp.
Pressure

Taking a bath
toes I cannot identify
relax against a bottle
of Bubble Monkey
bubble bath my husband bought
as a joke for a co-worker
that I switched out
with cheap shampoo
because I wanted the smell
same tropic
as the edible massage oil
that warmed with breath,
bought in some mall store
by my first husband’s foster sister
as my bridal shower gift
for the uninitiated.

After six years the black comforter
with aquamarine silk trim
stuffed under the bed
still smells like my bath tonight.
No Precedent to Reference

Lying here with him
allegations are implicating them –
Wrath swarms the space
that makes me small;
Tonight my blood is a drug.

His fingers promise innocence –
he claims she is indecently bored,
this will force explosion.

All I rely on are his eyes,
validating us unwaveringly –
Persistent images damage
essentials of trust—
Sleep yields to their fiction.
Constant Novelty

Waiting at the door
(as for the lady she is going to wait forever)
standing no matter the hour because he has put in a full day
his car door slams heavy.

Burying her face in his suit jacket woven with layers of smoke:
high roller Camel, boss Marlboro, glittery woman Gitan,
his gold Benson & Hedges
that smell signifies arrival.

Some nights smoke does not come
she gives no sign of iniquity
slipping into her robe she reads
welcomes her daughter’s middle of the night visit
nightmares are not always bad
nothing is always.
The softness of her morning body rises
no one to savor how very exquisite
her hands are
always doing—
less knotted, though,
with him gone:

programs are not always of animals battling, mating and killing.
With him she sits with animals in their dark den of smoke
amor vincit ominia: love conquers all.

If conversation becomes an option
she listens
rare still lips

while thinking if she were in Cana that day
she would choose water over wine.
Quia amore langueo: because I languish for love.

Years passing this way
(when is it not)
still here regret is known
as she is not entirely without blame
troublesome acceptance
of the made picture—
hortus conclusus?
If she lets go it will be all to go.  
She would separate the pieces in her mind  
"to take" and "to leave" piles.  

She stopped waiting by her loom  
he stopped leaving Circe to come home  
   to his one true thing (he knows).  
She knows now too  
   peace of faded smoke.
Explosions

I.
Committing suicide because they wanted to live—
Not harmful if pain of violence is unreal,
But no one is not seriously hurt
wandering with a lacerated thigh.

I like how pain is in cartoons,
when the coyote is coerced off a cliff
and a cannon then falls on him –
he is whole in the next scene.

II.
The world speaks with us
Low voice without community
Continuing complications
Topping each other cold.

Imprecise space has no image.
The curtain falls in the middle of an act.
Suddenly, it is over.
Consolation escapes.

III.
Parading naked in a new country
We are laughing
To see it coming and keep going:
The bum is on the corner walking
Towards the open man hole.
He falls in, gets out, keeps walking.

IV.
Voluminous complaining
leaves a riff on my left breast,
each physical complication
topping itself.

Shared themes remind
we make ourselves feel better
touching base with mania:
what can be said about someone
who tries to destroy her brain, cell by cell?

V.
Notice the terms are reversed:
Does anyone really get hurt?
She was cured from the overdose.

Anyway:

Back in the jungle;

It is all intruding.
We are in the aftermath,
The echo,
When anyone can come
To the door,
Even kamikaze parasites.

Anyway:

Don’t spit in my eye for the favor,
It will all come to end uply,
A lyrical image
Of romantic light.
Perspectives

I.
something written
about the magnificence
of an orange
each droplet
glittering
each neat package
in edible containers
joined with other packets
grouped in sections
miraculous symmetry
all wrapped in disposable
biodegradable peel
where was that?

II.
this month they indulge
in an expensive juicer
specific to oranges
squeezer floor model
stainless steel base
mounts to brown formica
countertop.

III.
He uses a five-pound bag
to produce
a single glass
of juice
enjoying process
he is not tempted
to taste
his product
“this is what
I drank
instead of coffee,
when I lived
on the Mediterranean”

satisfied
he sets her juice
purposefully
next to her
hating to throw away

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pulp
she teethes juiceless remnants
as quickly
as he discards them

IV.
More than any other
the orange
is a nutritionally valued
source of vitamin C.

Hamilins are pulpy
and thin skinned
non-pitted surfaces
are better for drinking

she leaves
the juice
separating
into light and dark sections

V.
Wandering from sleep
their houseguest is surprised
by a gesture of juice
on the counter:
Gone in one drink
except for a splatter

VI.
on stained linoleum
attracts
when the lights go out
the spring cockroaches
gather
doing
what?

VII.
Some skins are
artificially colored
after regreening
rippedly soft,
fingers inserted
to open, peel back
What Institution Can Make An Equal Of the Ignorant and Learned?

Poking- -
Not woodpeckers
Who have intent to get in
Making holes to gain access –

We inspect the surface with long poles
Prodding from a distance - -

I did with my stick
When a bird had fallen dead
Out of the palm tree
After a summer wind storm –
Looking at what is
But not wanting to puncture it
And have the viscera exposed –
Grace

I spent
many mornings
tucking fresh
grape hyacinth bulbs
beneath earth,
she gathers handfuls
bringing spring inside
I do not scold.
She found
hidden splendor
an old self sowed
seasons before
she was.
man

pauses
with muscular force
bending
his knee makes gritty contact
with asphalt
to inspect a rogue rose
emerged by a side of this road
just beyond range
of vision
granular light
swirls, this rose
replaces himself
to perform an act
at this threshold of a
scrubbed moment
he feels scandalously privileged
to pick the flower
then find someone waiting
at the curb.
Removable Fence

Maneuverable fence drilled into concrete.
This green mesh enclosure appears flimsy.
A taut barrier stretched between
Measuredly marked silver poles.

It has served as a trellis.
Tendrils ignore the concrete wall to the East
With its un-holy rigidity.
Grape vines twist their sticky clasps
Moved by wind, crisped by sun.

The vines presence is defining.
Existing in relation to something else,
This fence is now less removable.
Maps

Circling in deserts
Lucky lack of icons
(non-examples of being) show
divine absence.
Not constructing One
As foundational,
Not having what a certain history is
Weighing on choices,
Not squashing juice from my pores
A heavy book pressed
On over-ripe flesh.

Help yourself to what is around.
When the Mona Lisa was stolen
I would have gone to stare
At its blank space:

Unheard voices
Buried by wrapping sands
That polish this shiny bone
Hysterically clean.
Economy

more taken
more given
more spent
more saved
less given
more given
more spoken
less said
Desire

as commonplace
as weather –
it is always with us
because it
doesn’t know what to make
of itself
now that its own gaudy
trappings have
been emptied and cut out.

Now regret
walking naked
is all that
is left to us here; stripped
down desire
without light dignities,
the burden
of a million flaming swords
drawn from things
of mighty Cherubim.

The rusted panoply
is cranky…

I will dress my bones in rags,

won’t you,

rather than walk

naked?
Long School-girl Summers

We spent
b.b.gunning pigeons, soda cans
and neighborhood cats,
with my brother's rifle –
early morning
lizard chasing
through deserts –
throwing rocks
at Mrs. Trenkle's house
late at night.

We cool afternoons
mouth-mauling push-ups,
slicking on slip 'n slides
dodging rain birds
standing as naked as possible
in front of mom's open
deep freezer.

Together we bunkbed
at my house one night
sleepingbag on your lawn
the next –
make forts with huge
sheets to play house in
carrying as much
as our arms hold
from inside
to out.

We will prick our pinkies
blood sisters
and in twenty, twenty five years
I send you

Christmas greetings.
show me how you want it to be

give me a sign

she has five children, now
squirmy burrito wrap
  jiggles his clear plastic
  bassinet
on her phone she whines
“where are you?” “where were you?”
“he has a lot of hair.”
the day after
  brings people
administrative state, health hospital people
she delivers different stories
calculating what they can give
what is there to take for him
the curtain is thin between us
he lies there she lies
i notice her teeth
  pass her my free formula
  as they wheel their dark hair away.

i must confess i still believe

time old trash
nobody to tell his story
i have lost track of it
because he is not now
he is then now gone he is

i must confess it is killing me now

A fallen kingdom is
him here him there him nowhere.
I take this plot
green green green it is
for us...thanks
here he is.
Slate blue colored eyes
welcome to the world
beautiful ears.

  What beautiful ears you have.
Disorderly Flesh

Rusted dew drips down our open window.
I stare at your sheeted figure lying still
Your white shirt with buttoned buttons
Thrown on the floor by my speechless hands.

Twilight enters; I sink further into your breath
Concentrating on the slight movement
At the base of your throat—
Deeply indented wasabi dish I fill

With soy sauce to soak a sushi roll.
It fits perfectly absorbing until with open mouth
I brace my right hand on your chest to lean
Eat it all at once, then lap the sauce.

It does not tickle. You remain still, composed
While the relic fountain churns outside.
I move amidst insomniac shadows.
The summit of unity is sharpened.
Adaptation

I do not cling a man to me as brother
who can't distinguish one man from another.
-Misanthrope

Marsupial woman ambles across concrete
around the dusty van running sojournly,
her skin socializes with what is Inside,
its pallor ekes out amidst withered outsides.
She struggles to will her thumb
strength to get the driver door open.

Her kids know they get to get out of the house,
strapping themselves in the van
half an hour before she comes out.

Undescended Samaritans,
comment on abjection
accepting none of its ownership:
*How could they let that drunk woman have two children?*
This happens into her effective adaptation -- she does this well.

Filling environmental niches
the marsupial is not a new species.
They’ve filled out most open space, resembling habitants
of the predictable environment
who live in the pretext of control.

The Copaxone causes her system to attack itself –
narrowed down, minute to minute.
She sold her house for a rented two bedroom duplex,
still in space, thinking things were too big.
She wants them small, for now.

I knew a Sioux woman whose boy died.
She placed him in a tiny white casket,
turned to the funeral congregation
to give away one by one,
everything she owned
then returned to a bare home.
Appeal to Light

to mother (and all those like her)

My skin is her, inherited glow.
Learning where to find her,
still one moving
rainfall that does not have to be
continually salvaged for.

If I do not find anything
I am not anything
I am her therefore good;
A good tree
putteth forth good fruit
despite my unsuper peachiness

a guarantee of praise

(because you exist you deserve

I would wish her on all of you.
Dear Hillary

(On a run of coke, chemically
there is no way for me to feel spiritual.)

She has been gone four years.
Random requests for money lends no memory
To what she was when we laughed.

Each time she vows desire to do things better, but numbness enables her
To look as a building and see just a building.

She does not lay hold of victim hood, she bows to choice
Resources are not enough, provisions that force surrender.

She fears god's morning, it illuminates only her weakness.
Like this she is one, contained, before she was many

Shape of skin, gold teeth does make us small.
She gives presentation of time to extend past one to all.

Amidst clutter she approaches, again.
Seeking has no end – You who has tried to contain
What you cannot hold will remain one.
She's a gullet that swallows you.
Dear Hillary,

Get happy. The orange-size tumor wasn’t found in you stomach. Removal was unsuccessful. A rip in the esophagus has caused everything to seep into everything else and this is what kills.

Dear Hillary,

It was unsuccessful---you have a tumor, not the size of an orange. A rip in the happiness has caused nothing to seep in.

Dear Hillary,

An orange ripped causing acid to percolate the tumor. It did not make it. Sorry.

We are people my dad said, laughing, this world would eat alive.
10 am

on an unamusing cloudy play day cradling steamy barley drinks in hands cuffed over by matching sweatshirts talking just the same

10 pm

we need a ride from here I recommend “God is Real” taxi service laughing we decide unspokenly instead to walk.
Kassabian Ave. Neighbors

To my East:

South African woman in knee length nighty eating biscotti and drinking Jack D. beside her red jeep with "Angels Watching Over You" paraphernalia all over it.

To her South East:

Australian Gestapo in knee high white socks and black bedroom slippers coming back from racquetball in bullet holed van, he claims the shot we heard last week was a truck backfiring---that explains a surveillance camera he installed last week above his driveway. (he phoned authorities)

His West:

Orange haired oriental woman sweeping the street for five hours (some days longer) not the driveway, not the sidewalk, the street. Upon seeing Australian, she asked where he was going then told him she would miss him. Her tulips died prematurely.

To her West:

Frenchies from Paris who refuse to decivilize themselves by losing their accent. Tall sun wrinkled skin around her fluorescent pink bathing suit, cigarette smiling in its gold attachment on the end, white feather headdress hiding unkempt red hair as she waves "Bye Bye" to her white-haired husband who though retired still leaves every morning in a black suit.

To her North:

Me the white unwed mother installing drywall, who has a huge cactus dump in the yard so my child cries confined in her playpen.

To my West:

Petite Argentinean trims bougainvillea while her daughter sits, smoking in her van, wearing a t-shirt "grow your own dope, plant a man."
Too bad...you were so intelligent.

He is a salad of aphorisms
Who, in hindsight, appreciates
recognized failures
laden with guilt,
only as good as your last day
regret for intention
for passage,
he then advises
to go about
a like and similar course
as if it was all just and valid.

Despite my dismissal
no such thing as too much prosecution
of what he choose, discarded,
betrayed, worshipped,
of what he deceived,
destroyed, tainted,
just because you exist you don't deserve
of what he sacrificed,
wallowed in, loved,
of what he defined as essence...
don't underestimate the value of network and bonding
that which tonight he advised
moved me.

Moved to alter
what defines, what moves,
breath
based upon evaluations.
Regardless of direction (to modification,
to shame, to resentment,
movement to thought,
to capital, to divinity,
movement to question,
to hesitation, to regret,
movement to aspiration,
to conviction, to him or away from him)

him sitting by my winter fire,
him there and me moved.
Still, after all,
I remain, if only for a moment,
moveable.
Faltering View

For tho' from out our bourne of time and place
the flood may bear me far.
--Tennyson “Crossing the Bar”

Her brown wood-frame home towered by mulberrys
is not large, not ornate—
cluttered with brown photographs
black etchings on wall papered walls.

Dusty books ended with stuffed parrots and meadowlarks.
Bulging furniture covered with souvenir silk scarves
draped with hand-crocheted doilies some new, some yellowing.
Stacks of folded quilts new-cut square blocks laid down around rooms.

Cats claw vining window’s glass
keeps the house shrouded, dark to the road
hot with sun lined with sunflowers.

Tucked away at the top of some stairs
is one room of faded funeral flowers.

Processional football absorbs her attention
she does not know who is playing—
a plate of saran wrapped food arrives
she turns off tv to eat.
Wanting Voice

You are much better
at clarifying particulars
of sky reflected in broken glass
beneath this jungle-gym.

Working well there is less to say
when we are finished without noticing
how much we have left.
This double barreled shotgun
cannot not go back
to allow moment
to weigh its importance
of wanting to speak…it wants to.
This pull has it's weaving:

In, out, in

feeling not singular, not this, not here.

Our progressive energy
is to reinvent, scrutinize
movement having itself realized:
that which doesn’t want to be
can’t be wrestled into being
I must come to it as it is far along
but still…

it remains only a version.
Leaving Him in the Rain

We duck under the red awning
For shelter from the unexpected downpour
That has stamped a bruise to our sky.

Its protection tells of ambiguity between us
Pulled by deafening rain from fractured meaning
To distorted oil rainbows on asphalt.

Leaving is more than walking away.
This time is a beautiful baptism
From his elliptical mouth and dark memories.

A riot of gravity moves me to splash
Two-footedly in each puddle I pass.
At the Gym

reading the news monitor after drowning her four youngest in the bathtub
she chased her seven year old around the house and drowned him too.
is anyone else reading this? something isn’t happening, concentration isn’t broken
people are staring at the monitor that reported this information.
miles per hour increasing, running faster to anywhere.
why can’t i get anywhere? sweat trickles from my face,
my lament reveals nothing
except that i am somewhere.
I Would Skip Over the Beginning

i.

when I hear you complain
over mismatched furniture
a certain definition of “problem”
is called into question
as associated with existence beyond furniture.
It is spilling
dark matter
of undiscovered
wind (chimes ring
of invisible)
un-named
things
are still being explained.

There was or is no text
to pass or fail.

ii.

Pacing the circumference of why there is no such thing as too much prosecution
that polishes moonlight or grinds down baby’s-breath,
seeking after reasons of our beliefs by interrogatory means
hope of learning what we know, and have disregarded
by admitting salesmen who sell flies.

Allayed silence allows space to sing;
Looking through voices,
finding in clamor simple strains:
openness is not embarrassing

yes, one absolutely pure thing.
your eyes do not bleed as those of Mary
who cry for sins.
Being instructed not to steal from the dead,
you show one should not steal from living.

iii.

There are ways
of warping when
warranties are only in
the white body,
infested with hair,
on the pot,
reading *Time*.
She sits at the cracked door
listening to ranting
gurgling and expulsion
(a pose for Cindy Sherman).
Two children kept quiet
in bed so he can rise
it was all about his issues
complaints, clients
ways and means committee
all wound up in one.
That bathroom is
still yellow,
reflecting off her
white was bile
she drank
whisking him ham
and thick mayo sandwiches,
chunky milkshakes
made with vanilla ice cream
chocolate syurp
with a touch of vanilla,
watching Merlyn Perkin’s
hours of animal documentaries
or cleaning his glasses
on mornings he was there.
In the yellow sink
listening, non abrasive
whetting stone
what it is to sit at cracks
with wafts floating by.
CHAPTER 3
ADAM-ONDI-AHMAN
this is not the Grand Canyon

returning to Vegas
my painter beloved and I
leave and overheated car
on the freeway’s shoulder.
he still want to observe
Bright Angel Trail’s head.

four miles on foot.
the sunlit moment comes-
cogs mesh, crystallized focus.

he holds me as I look
across miles of tumult –
riot swirls around
below into illimitable –
abandoned stone.

I cannot name familiar smells.
a pleasing vagueness
of musk, plucked feathers
are sunburnedly intensified.
my breath is fruity, starving.

fading light brings illusion:
flattened planes,
surfaces teeter into tints.
distant objects confused
with objects at hand,
the brume blots them out entirely.

he laces his fingers in my hair;
same ferrous oxide blush
as the thickest stratum.
a breeze rouses
follicle bases on my scalp
and touch clusters
everywhere.

we notice a fellow traveler
running to throw his arms
around a tree.
resisting desperately
all efforts of two companions
to pry him loose.
Atmosphere changes to haze,
departing flare of flame,
burning alcazars collapse.
zenith clouds torn by winds
are moon craters,
dove gray they darken.
color recoils from the canyon,
disappears, twilight passes.

If you ever try to paint that, I'll leave you.
Wanting More

you want to know me
you will know me
before it is too late.

What he did remember
is the thought
we are left with.

We have time,
time for grass to brown

unstill pace
filled with pauses
unvarying variety
gives breathy rhythm
of delusional unreliability.

He shows what is not
instead of what is
achieved.
Seeing as he sees
"established ideal,"
ecstasy is depressive,
unspeeding the pace.

Loose summers
lump over the landscape.
Pregnant loop
of liquid puppets
allows
Distillation to take me directions
i like.

Openings come to us,
without being setting it up;

Rendering absence
makes us want more
when something isn’t
as it appears.
Extremes

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part
— M. Drayton

Violating standards of humility
natural hystericalness of pandering
i invite you into this spontaneous landscape.

Evocations that delight in chance events,
eruptions that get you somewhere exotic:
unpatterning of Sicilian blood oranges.

Being involved for it's own sake,
looking for authentic cross fertilization
without invading to become euphemistic
or enemy – we are perpetually against.

Keeping distance from non-signification
embedded in eloquence
of privileged upbringings:
Plentiful life!
Sub-culture

Politics of the mission
are in tight motive
much more than before.
Laying claim to truth of some world
... he can get away with that.

So many issues
to painstakingly talk about

Simple flight progresses past lacquered rosary beads.

Everything is not at the service of furthering
non-deliberate strokes
*twin hearts beat in your temples as you drive me to the bus-stop.*

*I stand*

*amid sagging ponderosa, scratching*  
*the wounded*
*noon sun hasn’t yet dried my brain.*
Communing.

The protection rackets have fallen
chocolate emptiness surrounding with barbed wire  non-center;
hashling *urge urge urge*  
to get across without adoption  of status quo  lashing our eyes
spearing our hands  becoming  overtired
swarming the tangled barrier.
Hulking aspirations insult what is.

*Are you peeling an orange? It’s smell has come way over here;*
*the crowd between us does not wedge*  
some things out
*escape is  insistent*  
connection.
*I ate an orange sometime last week*
*in the corridor rummaging in the darkness it is.*

Without exploitative weapons... *I am right here*
to be stabbed over and over
to lie in blood and piss
remaining outside
cold and shaking.
Swirling Maelstrom

A crazed
hummingbird approaches
this dangling roof feeder
of kitchen made syrup
dyed red
frozen three weeks ago.
It hesitates, hovering
over each plastic flower
sitting on air.
It shrinks as wind
directs flight.
Seeing For Now

Unsweet terrain surfaces as you sleep
with my children on your belly.

We can't be impatient,
it is too short,
unrevealing.
Moments not knowing
why they are they, “they are there,”

you hint
    small degrees.

Baby lotus hands,
he is happy with his adultness.
Things can't get any worse

swirling a salted pretzel
through beer foam
he notes the fleeting track
it makes
before bubbles reunite
leaving no indication a pretzel
had been there
That's how it all goes, isn't it?

A hysteric roar erupts
in the Tounge 'N Groove.
A certain team
scores or does something
most everyone seems
mirthful about.

Cradling his face
stubbled prematurely with gray
unreactive to “teams,”
with minimal rhetorical embellishment
he repeats
things can't get any worse.
He uses his tongue,
fishes out the pretzel floating
chews intently,
to silence his singspiel of defeat.

Tongue 'N Groove resides
in the heart of flailing downtown
where urban euphoria high
should be flourishing.
This lounge is operated
by its third owner this year.
Suburban strip malls
of fine rock facades
are preferred over
dark wood paneling,
auditory ceilings speckled
with gold flourishes
and wooden water wheels.
Things can't get any worse
Paying Attention To What Is Hidden

Days are tough to plan standing at closet doors
Leaning in far as possible -- arms support my frame
Deciding on a multi-purpose outfit.
Weary of what the t-shirt stack foreshadows:
Albertsons, cutting out dead peach tree, mopping,
I randomly shove my hand in the pile to withdraw
His tissue thin one with the green ibis.

This shirt was given to him when he was ten.
His grandmother took him for a day trip to
Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge in Salt Lake.
He said he was excited each time an ibis grazing in a field
Changed with slight turn from chestnut to iridescent.
Across the country when I was ten
My MaMa and I boarded the Methodist Society bus
for a daytrip through West Virginian country.

Her short grey hair, just long enough for a bun,
Was pulled tight enough to make her eyes almond shape.
She told me to take copious notes, scrupulous records,
Of what I saw. I wondered what she meant.
Soon she was shouting Baby cow in tall grass at two o'clock!
Write that down. Or Abandoned bike in ditch
Twelve o'clock! Write that down.

We did not see ibises, white faced and glossy.
No feathers flashing iridescences of pink and green.
Unlike ibises, mud covered gas cans were not companions
To gods, nor were hog strides used as measurement
in building great Nile temples.
Almost home, clutching a crinkled ink-filled notebook
I fell asleep on her lap.

His bird shirt has not fit him in years
He gave it to me to sleep in our first night.
He is now a chemical engineer who reads smoke
In the sky, in his laboratory and in wispy curls
That trail across birthday cake frosting
When the last candle is out. He tells me, smoke
Is made of carbon particles tiny as bacteria –
We ritually slice cold table knives in candle flames
To see how quickly carbon becomes soot.
After learning to read smoke a rapture comes.
I gently rub the material between my thumb and index finger,
Holding the bird t-shirt up to the light
I catch a kaleidoscope of patterns in its fabric
A design to triumph over the dull grid of necessity
That comes with choosing the days clothes.
I pull the t-shirt over my head reminding myself
Not to miss baby cows in the grass at two o’clock.
Come On, Be a Pepper

Safety and comfort guide
Service and support information
Take a moment to familiarize yourself
With the special text messages used
Throughout this guide: home end backspace
Special messages: hint note caution warning
Equipped with several helpful programs
That will aid you in identifying common problems
A virus erases or damages
Signs of being infected include strange characters
Crude statements suddenly appearing
Memory error damage for no apparent reason
Strange response to commands
Sharp decrease in performance or speed
Hundreds of new viruses are created each month
Update the anti-virus tool often:

A child leans against the window
Knowing not to whine
To his mother.
She rifles his hair and slips two fingers
Into a soft hand. There will be
A revolution of rebellion.
The glass will not suspend them.
Unwise Foe

The precedent of the real mocks us.
--Ann Lauterbach "Clamor"

Especially in summertime, windows open,
Insects find entrance to share place with me.
Pen laid down, forgetful of theme,
Bee is from neighboring hills seen earlier –

They are buzzing! Crude black-and-golden scraps
Loops of straightened paperclip wings jitter about.
Swarming after scent trails set out willy-nilly
Through furrows, between grass blades.

Hum of its flight now pleases at intervals during an hour
In all its efforts to find exit through a partly opened casement.
Ready to close up and leave I throw the window wide
Tried to guide then drive it to liberty.

Peaceful hum changed, its darting flight hostile
Alighted on a pendant attached to the ceiling,
Beyond reach of injury or assistance.

Anticipating it dried on the writing table,
I saw it had not paid for its stubbornness.
I a friend offering ransom
This bee wholly failed to discern.
In spite of me, it did not forfeit life.
From prison house to outside air of liberty
It contended.
Uncle Jr.

Cut the chicken’s head off
And it’s body runs
Splattering blood
On his freshly painted
White ladder
Drying in the grass.
Rosebud Fabric

I know who your maker is,
Frayed apron
Warn thin and yellow
In kitchen toil.

You may not remember her
Cutting penny store fabric
Or sewing a pocket on the front
To hold clove gum.

Wearing you when baking
Fried apples or blackberry cake,
Shuffling to the basement
For summer's canned food.

Or teaching her granddaughter
The smell of food done baking.

Though she is gone
I know who your maker is –
So folded in my drawer
Maybe tomorrow you’ll be worn.
Two Narratives: Cumbersome Il Duce

In civilian clothes, stiff upturned collar
Common among the important.
Respectability of one who restored order
Through the virility of his bald head.

In Fall windows remain open
Replacing human smell with outsideness
Sounds clearly distinguishable
To those locked in houses, under heavy sheets beneath heavy bodies of the other.

Black hair on his temples and face shaven
Angled slightly sideways, jutting out from darkness
Shadowy background of Piazza Sansepolcro
Implies non tolerant discipline.
Libro e moschetto, fascista perfetto

My larger than average brother
Held and tickled me
I never laughed. Screaming, thrashing
Not caring what was hit or hurt,
This freed a rage to crack
His face, that emotion backing me.

He stopped for awhile,
Learned to get up when I said
I'm serious, please
I hate that asking.

Pensive, prominent forehead, sharp jaw,
Continuous line from head to neck
Underlining a perfectly spherical cranium.

I will never be big enough
Not to have to ask to be under.
It is a condition those close learn.
He is six feet nine inches now,
We seldom play.

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On a gold chain around his neck a plaque
Order of the Annunziata where the knot of a tie would be.
*Se avanza seguiemi, se indietreggio uccidetemi.*

Thin, a stomach ulcer, his paternal image topped pyres –
This image on the nightstand,
Framed dictator.

Layers of dust settle.
When will the unmade bed be smiled upon?
It leaves only its departure,
The covers, though, are warm.
Farfalla

I adore that word
For what it releases.
Butterfly. Vanessa is Greek
For butterfly.

West Virginia family farm
Has a particular bush that was the
Beautiful butterfly siren.
They flocked there.
I thought it was the bush.

My PaPa explained, no princess,
you see those butterflies, they spend
a majority of their lives fluttering, yes free,
but by themselves. So, they flock
to the chance to gather at that bush
and tell the stories of their wings.

I wasn’t able to follow any one
To see what its story was.
Why, when I have humanity,
Covet such fluttering.
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