

5-1-2013

## Samsara

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.34917/4478190>

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SAMSARA

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May 2013



## THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

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entitled

Samsara

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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**May 2013**

## Abstract

My creative dissertation is my debut collection of poetry, *Samsara* (Noemi Press, 2012), in which I use a broad poetic palette to create a spiritual, historical, and ecstatic lens through which to view art, war, feminism, religion, and the body in extremity. The ambition of this collection is deliberately broad and far-reaching, and it has been from the beginning a process of discovery through the materiality of language.

The word "Saṃsāra" refers to the Buddhist and Hindu concepts of reincarnation, and the wheel of death and rebirth. Its etymology and origin means "he flows into himself," meaning to perpetually wander, to pass through states of existence. *Samsara* expands on this idea of wandering both thematically and through formal experiment, exploring transience and trauma across cultures, including Muslim, Christian, and Judaic notions of spirituality. Bosnia, Iowa, Boston, and Prague are all settings for these poems. The poems enact an ontological claim through the spiritual recycling of images (e.g., haloes, rainbows, babies) throughout the book: ultimately, nothing ever dies, everything returns eternally.

The poem "Sojourner" in particular occupies this liminal space within the lyric tradition: in the poem, a woman undergoes an abortion and speaks to her unborn child, choosing to send it back to wander in the bardo, "Come back to me another day." I feel strongly about taking on this topic, and in a way that diverges from other poems about abortion. There are many contemporary books of poetry about the experience of pregnancy and motherhood, but very few about having an abortion. On the one hand, this surge in writing about motherhood is positive in that the subject has been deemed too trivial to write about, a "woman's" subject. On the other hand, these books reify a

broader cultural fetishization of the pregnant body visible in the media's obsession with finding every celebrity's "baby bump". In light of this cultural trend that works to the exclusion of women who are not mothers (either by choice or necessity), I believe the experience of abortion ought to be written about more. One might even argue that this trend of writing about motherhood and pregnancy -- which may appear feminist on the surface -- is actually just another way to reduce women to their bodies.

The debate about abortion needs to move from reductive and inaccurate terms such as "choice" and "life" to a more subtle exploration of the actual experience of women who have had an abortion. To believe that this debate will ever move in such a direction is hopelessly naive; yet I believe that poetry is the place where we can and must examine and defy the conventions of the culture at large. My defiance takes the form of approaching the subject from a spiritual perspective. The speaker senses the presence of a spirit within her, feels love for him or her, but still knows there's no other "choice" but to turn that spirit away. The speaker sends the spirit of the baby back into the bardo to "wander" but with great reluctance and grief.

However pivotal "Sojourner" might be in my conception of *Samsara*, the book is not "about" abortion but an engagement with language. *Samsara's* "wandering" operates within the forms of the poems. Experiments in poetic form are exploratory and the collection is fueled by curiosity and the desire for expansion as it breaks open traditional, closed, patriarchal poetic forms such as the sonnet, and follows the call of the open page. The unifying strategy of the book is experimentation.

I read widely and voraciously while writing this book. As a poet, I am nomadic and while not exactly an exile, not exactly at home either. I do not put myself in any

"school." Part of the beauty of first books is to show the poet's imagination in a state of growth, discovery, and reaching, organic and uncrystallized. Yet if I had to narrow down my influences I would note DADA, surrealism, L-A-N-G-U-G-E poetry, some of the so-called confessional poets such as Sylvia Plath and John Berryman, and the mother of modern poetry Emily Dickinson. I see Plath and Berryman as poets who knew their craft, not blubbery and self-indulgent neurotics as the term "confessional" suggests. Dickinson inspired some of the poems of encounter with the Other such as "Crayon Savant". Part of my process is to make lists of words that I like the sound of -- I happened to like a lot of Dickinson's vocabulary and stole words like ermine and anodyne. Writing for me is akin to painting; words are the materials I use to make a poem. If self-expression occurs, it is a byproduct of my craft. As Mallarme said, "Poems are made from words, not ideas."

The personal is political, and the voice in my poems frequently issues from a working class register and speaks with rebellious power from a place of powerlessness: "E-bay nirvana, you want me to yes sir/I'll get on it." In this poem "Buddha Vibrator" I (dis)place the Buddha in a porn shop and in doing so question the commercialization of spirituality and trouble its waters with feminine desire. The aggression of many of the poems is meant to break the feminine norm of sweet silence and the bourgeois norm of polite sadism. For example, in "'Hysteria with Hummer" -- "I threw a navy" -- is aimed at a patriarchy and capitalism whose children "wave mickey mouse sparklers." It hits its target.

Confrontation is usually the province of men. It is honest and open, while women often have to resort to subterfuge. Women today speak not just for themselves

but for all the women before them who could not. For me personally, this is my mother, as it was for the Baroness von Freytag, who chose to confront her father directly and physically about his abuse of herself, her mother, and siblings. He almost strangled her to death in front of her stepmother as a result of this confrontation. Thus she revealed him for what he was: a brutish tyrant. Although she loved her mother, she refused her to live like her -- in silence and in deference to her husband. Critics see the Baroness' family dynamic as key to her aggressive and shocking performance art and poetry. I would put the Baroness in my poetic "family."

I voice political concerns openly in poems such as "We Will Continue to Attack" a quote borrowed from Donald Rumsfeld. This was his frequent and grossly mechanical response during the second Iraq war whenever he was questioned about strategy or anything at all. The theme of large-scale war, the battle between the sexes, and still-life collide in "Hysteria with Hummer." Hummer could refer to the vehicle or a blow job; both involve power plays, the former unnecessarily so as why on earth would anyone need to drive a Hummer in the United States? Especially when the wars being fought involve oil and such large vehicles -- meant for war zones not America's roads and highways -- guzzle gas? "Hysteria" is a word coined by Hippocrates for any kind of illness that he believed issued from the womb and birth canal. By the early twentieth century, it was a term applied to women for what doctors perceived as an irrational emotionalism. Later, it was rebranded as neurasthenia in soldiers in World War I; now we would call it Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Septum's is a character in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* whose mad rantings often contain poetic truths such as in "Trees are alive." I say poetic because this statement is so obvious but as he stutters it in a park

amidst the bustling streets of London, it seems insane and out of place within the realm of communicative discourse like the chit chat his wife expects from him. However, Septimus' ecstatic statement is not mad but sane. This fragment is shored against the ruins of current wars, a call for an eco-poetics at the end of this poem.

The theme of still-life runs throughout the book from ekphrastic poems like "Judging Vermeer" to the mixing of still-life titles with the theme of abortion in poems such as "Pregnant with White Noise" to the placement of still-life motifs such as the hourglass in other poems. The politics of art is clearest in "Judging Vermeer." In this poem, I examine the Dutch master and the Golden Age that created a safe haven from war which allowed him to paint idyllic domestic scenes at the expense of all of the countries the Dutch colonized during this time. This is not unlike the position of any first world country today, and yet without this peace how could we create art? Art and politics mingle in other ways. In "Red on Maroon," Rothko's refusal to sell his paintings to the highest bidder because he rejected the commodification of his art is political. In "Hocking St. Theresa" Bernini's choice to paint St. Theresa in what appears to be the throes of orgasm is political, and so forth.

There is something grotesquely beautiful about St. Theresa's distorted face. Likewise, in aggression, ugliness, and the grotesque all have their rightful place in *Samsara* and form a counterweight to some of the quieter poems like "Changeling" and "Devotional". This "aggression" is a way for me to critique the "feminine" norm – the speakers in these poems are trying to not just break free from *Samsāra*, but from societal restrictions on women's behavior and expression by mixing high diction with low, eloquence with obscenities, and invective with prayers. I believe anger is often the only

healthy response to oppression, particularly in the case of class or economic privilege, where the oppression is so often invisible to those who have the privilege and unspoken by those robbed of the means to speak. With *Samsara*, I hope to make the invisible visible and invite the possibility of transformation within the poem through the power of the imagination.

**SAMSARA**  
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“Hey stranger, will you wander off with me?”

~ Anonymous Blogger

The butcher wraps the stars in newspaper  
The young woman offers her breast through prison bars  
How many have sailed beneath this shuddering arc?  
Maybe the nomads have welcomed the children into the ocean  
Last prediction of aborted clarion  
Mouthing serpents  
My belly dreams a buoy  
Worshipping, that's the most potent  
You'll find a chirping stone that won't shut up  
Stoke the pollen, burnish the constellations  
My tongue fevers yours into  
A boat looks away, blushing  
It's sunny in the angel brains  
The babies of the dead have had their incubators turned on

**I.**

## FASHION REPORT

Women are seen about town wearing nothing but butterflies. They braid each other's hair by carousel pool, while sleek heads emerge like seals and descend again. Women are seen yet twined with flower beds, crumbling crowns. They ride these streaks of flashlight, question mark. They lean over balconies above canopy city, blinking red as answering machines. Many of the women are bullfight, with eyelets that resemble little girls. Many are diaphanous or re-embroidered. One of the most marshmallow (top right) was worn by everyone, including the master kitemaker.

WOMEN IN THE TREES

The ones you say aren't there. Abattoir

on fire, crimson waves *too long under we*  
*pucker*

Papillon greening. As they preen their machinery—

Into your mouth the leaves, what's left is  
this: the serene bodies falling back into place, legs  
lifting to

petal the air

## RIPE ORANGE

Ripe orange, you ripe orange you, sitting at a table in a bar in prague, there are naked people on the walls, cartoons of naked people on the walls, and one shows a man running naked in the desert with his ass blown off, bloody, running while above him there is a man in a plane with a shotgun, and you are drunk, you ripe orange you, wearing a black wool see-through shirt with a black lace bra you are complaining about your housemate's sexual advances and jorge, sexually advancing asks why don't you try being less sexy you ripe orange, you remind me of a ripe orange, and he takes your phone number and programs it into his phone as *ripe orange*, and when you text message him you say you are ready to be squeezed, your breasts hurt, it is that time of month when your skin is sensitive, you try being less sexy and instead you become tactile, your hands approaching his on the table in marquis de sade, a bar that used to be a brothel, and your hands advancing sexually, tactile, towards him, you are like the czech girls, so tactile, and he is like jorge, he is more than jorge being a clockwork jorge, like clockwork and like oranges, ripe, ripening in his mouth.

## CARTWHEEL GALAXY

The thirteen colors of horses.

Wet mitten. Siren. Cut grass. Snow caught on an eyelash.  
Studded whip. Pink half-moon of a baby's fingernail.  
Sleep veering into the guardrail. Too many Klonopin.  
Bare foot on a dead mouse. Gush. Dry hump  
with eyes crossed. Cornfield

meteors called comets after the Latin *comēs*,

piss across the sky, and is it this that will survive?

Hair covering our bodies, cut free from morning, skinned relay's coding-coating?

Bright shadow, could you carry the caravel that carries me? Your sea:  
a bestiary of white. Lightning

swims. Coos rainbows dim, star bellies that say *come cartwheel galaxy!*  
You tore through me to make new violet.

SATELLITE GARDEN

Nimbus ripening.

Missile minuet, he said.

And I, the masseuse of his *cut the thorns off Martha Stewart style* genius.

Arose a slinky stair we did it with the butcher.

O'Hare and afterword, the sun's lips were damp.

We kept getting up and number his was.

The war to my piece.

The torn to my dicey.

The star to my mink.

Mine pie, mine one lies strewn machete.

Cuticle two the center, hold it.

Maladroit-mistreating every o ink of meaty, his was gods o my nuptials of flies  
in the satellite garden.

## ROSES

Roses that smell like the ginkgo tree, the female ginkgo tree that produces a rotten smell to attract the male tree although trees do not have legs, do not move, yet somehow reproduce, some of the roses smell like this, but others smell good you know like roses should smell, rose-scented, pink, red, and yellow roses that sometimes smell like the sex of the ginkgo tree but mostly smell like roses, in the summer, in the evening, the park is like a cemetery, it has that feeling, and that smell, the smell of rancid butter, the smell of the sex of the ginkgo tree, the roses are blooming and some are wilting, some have yet to open, and there is a giant egg made of stone and a sign that says do not lean on the sculpture or sit on it either, and this egg is in the middle of three other stone sculptures with an indent in which the egg would fit perfectly and these are arranged around the egg in a circle, and inside of this we sit and talk and our voices echo, we talk about mosquitoes and encephalitis and death, the roses go on doing what roses do and the smell of the sex of the ginkgo tree permeates the air, everywhere the roses are.



## SOJOURNER

Hosannas and signatures, sweetheart,  
*womb-breath, first star, vacuum cleaner, blood--*  
Come back to me another day, you too good  
tears in the middle of winter in the parking lot.  
That was while you were here, alive; I want  
you to leave I said. Sojourner, you stood  
alone: picture of a leg in a leg warmer. Tight little bud,  
you stood again outside, unsteady as a newborn calf, and wet.

Unspoken, undone, underground. Only then could I call you  
*dear one, dream-wave, sundial.* Little hiccup,  
I cooed. I asked  
you to begin again the journey you  
thought this lap  
had ended. I want you to live I said.

## LICHEN

You turn towards the hand that hits you.  
A slug inches down your legs, paints

a fragile red, soaks the carpet.  
What I want is irrelevant.

By the murky Charles, cars  
flare, horns fly. If her hair

would grow long again, she'd  
gain weight. For

years she didn't wear glasses,  
preferring blindness. The colors

had names. It was  
a burgeoning. In the encyclopedia

she looks up lichen: a slow growing  
green moss on rocks. Or was it red?

A boy with a girl's name whispers  
*virgin runt* into her ear

as she sits on the auditorium bleachers  
during chorus. She can't sing,

suicidal in a deliberate way  
like walking a tightrope with the Bible

balanced on her head until an angel  
breathes into her, moves through her, is

a carousel. In a basement apartment,  
a woman eats a pound of raw meat. There's

something she has to  
attend to. Things born

with certain proclivities, like falling. Or opening  
like an airplane. Is there

a name for this, something written  
down somewhere?

she asked and the air  
became light as if newborn.

## SCULPTURE

are you the girl who slapped my ass in the library  
the one who opened my car door unpeeled me are  
you the one whose breasts graze mine in certain  
ports who catches apples with nets above the ocean girl shorn blue who  
bangs against my window who comes in through the sun  
a now and again explosion girl lying rosehips girl under clingstone snow  
girl on a bicycle green even in winter girl of the serene lollipop  
chopsticks in her hair swear to me before this chrysalis star you are  
bituminous shadow the one I'll follow

## ITINERARY

in the palm of night: a glass cathedral

the archer: blond ambrosial

target: rolling green

laughter: ought to be drunk

flare: reaching for his hand

verboten: a red X over, snarling bulldogs

question: who are those women in the trees

order: cleave, tighten, release

fear: getting caught in his serene machinery

surrender: her delirious her delirious

myth: he was sucked into the sky  
she pulled a string to get inside

SIMON SAYS

Play

a child on a fringe of orchid.

Play

a sailor in Beatrice lace.

Play  
a face.

Say

*tiara, tiara me, tiara over.*

Say

a “muse” in this mildewed notebook.

Say tremolo, scalpel.

Repeat *until*.

The face shed its pages of harps.

## ESTRANGED BLUSHING

Someone else conducts the snow. And the debris marries—

A city of light, an anemone  
glowing underwater.

I call on the caller the one who brought me here I want a more  
entire

he answers: circling my breast with one finger,  
outlining the nipple.

Look up, he says. We're in the picture. Dunes  
swallowing the sun we move into

## FAIRY TALE

Then a bird waltzed out of the cuckoo clock in her piled-up hair.

Soon I stood under a tiny antler.

There I saw the king in starry gallop and manic crown, lean down to lop off deer heads.

Scarsely hundreds of children waving mickey mouse sparklers.

**II.**

TO HAVE AND TO

Cigarette the contours of her taut. Potting the hand, dragonet redundant.

If an airplane disappears on the sinking map's lost horizon. If a dissident chessboard wing's curve oceanic stamen.

Pretend you're a capital letter with your arms out to scare the cameras.

...Bullet after bullet: breathe without a straight jacket that shits (intelligent) mirages billowing water.

No match from Mars – collapsed jugs. No gathering from Venetian crevices. No wham. No blind bam knees. No dandling crystal. Dials studded cheeks. Or three hammered stallions.

No fist noosed the air.

*The hand, cursive Aristophanes.*

*Swimming in the higgledy-piggledy rouged enamel.*

*Myopic hum of a skirt.*

*Cresting saints' warts lanced.*

Said by Wilhelmina: all sex is a neologism.

A tidal, ripped script.

Pink scissors: ballet convulsively before seeding. Tattooing a virgin, de facto. Coring the apple.

Qatar petals but all snouts. On the accelerated morpheme whispering stars.

In slices the deaf marijuana. Wet violet. Shed an insulted flare in the shape of an antler. You bet. On the mnemonic divan.

See the gladiator of parenthesis?

Clumsy Mona Lisa tits. Snow globe bowlers. Swigging hips. Money is born in the descending sonar. Dysentery in boxer's rounds. Nervous chaos. The High Priestess proffering war. The loins of angels mix with the angle of the butcher's knife. Disturbance for the urbane. Search researched. Communal farts. Rude gamine. Antecedent lingering. Lingering. Delusions about what we marketed in Faluja. Never a question mark but, less often, an exclamation of body count. No explanation.

*Margaret with both hands*

*Float away swaddled alphabet*

## INFIDEL ECHOES

Violin and bitten, from *chaste* to *chase*,  
lied again to lie again with him.  
Chapeled in chairs, Čert the devil in Czech.  
Where were we then...location

and locomotion, broken broken broken  
on my tongue. Left dumb and lusty.  
Where were we then? Hummed a halo,  
goodbyes good angel, cleft palate, hello.

Violet apples, tried *to hell with it*, spit  
colors, splayed dollhouse, rolled votive  
surfeit and counterfeit, surfeit and –  
Where were we then? Red meridian

unhanded, blue variant, vervain where  
blossoms *rain* into *ran*, blitzkrieg where

RED ON MAROON

*After Rothko*

I started like the masters and skinned  
my rabbit blue. A live burial  
on canvas, they called it. A chapel,  
a one man show, an empty gym

where the fat ate caviar. No, Seagram's,  
Four Seasons, no. Red on Maroon  
won't take your money. The subway  
became my only audience and muse.

I turned to Texas oil. I burned my lungs  
to shit. My marriage collapsed, an artery  
clogged, a heart so full of color, swung  
onto the operating table. I cut it out

to show how blood's underbelly's black.  
The rainbow I chewed up and then I spit it back.

PREGNANT WITH WHITE NOISE

T  
iptoe  
medici  
ne

Munk

punched

cream

umbrella

a  
calend  
ar  
pumme  
ls

apples

at

my

head

I am a net  
meant to catch every color

## EPITHET

You silkworm garden. You locust come forth. Scherzo, lucre, typo, zapruder. Everything I have I don't? Want to top you off? No, smoochy eyetooth. Flashlight / called *whir*. Touch could be *ouch* in my dictionary. Muddy kiss and weigh the flesh. / Here's to *tutu* and *tata*, fruit loops and the wire-haired! We went which way, we bent / at the sea. Please pull the clouds over my body. Why are you always?

## MIS-EN-SCÈNE

That's easy,  
he said. Licked three fingers, bent back to wrist.  
All the way to where I was Beth, in grass light, retch.  
In bikini in smorgasbord in mise-en-scène.

I sent pale tires, bacon bits, mildew. I fed  
her from a dropper like a bird. She locked  
like airports, bolted like rawhide. Wouldn't let.  
Even if cellar, even if lawn ornament embossed

her pilot, flicker goat. I tripped we were home,  
not flood or umpire. I tripped we were plugged  
runway, shine package, salvaged hymn.  
Shrub who bared the sharpest fang.

## CORONA DISCHARGE

Or sucked and wrung saint blood out,  
hung her dimpled on the back  
of sutra bastard's front door. What root  
takes hold in plaster, Shedrack,

or roof opens for trumpet head to pop,  
or woof woof goes colonel wolf. Tell me  
about fire. Jinxed labia, raven rock.  
I know how lethal bicycles can be.

Teflon can kill. Holes in the ozone  
are lassoes thrown from curvy stars  
that don't care about my stolen  
heart gone peekaboo on bumper cars,

her razor tits, her B.O. pussy wormed,  
or yours (shitlace) either, even if it burns.

ONLY BALLERINAS

My abstinence from anger

Imagined

only ballerinas kicking around

a mushroom cloud as you spoke

Played  
silent  
host to  
a  
narciss  
i

Starring in his own gory porno

a new accomplice?

you've changed

your  
coat

smells

like vodka.

No shower in days.

VETO BODICE

Blamed you for the lip

works from a frost-bit

broke  
off, a  
reprise  
of fire-

Tree we still

exist my majig sayz  
zero

## BUDDHA VIBRATOR

Will hot air balloons do it? Fur  
in the closet? Higher self made-  
to-order, buddha vibrator. E-bay  
nirvana, you want me to yes sir

I'll get on it. Hobby horse, little  
girl who gave them all away. My  
mother bought me the models,  
a black Cabbage Patch, fly

swatting lessons. I went round  
the world in one minute. Barbie's  
bathtub filled with iodine clowns,  
bubble gum tiaras on a plastic sea.

I may be coronated or kicked out  
of Narnia, box cutter queen of an hour.

## ALBINO STYX

Bunny and scotch, six bucks  
for a handful of tokens. Back  
porn room, jack splashed on the floor  
like a milk balloon broke. Where

are those babies who used to watch  
as they climbed the T.V. tower  
with one hand slingshot and latch?  
They fell off. I miss their acid

lullabies, their G-spot certainty.  
To come to this: crushed tomato  
embryo the dog scarfed up before we  
knew what it was. How sad albino

styx, and nine to then, let's Reisling heaven  
or turn heathen when you spindle me into gold.

CRAYON SAVANT

I drew a cashmere bath for the crayon

savant

He said I do

how do you?

I said

PSHAW

He took my freckled

kite

below  
the  
sea.

I took his gooey

light

into  
a

bestiary.

Each shrub

I pruned

until

BALLOON

then cut it free

A flea bit you  
then me  
and we were  
that flea.

Have a nice day.

Okay,

Donne.

I died, balled in a sock.

LAMAZE WITH STILL LIFE

anodyne lullabies

a c  
 r  
 o  
 w d o f  
 s w e a t i n g  
 m i s t a k  
 e  
 s

Picked  
 from between  
 my teeth: a  
 parade

of pubes. Dilated all the clocks  
 and did Lamaze with still life.  
 Nothing came

by five

Cufflinks

you to me insured umbilical

long

So

STORY OF THE EAR

snowb  
alls pelted  
o  
ur  
bluepri  
nts

t  
o

t a b l e au to

mel

to gold

Ring ring it

goes

WHAT

are you?

Van Gogh

ate paint

I  
picked  
luck  
like  
glue

bandages

T  
he  
clock

KNIGHT

a sun

errant hair  
from

aureole

Tore  
us

## BOOBY TRAP

I napped in a down closet, a Bolshevik  
nosegay folded in prayer across the middle  
of my crammed chest. I was a booby  
trap meant for all the lathed boffos, thimble

receipts blocking a tiny vellum telescope.  
A coat of many crayons. I was bogus,  
and he knew it, like he knew how hope  
was little more than antifreeze in an old

jalopy. But he wanted me to oracle eye  
his dreams, a job with health insurance,  
the esteem of his people. I diademed  
his wife instead. We were two rank

porcupines, nudging closer until our soft  
bellies touched. Until she lanced my heart.

HOCKING ST. THERESA  
*After Bernini*

I tried to pawn our faces

.....driz  
zled crepe

.....blea  
ched anus

.....her mouth

.....snowed

open.....her writhing

dress.....a Godly

.....migra.....ine.....

.....text-

.....mess.....aged

*pussy*.....drunkdiald.....  
``

*release*.....le

vit

ate.....there we

are,,,,,,,,,,,,,sunk.....in the saint's mimosa

REBOUND

t  
he  
dusk  
had  
waited  
long

chewed its fingers down to pink  
blotted razor nicks with toilet paper

c o c h I n e a l f l e c k  
s  
v I o l e t b u c k e  
ts

threaded red

You  
shot a  
rubber



### **III.**

JUDGING VERMEER (A DOCUMENTARY VIDEO), 2004

If you were the judge standing before the Bosnian man accused of ordering a man to cut the testicles off another, if you were the judge how would you shield yourself from the knowledge that the man who acted on orders went crazy and the other died,

Girl with a Pearl Earring (1665-66): Is not a genre, is not a drunken girl or a greedy girl, but a girl whose eyes meet yours.

If you were the judge pulling on your robes in your private chamber, a vase of red tulips on your desk,

Woman Holding a Balance (1662-4): The light (of consciousness?) caresses her swollen belly. She weighs it. It is your favorite because you say *light is as intangible as justice*.

You say *those who are killed are killed twice*,

The man accused looks directly into the surveillance camera.

View from Tango Two (Dutch Army Observation Post in Bosnia): Green grass and orange flowers swathed in sun. Christians on one side and Muslims on the other but they can't see each other. And you can't see them in the picture. *You can't see the war but it's there*.

If you were the judge say *Vermeer invented peace*, and how, to hold the world at bay, the map of Holland looks like a lion behind the

Girl with a Red Hat (1665-6): In her eyes there are no lions.

View of Delft (1660-1): Vermeer's windows were knocked out when the armory exploded and destroyed the better view of Delft, so here we are at the back door. If you were the artist say *and poor, the war broke his peace* and died alone.

TANGO! TANGO!

Lava and skyscraper,  
pray me an elevator. Hungering

ascension. Caesura! Caesura!

Come down now, growling  
new intelligence,

and hook my name to sleep.

As if everything would sharpen, which is  
uncertain,

unravel me.

ORACLE

Shaking        it said “yes, in the new millennium”

                 it said “no, no, a thousand times no”

Booming Crystal        ball: no

                 we won’t        Shake the Oracle

We’ll Smack Its Space Head

Bury this ringing        Sea

                 kaleidoscopic with her own whispered

mountain        antheap        shifting        samsara

                 heat

                 “callow lightning: fallow yields”        precocious

carnival        is your zeitgeist an earthquake?

                 your news a noose?

                 swinging a slender hour

                                 glass

                                 sands of letters

                                 pour steamy

                                 lines

                 no cover

                 no spine

                 what order?

VANITAS PICTURES

*After the VMFA exhibition, (2000)*

Kissing suns impassible.

I walked on my own.

White as intaglio.

A child's skates hung on the threshold.

How many fingers have flowered on the veil?

Or checkered jesters skulls roll?

Re-pulsed, two clocks once in sync fallout.

Or repaired banana skins and oranges.

Lost in yellow baths of butter and fat.

Out of pig hides come caskets filled with light.

“The very essence of the piece is to decompose.”

The faces of the dead Swiss are blurry as yours.



## WE WILL CONTINUE TO ATTACK<sup>1</sup>

Toss of the dice,  
barricuda tits. Pushed down  
into holy mountains. Moss  
creeps over timbrel  
feet, our murderous green.  
Pits filled with G cleft. Slit  
the hours. If you continue to apply pressure to  
say *tenderloin of clouds*, we will have to stop.  
Lock arched hearts and leaf. See  
the other in mottled marble  
noonday *run*. Louder. Two shots  
of sun, down, dawner.  
Trammel glow in cathedrals  
swirl in blues and greens  
we catch as catch, soup cans  
knotting intestines in sand storms.  
Red rover, red rover, send it, it, it.  
Latch bit the outside lip and I threw up rosebuds.

---

<sup>1</sup> Quote borrowed from Donald Rumsfeld.

BLUE COCKPIT

a  
sailor  
almost  
drowne  
d

spread now like Denmark

upon a rock

A mermaid

with her tongue cut out

Shovels didn't shout

HYSTERIA WITH HUMMER

I threw a navy

Tree are alive, Septimus said

MUIR

*For the sailors*

Hunger in my mouth like the pit  
of a plum. My turtle turned on.  
Clawfooted or foxed, lightspit –  
I hit my head on the moon's bow,

went under. You were there,  
an actor in a sharksuit. Trailing a fin  
swathed in kelp and coral. Muir  
along the starry floor and aspirin,

provocateur of lunar conservation.  
Haven me from the sizzling black  
of mating snakes. Heaven on the ocean  
is hell, a puddle of oil. A teething of blond

heads or tails up, braid me with pig gut and murmur.  
My rainbow broke or else I'm snow. Muir –

MOBILE

I awoke to snow outside the train window.

Could I reach up like a toddler in her crib and send it spinning in another direction?

Could I put my hand through glass and touch your face?

In the marketplace, dead birds hung like Dutch still lifes. And my tongue

to a rusted nail; the only one getting laid. Later, we went to a  
concert. There was a boy

whose name I forget and Jessica in red hot pants and high-heeled boots. He had bought

them for her. She had been a stripper and this put a scent on her the boys would follow.

I sat composed before the harps,

but wearing you, electric.

You would follow  
too,

if you

could, finger paint with her menses. I would lose, but this is before

I knew I would lose

myself in your thick brood.

## STAMPEDE

I watch the stars through the window in my ceiling.  
They move like herds of elephants across the sky.

The New York Times reports that elephants are going  
crazy.

Are the stars going crazy? Here, eat one. It tastes like chicken.  
Sorry, is that  
too obvious and cute? Ok, it tastes like elephant. It tastes like the bloody tusks of  
you without you

in the ground. Even when the tusks  
are gone, I return to this spot to nuzzle

your bones. The elders

are gone, and young males rampage through the village,  
trumpeting like apocalypse and

upsetting the occasional fruit cart.

WAKE

My medusa head is heavy.

Even after yanking  
a few snakes from their  
concrete moorings, even after  
they

make a swimming halo. Stain of lipstick, red streak

speeding cars leave in  
their wake. Tiara of electric

sperm

fl  
o w  
e r i n g i  
n t o f  
i l a m e  
n  
t

Why do they call it a wake anyway, when the dead are laid  
out like they're sleeping? Is it because

the elephant on my shoulders hollowed and blew into a hot air balloon rising above the corn  
fields?

Or that I've grown long velvet, unicorn on a string?

Roses are spilling out of the toilet.

The house I played pony in went giddy up and gone to dust.

## BARGAIN

If you fret the showerhead. I'll slide down  
the banister. If you glint  
a broken window. I'll  
kiss the inside of your wrist. If you  
snot out the nose like noodles. I'll  
watch the ocean take you,  
each wave lapping your face  
less alive, like ants  
take a sandwich piece by piece. If you  
lair. I'll repair  
the broken aviator. If you  
surgery. I'll painkiller.  
If you canary. I'll play nice  
at recess. If you zipper  
caught my wrist. Bang bang,  
you're it. Blue  
tug the groin I'll make  
an angel if you'll be the snow.

## A GOOD DEATH

Will you unmarry me? Cut this ring  
from my finger as they will years from now  
as I'm wheeled through the inevitable, sing  
it open (pincer) and into a plastic baggie? Snow

falls on the first day of the new year.  
A good death, the Chinese say. Peak me  
into the windows of dark Victorians, sere  
me on the porch covered with leaves, dear.

Opera wafts from your office like the promise  
of cookies. All I want is your *no*, trapeze hooker,  
not your stand-me-ups as baffling as poems. Once:  
salsa lessons. Twice: a presidential debate. Alligator

boots aside, kiss me into an anodyne pool  
beneath the fox head. I'll caw like the Twinkie girls  
in my LSD classroom, power-points full  
of skeletons, *caw caw* in their best Allen Ginsberg.

## REMAINDER

Shit very faint like someone  
humming in the next room.  
Drawers full of girdles, tumbled  
jelly fish, a clear albumen,

tentacles (the rubber straps) stretched  
to hold in her fat. Drawers full of match-  
boxes, sugar packets from McDonalds, tin foil.  
I'm caught, ashore, in a doll's cradle.

My arms and legs spill out like fizz  
or the wave's tinsel foam. What gives?  
I try poodle bank of pennies, loose  
railing that broke her fall. I try plastic lips.

It's her red felt slippers I fit. I fit the grey cape,  
mink stole, oxygen tank, army cot, blistered paint.

## REMAINDER

Drawers full of maxi pads, gloves, one red leather, one black, elbow-length. A letter from the Christian Children's fund *you've saved a child from hunger*. I hear you wrote to her

for a month, then took up a butterfly garden, Beatrix Potter book, a plastic wrapped puzzle, yellow bicycle reflectors, a diamond. A found artist? Or just yourself an orphan?

A raven in your belly. At seven, you spent a week hungry and gained hundreds of pounds, lost your mother to the flu, your father to bent figure and the remainder surrounds

me like an ocean. Glittering debris of a life like an island floats. Sneeze.

## SKY CATHEDRAL

Purring rupture, I trip,  
no-one beside, so we're silent.  
A few-crowned shiny floor dances and dogs,  
to the sky cathedral go  
icy pews, kneel  
stars, dogs and snow  
transactions burning  
our mouths, a litter of tulips, undulant, tipsy  
towering hours hours hours  
and hours, green serene  
bolts, fluttering, nipping  
naked shoulders. And one  
furred palimpsest, lying,  
unmoving, eyes open,  
altar/Ring –  
Dare I touch it?  
Ask first.  
May I touch it?  
Repair the rented rainbow? Re-pair  
what was bold with what,  
now shallow, limp, sickened,  
puddles at my feet?

## CAPTURE

To hunt underground, pregnant, snow uncertain.

I try to look away from your. Capture apple trees sprouting from cliff-edge.

Or is it the librarian? A girl in a blouse of *hot blast*.

A girl in the last pew.

None of the mutterings archived. Silk slips flying off the line.

Uncover capture with snouts of *who did this* and kiss *yes*.

The orchard of *two tethered the stars*. The cycle of pig gut?

To graze your body in the *no place like* where there were waterfalls once.

Mouth to mouth with it.

In silver cages singing arrows.

I dimly see *the many* scraping their brains against the rainbow.

Hooves, cinnabar, stalactites, chancre.

It sleeps, a pearly film stealing over its eyes.

Whether I say *love* or whether I say *love*.

It sleeps.

Above, at the top, at the trough, I ate it all—

## CHANGELING

Never mind your division      loosen

Moon-full and wrestle, boots too small,  
with dog lilies

Backwards hilt of what was  
parched, could braid

All that marries insoluble (turn towards it)

Turn: “you didn’t call” or “to announce”  
Turn: “without proof” or “thrown away”

Come once more to the      pour “but I can’t see”  
onto your hair

Pour it on your tongue let the hive shimmer  
Pour the doorway, unlaced keyhole –

put your ear to it,  
bleat what’s not what’s not (hear it?)

Puff of air as one  
sniffing from the other side, shifts

her armor (it sounds like) the making  
of a tourniquet or amulet.

## DEVOTIONAL

And so we nail. How to hold  
peeling off. How to hold

off finished. How to slake  
our thirst for thirst.

Cradling sounds unvanquished,  
solo prowess at the tip.

Wing: flaking nomenclature.  
Wing: what would not shut up.

Oh cease your circling,  
tarry awhile in the soil.

Unveil your guilt blush,  
turn us turn us turn us.

## INSIDE THE SNOW

Submerged, nobody's exit. Honeyed  
retreat; shouts what's there, then sound it sleep's  
echo. The inner ear spirals, or redeemed, where  
a staircase is all that's left of my equilibrium.  
A swollen engine questions repair, slipping  
its tongue in. I hear the creak  
of organs unlatching, sockets  
thickening, harps limping forward though  
lopsided, swervy with the planet's tilt.

Apples are revolving buildings, bite hard. Groping  
for the pillow, you'll find a window: some salvaged  
cradle tips and breaks the glass. Look out through  
the jagged. Shining lawn. The engines  
are still rubbing their metal parts  
against metal. Do you want  
to be one of them? Detachable. Glass  
ringlets posy around their fringed lashes.  
They touch eye to eye and shatter.

What do we do but falter? And bark and scratch  
and claw our way into each other? Inside the snow,  
blossoms blown in from the broken window,  
hushed as the cracking open of an egg, blurred  
drowning or turning, I can't tell which.  
What is this, dripping within the buoyant,  
heaving itself ashore at last in the air, spitting  
up water, to be borne on pearled leaves?

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