Charm City

Victoria Elizabeth Plasse
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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CHARM CITY

by

Victoria Elizabeth Plasse

Bachelor of Arts
Bucknell University
2001

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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

Graduate College
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Thesis Approval
The Graduate College
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November 8th 2005

The Thesis prepared by

Victoria Elizabeth Plasse

Entitled

CHARM CITY

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, English Department, College of LA

Examination Committee Chair

Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative
Charm City is under construction. It is a space occupied with mutability, free will and perception through physical evidence. This is the ephemeral renovation project of the individual; and so if one can begin anywhere in an ongoing process, it is important to begin with the collection’s sections, Chase, Ground, Appraisal, Balustrade, Rough Opening and Change Order.

The five sections of Charm City are most literally, terms of construction. Appropriately, Chase is the first section, addressing an enclosed space that is qualified to let something pass through it, be it individual or city. In most cases, a chase is the enclosed space of a flue pipe, a channel designed to let fire funnel through safely. Inherently, the heat and pressure of fire to pass through something without creating a destructive reaction on all of its supporting agents accepts that indeed a structure is strong enough for fire to be
managed, to be processed and to be incorporated domestically. This is the first truth for
the individual in Charm City; it is acknowledgement that pressure cannot destroy but
only reinforce function validating the individual’s need to consider what it means to
occupy space—how one lives and how one titles purpose in such space. It is in this first
section that the poetic space of Charm City and the individuals inhabiting Charm City
begin to articulate the rhythms of history and new philosophy as they manifest into the
real. Motion is central to the city and more so, central to the empty space the city has yet
to define or occupy. The chase allows for motion and current to exist, undisturbed and yet
remain negotiable energy for the individual and the city. The chase is the vein for the
pulse.

Ground refers to electricity’s habit of seeking the shortest route to earth. Neutral wires
carry it there in all circuits and in an edifice such as a high rise, additional grounding wire
or the sheathing of metal—clad or conduit—protects against shock if the neutral leg is
interrupted. When we build something, we build it to withstand the pressure of natural
forces, hurricane, rain and wind. We rarely consider that a structure could be interrupted,
that the very protective details of something as mundane as sheathing metal would
dissolve the building’s presence, returning the structure to the very level it derives from,
ground zero of its construction. This section of poetry should not be prominently
mislabeled as a homage to recent historical events; this section is about choices. In this
America, citizens are fighting for what remains of their rebel cause, a pursuit of
democracy in language and livelihood. In Ground, choices no longer appear to be strict
assertions of what it means to be an individual, rather what happens to the individual
when choices are made. We reinvent ourselves as immigrants everyday: on freeways, in
different countries, in different jobs, when places open and when places close. There is so
much of the city in the individual and only the individual in the city that the electric
currents that terminally bind us in this paradigm that we, much like the ground, seek the
shortest distances as a means of reconciliation for existence. We seek out material matter,
titles that create relationships between one person and another, one country and another;
we seek out equations of imposition rather than the means necessary for existence,
nourishment, love and faith unattached to any one deity or practice.

And so it seems only right that when questions of faith appear as billboards in Charm
City, that the next intersection encountered possesses the street sign entitled, Appraisal.
Here, perhaps too overtly, I pay my respects to the French writer, Georges Perec. Perec
throughout much of his work attempted to bridge the many dead ends that created his
own composition as a man in twentieth century France. He returned to his origins through
what was left to be discovered of family trees in a post World War II era, reviewing in
great detail what remained of what came before him: boxes of storage that only belonged
to strangers and ghosts. In Appraisal, questions are raised not as questions but as
momentary glances as if the individual was only encountering the idea because the idea
appeared just then—in the elevator, in the wash, in the noticed footprint, in someone
else’s conversation, in the graffiti littering construction panels. Perhaps too, this section
does not only acknowledge Perec but the legacy of eavesdropping and allowing the
present to create the flow chart that will disappear once the second has passed. This is the
role of the linebacker, the mountain climber, the improv actor, the on duty police officer,
the legacy of John Cage and the American rhetoric of action. It is the action of verbs and the ideal promise—that change remains a possibility.

With every appraisal and discovery for alteration, therein lies the infrastructure, an identity all onto its own, to be altered or appraised. In this collection and in the following section, it is Balustrade that adopts the identity of infrastructure as the most immediate "thing" to be reviewed.

A balustrade is the rail, the post and vertical balusters along the edge of a stairway or elevated walkway. This is what we hold onto, the physical matter where faith is attached. However, Balustrade follows Appraisal and so it is with skepticism that faith based objects and personas are seen. Since 2001, faith has matured into an animal that many no longer understand and even more distrust. Many of the poems in this section are written for actual moments in time: a sniper shooting, the death of a heroic athlete, a cicada summer, a military occupation strengthened and a last symphony performance before a country evolved from a society to a bruised battleground of desperation. It is hard to be revolutionary and even harder to avoid being offensive when questioning the practice of having a belief in something: a deity, that kids will make it to school, that a loved one will return love, that as individuals we have a fate or a destination. Is it that the balustrade is broken? Or that the balustrade needs to stand alone without the weight of individuals holding onto it? Maybe it is possible that the balustrade needs to be recognized only as a balustrade—that there is a tendency to hold and follow a railing versus walking up and down stairs freely.
And to be unhinged is possible when the individual seeks out a rough opening. Rough Opening is the unoccupied space in Charm City. This is the poetic city’s purpose to allow the individual to exist outside of time in unidentified territory. Thoreau fantasized the wilderness, pushing even his use of language to strike new ground. Once the railing has been let go of we have air to run through our fingers.

Every new place visited in language and listed in an atlas begs an individual to adopt its qualities and sounds into, at the very least, the memory where it will eventually find itself in opposition with every new place encountered. Charm City is Baltimore’s urban nickname. It describes a quaint, stubborn small town old with racism, bloodlines and a very secular heart. The guttural accent will never change. It is a dilapidated tone of Cockney. As this town accumulates immigrants to form a metropolis—a cartoon book city where leaders makes decisions based on their constituents and rites of passage are handed off to new members. Its ability to change recedes in the face of expectation as if it were a broken heart refusing to mend itself for future loves. This is the charm of Charm City, a place so real that a change order could destroy it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I will never be entirely responsible for my own writing. It is the fault and the grace of others that have taught me to exist as a writer, who have taught me to live as a citizen of the universe and who have reminded me to hear my own pulse as I breathe in and breathe

vi

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out. To my committee members, I not only thank you for the continuous encouragement and generosity you have shown me but consider you my company. Claudia and Dave, I thank you for allowing me to be your student.

I was once told to let advice leave and then allow for it to return as my own, in my own words. My words, these words, are echoes for my friends and family, for my parents, Barbara and Jerome, who have never once given up on my desire to create something new in this world. Thank you all for being so close to my heart, to my consciousness and to my pen.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABSTRACT</th>
<th>iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Theory of the World</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chase</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound Field</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Night</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How You</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manifest Destiny</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atardecer</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortissimo</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Advertisement</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin Of A Species</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plow Zone</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Credit</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Line</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natty Bo, Charm City’s Bohemian Beer</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining Alone</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonetics Considers Culinary School</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Hundred Points</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraisal</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hereditary</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aix</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen Violence</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even Bite</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight Wives</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Manhattan</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acrylic</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty Girls</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends Return From Summers Abroad</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charm City's Smart CEO</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balustrade</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precociously &amp; Before Closing Time, The Parable of the Dragnet is Re-told, in the 21st Century, Near Rockville, MD</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief System</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Enheduanna</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch Down</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geology of Two</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mellow Sailor</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charm City 2004</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq National Philharmonic Performs The Marriage of Figaro</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topos</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rough Opening</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballroom Dancing</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient Occupation</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musika, Charm City's Heartbreaker</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilderness Beyond This Point</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Ceases in Assonance</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnaissance</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Dogtooth Violets</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recollection</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Order</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of the World</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cities</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charm City</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Theory of the World

But is this world to be considered thus merely as a machine, to last longer than its parts retain their present position, their proper forms and qualities. from “The Theory of the Earth” by James Hutton, 18thc. Geologist

I am talking to Henry in the woods; and
driving Midwest through an endless state
of sedimentation, time compressing time
in sonatas in salt in saffron

that’s where time is

in between layers of diamonds and crude oil paintings
deep beneath the surface beneath emotions and politics

and Henry
what is it you say,

keep driving, drive through waters
to the depths of giant squids alive
and battling The Pedestrian of New York City

I am told Toyko is worse and yet

seems quiet in the early morning life
quintessence in not knowing the language
or the poems for meaning
only the sounds
and where I am right now standing

a year older in less than a day;
it’s equivalent to mathematics
equations for galaxies and pamphlets
red and yellow with Haiti and Rice, Tomatoes and Comma

Henry, did you eat tomatoes with your aunt, ask her who is buried in the dirt.

I was told there were Slaves
and Indians in my own backyard.
The only proof of blood are the Scarlet Tanager eggs every Spring, bumped from branches to boxwoods beneath window sills, outside walls in gardens. Henry it is finally dark. The soil’s sullen and pregnant with everything.
Chase...A framed enclosed space around a flue pipe or a channel in a wall or through a ceiling for something to lien or pass through.
Churches make poor battlegrounds. Saw one once in a county called Union. Praying folks, all types were the soldiers. Bonded in gunpowder and buffalo, the congregation imploded their steeple hoping to misdirect redcoats. Sneakers. They raced to the altar, spilling powder, spilling baby’s breath and milk through the town, down the aisle, setting blaze in revolution. They sang hymns the books say as they crusaded to their own sacrifice.

Limb by limb, trees were counted as beacons but the town was never found. It was a small Pennsylvania river town hidden in a crooked rivulet of the shallow Susquehanna. Today, people walk this river. Water never rises higher than the knee. And the only things racing are race car fans pulling out lawn chairs and coolers for when Jeff Gordon drives by, drives down the 15 real slow with banners and two patrolmen, passes right by the shopping center, the Bob Evans and the billboard for Clyde’s reptile farm further up the road.

This eventual world is always passing, breaking lotus leaves each time an answer is found. Parents and children, best friends sit idle waiting for a celebrity to drive by with coolers filled with yuengling, in cans. It’s the oldest beer in The States. The soldiers waited for the oldest battle in the world to take place. They burned their building to bits where the Bob Evans now smokes sausages every morning and evening on the same property where the only fight found to date has been a mother and a child arguing over quarters for the stuffed animal vending machine. No, it’s the elephant the child wants not the turtle. Turtles can be found down by the river in between the river weeds making pipe music in the summer time.

Churches make poor battlegrounds may have headlined the old pressed newspaper months after the battle.
never commenced. The folly of fear didn't expire
with the words of the Revolution. It hung in Union
with the river towns, a punch line for those who thought
something might ever happen in these parts besides
harvests and cars.
Late Night

Late night on cable is a catalog
overflowing products and people and no
difference between the two. No need.
You’re up for sleep deprivation.
Up for panic. Up for anything,
It’s such a neurosis need
up for anything and anything can’t be solved;
buy genie bottles bikinis bunkers.
learn about battles and churches
each seeking salvation each time the
channel changes. Changes. It’s only the
TV screen. This HIFI. Screen of Nothingness.
Honest player cleans himself in plasma
somewhere in some house. Steroids.
Something to be guilty. Something to stop playing.
Insomnia in some house. Savior in some house
late night
formulates the future and increased percentages
and break ups will recede. Will create scars
from needles will create
ten fingers-ten toes superstars. Boredom is turning to oneself and having nothing to say.
It’s late. Asking why wouldn’t even help.

Lazy muscles. Until it grabs at your ten fingers ten toes
makes you think there’s two of you, two sides instead of one.

What would you do with three of you...
surf and change, surf and flip till it’s time. It’s time to go.
How You

They asked me about Tennessee and like the three or four
Other times, only one line or two stuck in my head as a real detail.
The Huddle Houses and Big Daddy’s Firework stores were there
But somehow they didn’t seem as important

As when I was sixteen and a man from New Jersey
Told me I walked in the door with Audrey Hepburn’s sunglasses
And smile on — I was running as usual, late.

At eighteen, my things were stolen out of my room
While I was sleeping. My play about whores and gardening gone for good
With a two hundred year old cello from the summer music symposium.
No one saw the instrument being carried down
The one street in town.

Then twenty twenty, no twenty two, I was unemployed
And pregnant, saying goodbye to cancer patients, my own children
And some friendships in a field, swearing by oath and curse word
Like hell would I ever return.

My body broken and healed, climbed Monteagle again
In the middle of the night. When I got there a man wearing coral
Didn’t say hi, he said how you
Picked up my bags and walked me to where I was going.

The difference is always in the details
In the wideness of Chattanooga over the jaw
How I find the words to describe home
In a place I don’t live.
Advertisement

The sex shop is the perfect poem.
Diluted. Dildo. Dark leather snaps

On to a male or a woman. A mother
And father. A son and a daughter.

The purpose is as clear
As the crucifix

And older than any such
Wood’s importance.

The Night Angel Billboard
Appears again.

Today, the boutique
Has no advantage.

No patron
Or sale

To reclaim it
As necessary in society.

On its behalf, I try to interject
That prostitutes are early feminists.

The first women
Able to read, able to write.

Out of loyalty, I think of something else.
After all it has been my landmark for two years

Helping me make right turns
And witty comments about this city

(I think I have even gotten a date or two).
But I can't share that this thing
Is a modern diorama for my country tis of thee.

The woman in the passenger seat
Never has the bird and the bee discussion with me,
So I keep it to myself,
That in there in the store, democracy is clean purity

Letting vagrants and cheerleaders match
The fantasy with the shape

And find a name for the calling,
Find the O in OH, OH MY GOD

Over and over
My god, My God.

We drive by,
And my mother

In the car, sighs
What perversity.

We're shopping for plates today
And French sheets.

At least a hundred dollars
A pop.

I laugh at the calculation
For matching blue bells

And day lilies
Over small pillows.

But that's not perverse,
Just the opposite

I recall,
A sign of good taste.
manifest destiny

— it's what the Hualapai knew, listened for

in the vermillion walls standing along our never ending trail west

dirty once in gold, dirty now in news and a morality, building every day

towards LA, the grid aligns stretching tracts in telephone polls and billboard bodies round in each design an Ester Williams water dancing show along side the taxi cabs and bottle stands each corner offering any kind

asian black white pink and green hairy short short with glasses illegal weed

slow cheap high rolling Cadillac fiend-ing machine, maybe just a machine cell belle on the ball, this city is surrounding demons and it's fantastic;

having no hill, no history rolling through our valley centered flat with antiquity and blue moon lights to find our way home, passing similar past big shop blocks, flashing numbers from slot machines, ninety nine cents less left at the light or to

night is your lucky night, payback ranked city wide till the light changes

on a marquis from open to closed. my first waiter said it like an ad line,

"the house isn't built on winners, you know" but a roman republic expanding her provinces
for art galleries, better and impressive crystal chandeliers

    no more seventies white suits feathering from limos and
expensive cars

    pretty is a rare strip seen before daylight in a velvet lounge nicknamed the
stiletto or lightening spike, time can be long here, a forgotten pacific rail road

    that crosses parkways and boulevards in wry heat chinking the
diesel through

this corridor, dogpen-fencing chalks downtown murals and vintage factory signs

    unclear from the track path, unclear usually. the occasional
wrong turn tourist

driver might notice, but many of us think too much in conceit to stop
Atardecer

Find the metaphysical and the political at the smallest distance in the alphabet
When strangers bid farewell to the sun
And glance down to the water, incorrectly
From atardecer glare,
From the water being incorrectly called Nosara.
It’s goodbye and 5’o’clock at Guilones Bay,
Named for its corduroy, for the space in between lines and words,
For the hash marks in penmanship workbooks that clearly showed us
At an age when we clearly didn’t care
About what is in between words, in between the sets of waves
And breaths of communication, be it board, be it body.
Such quiet means nothing. And is defined
Nowhere in the dulce vita rolodex.

(just talked about in theory and French class.)

Because the dolce vita rolodex is twenty seven minutes wide
And centuries overdrawn with the names
Of addicts, of nuns, of no bodies and some ones—each in their own right
Hunters to answers; answers in files, answers in red, white and blue,
Desert storm, aquatic lifestyle, world wars of ones and twos,
Palm tree incandescent vacations, in pearls, in ribbons, Harley Davidsons
With easy riders, quarterbacks, with Billys and kids, all of them
Are mail men making their way to the next stop
Trying hard to be on time.
Side by side sit red telephone booths, children answering to the name, America,
Kiwis riding on whales cut in ivory, hanging from the necks of Russians
Who speak Swahili—this is the rolodex of ammunition
Igniting ambition, enlightening the possibilities for the paying customers
Of this world to talk to one another, to text each other, to write,
To send ciphers if not memos that solar panels in space will not save us
From eternity. No god. No amendment. Us is as is filling a rolodex.
The sweet sound of vitality ages awkward
Like a pinot past its time, the melody fades into history and the sun drops
Behind the earth’s curve. This is not wrong nor negative but a question
Of capability, when do you speak, who is there before night falls
When the corduroy moves in stereo with the tides, with the shadows of sundials
And settles the focus of eyes for the next horizon.
Name it battle, name it rock and roll, name it wedding vow, there is
the second wave of consciousness where eardrums fall flat
unable to hear the external and heed what had not been said, not as of yet.
The art of creating secondary ideas is not passed down the street
with neon fliers, pink and green, yellow paper
aware of what it is we need to know and where, no, it is how we go
in the directions of future plans, making left and right turns
waiting for stoplights to permit us, for barcodes and promos to discount members,
the ever increasing numbers of this world:
in academy, in hardware, in mortality, in love; if anything, at least, secondary to daily
plans and remembering the grocery lists
on the counter tops for dinner this week, seek a like or a love.
With the most important of items, soap powder and stain removers
the toilet paper and winnings. Some man makes a comparison (who are his agents),
the coffin and the camera,
how each has a way of preserving us in this world through the most extreme weather
conditions, as in the lightening storms that knock out
the phone and computer, each with buttons and plugs.

They make no use of the joints,

just make us better at stabbing, forcefully
to get it all down, to get to it, stabbing in the dark happens when the power is off, off in
the most unfortunate temperatures.

(does anything turnoff anymore)
Here, the secondary ideas find themselves as important as health insurance, what does it mean to live in this wireless world...did it ever become as clear as in the dark, how much needs to be said in the street. Speak.

Then wait for the return of sound, wait outside this world is round, turning circles, turn around again and in between the paper and the pen, the camera, the coffin, rock’n’roll are doing their jobs. They’re working hard at preserving the good, the bad and the damned all those caught in the traffic in the rainfall and tunnels of wind, even if it is just a misdirection or a moment, like art. Finds itself an anvil, heavy, black and real. In this second there is an anvil able to crush down on my shoulders looking for my sternum to be its path, to crunch what bones exists, what exists between it and my heart.

The weight of this will spill everything out into polyphonic chants, into unequal phrases, into the grotesque—turn it up, louder on the sheet music, it clearly states Fortissimo.
Another Advertisement

Burlesque lets you talk form:
shop for toys, poles, singing trolls...name your style and I’ll name your price....

Welcome to fabulous. It is here where the dreams come true,
not with fairies or mice in red, one in pants, the other in polka dots
but here in the burlesque changing room, imagination runs
from what you don’t see. We show in the bare, that’s the gimp suit
on stock, exactly what you’ve been looking for: you the kinky one
in the corner, and you, with a whip in your brief case
but you’re the not naked here in fabulous. We parade our skins
natural or not. We’ve got the bodies to do it, line’em up by the dozen
surround the troops with our demons, let burlesque walk you through form.
Shop for toys and tie yourself to the polls
We’re all singing trolls,
name your style and I’ll name your price
name your style and I’ll name your price.
Ground...Refers to electricity’s habit of seeking the shortest route to Earth.
Origin of a Species

Is not another poem about childhood or heart break. I can’t write about those anyway; I have no proof I ever grew up.

My authority is that I don’t know Chickamunga and Xanadu from relativity and kettle whistles. It is with authority that I admit to forgetting how to make a moment an object of time,

how to make a definition into a conviction
how to make a taste into a preference
how to turn affirmation into representation.

Instead, comfortably I am able to explain how to bite finger nails, wax a surfboard and keep a turkey juicy, stuffing it with oranges and grapefruits while it bastes in its new organic composition, I remember that I do not know how things change.

This could be directions to my parents’ house. Freud said I could blame them for something. But blame seems too easy for lapel pins, skipping votes and midnight remote rendezvous. Origin is in composition, in the fluke of everyday traffic:

I can get off the highway during a traffic jam and experience a street whistling on my way to work. I can watch the man with no limbs cross the intersection in his battery powered wheel chair covered in vet stickers. This is wrong.

I want a photograph of him for my bathroom, for all the grotesque crossing the street in the morning, knowing that people are on the way to work, knowing that people on their way to work, do work, do handout. I don’t, handout. I think about how I could live with no limbs.

And if I would want to.

I think about how I have been raised to give back and remember where I have come from, remember thank you notes and how to fold towels for the linen closet: one third fold in right, one third fold in left, split in half to fold over and over, the creases will not show on the shelf or on a rack—remember that and I do, I do, I do and I do not care that I have no loyalty to anything— I am driving through the intersection on the way to another origin, on my way to becoming a species.
Exhibit

Dial reason out of counting to sixty: One to two to three to five to six to tea
And drink it with biscuits and reminisce
Quarter by quarter
Years pass in bills and receipts: gas prices compounded with tuition divided by taxes, reimbursed.
No. Depreciating in worth every year, every second over the ticks of a classroom clock.

Exactly what is it, to count up

To an equation: a cyst, the small of the back, collarbone
Try: a photograph and ring, birthmark or a brother’s scar.

Admit that there is a circle and that the shape is strong.
But in what colors or names to be called out to someone:

Number twenty two your order is ready.
Is there a fifty three for the meat counter (fill in an exclamation)?

In a circle, each point maintains a line to its binary
To its pheromones uncovered in deodorant and eau de toilette—find importance
As in hands as in eyes as in dye injected by way of plastination: make the body
Survive past its life and pulse and charge twelve dollars to see it, to see
How hair remains and how lungs go black, really go black in plastic
And in plastic cases. Here the artist (always) dies
And the art (the body) continues to provide

With no narrator. Who is there to narrate time—that man
In the cartoon with the long beard and clocks on the wall, that Father
Would never say it is wrong to stay alive.
But there is a baby no longer than five inches,
A blue skeleton at almost three months standing stilled
In a California glass display. No where near here, is art a choice.
Here numbers and colors explain tumors and cancers, smokers’ lungs.
Here choices are reasons:

Will you make it to fifty
To that pension plan?
Here choices are right and wrong
On the hash marks of the living dial: job, family, exercise
And the child in the display case is pro what noun what verb, pro what number
On the scale of the good and bad, life and choice, museum and institute

There is no more space in the world
No more rooms without numbers
No hallways not hanging moral disclaimers,
Overhead announcements for new parades.
Plow Zone

And then I moved, as far as I could
Into exile where even my road, West Katie
Didn't connect with its Eastern half.

Much like all the streets three years ago
Cement and yellow hashes stopped
And started, intermittently with the winnings
Of video poker and black jack. High numbers
Low numbers. Unpredictable numbers flashing
Winner on the last nickel in the kitty. Red light
And JACKPOT. I am right back where I started
With one extra dime. Though, not enough
To call you from a payphone.

It's taken two years to say that, almost three
To realize my intoxication
With one photomontage, my hand covering
Your smile when I thought
You were sticking your tongue out.

It's been titled now. Nothing is Sacred. I stole that
From a textbook and a story about a Colorado chemical plant.
Three billboards try to repeat, reshape and reconnect
Our relationship with the land, with what we see and read

With what I hear. With how you listen. It's taken three years
To hear what I read, to listen to what I see:

Around Here Is Both Now And Then

The you, the I, that movie star passed out in his bed, the Irishman missing a tooth, the man in meditation with long hair tied into a bun—in truth—I wanted nothing more

From anyone, from well worn skin and organs roughshod
With human
It
And substances and wanted to consider the chemical plant, myself
A plant, a construction without self, built for function and use

But that too, was plowed away, not gone. But disposed of
With the countless pockets of coins tossed and slipped into grocery store
And gas station slots on my small strip of street, connected to nothing but the one dead
End intersecting at the middle of the block.
It is possible to call a relationship perpendicular.
Bad Credit

I thought about it while walking the dog; Isis was pulling hard against my stride to protest on the asphalt. The parking lot her resistance—it all smelled of heat.

My mind wandered from my domestic dispute to big things to a cartoon sketching a gravesite, a Jane Doe on the epitaph, 1962 to this Spring with a credit card balance of seventy eight thousand, nine hundred and sixty two dollars and fifty eight cents and no flowers around the tombstone, I guess her mourners couldn’t afford any or the illustrator forgot about the quick swivels and half arcs that symbolized art when I was in grade school—funny at first, the debt of our lives we ignore, pay with paper for, argue with at Christmas time and then sad, how it all returns to dollars and sense most of the time.

We balance our check books with grocery stores, department carts and catalogues, seeking gifts that will improve our mother’s life like a spa mat for the bath tub—we wrap and then with a note enclosed “why go away, when you can simply enjoy home”.

The box sits past her birthday and darkens in the dust on Mother’s Day, forgotten and spent of its timing, waiting to be a bargain one Sunday at the garage sale or the answer to a city paper classified.

The cartoon said rest in piece in acronym; but with the debt accruing interest each year, I wander more, if the credit agency sends notes still to the dearly beloved, charging for each late payment, or does she work her debt off in the next life as a checkout girl for her favorite store on the intersection of persecuted and malicious, the Best of Hell’s shopping colonnades...

Does she leave her inheritance behind as an everlasting memory or moral to live by, happiness sewing itself to the shadows of what we shouldn’t do like a neighbor watching in Colonial Massachusetts, uneven sparks from an oven knowing that, that couldn’t be right, that the answer is simple, that mischief and malignant are not benign, that debtors makes us all fall far behind, that our whole is worth the sum of its parts, its property and trademarks.

Isis barks at me, asking me where I have been for the last few minutes.
and about to answer my dog in explanation, in justification, I realize her four legs know nothing of my plight, just that it's time to walk, time to smell inside the grass and remember nothing till the next time we're out in such heat.
In Line

Pretty in pink babe—I know that you want me
in flinted velour envelopes (your smell bothers me)
all spelled out nicely I think of toes and hips
and Red Creek rocks make me cream
if tendons could, they'd lather and you'd say, pretending tendencies, "look at the green,
where's the handle, the on switch to silver-nitrated tears
and where's the ammo—the left lane is for losers" "yeah, in the tumbling weeds, ass"
apparently, it got taken over
and the tie is annulled
and cattails and cactuses in the lungs of the desert
I remember my life preserver
for sleeping
alongside a telephone pole campground gulch
today he said the sun wouldn't be poisonous, but breathing reps once an hour
as the backdrop begins to explode
all occurring in a van caravan
off rhythm
but the highways stops for the intersection
of punk pantoums and stereo directions
held together by lust bent over a package of Little Debbie Devil's Food Cake careening
out of the sky: the aliens have landed
—hide the cattle.

I am trying to keep my hair back with buffalo jaws.
Oh good, you're so special.

How many truck ranches horn the senses and say you ride well into the night's breath
as dreamy as heartbeats and raindrops? as
dreamy as pretty in pink?
The reflection of the disco ball assumes I dance in small circles
praying on the red roof towards god
—the steps get faster while I wait in line.
"It's hard to listen when you're fucking talking," I turn to my next dance partner and say.
Stretch out across the breasts of infinity,
the hills will forget they wear green eye
shadow under their folds: nailed down and
choked by Christmas trees. My partner is stunned and leaves the floor.

I inhale the dumpsters, the oceans, the air not there
—it is inside me preserved in stones for billions of years. I know that you want me and I want you to.
Natty Bo, Charm City’s Bohemian Beer

Natty Bo man has been relit. The hill
is open now
calling sailors and drunks
historical cliches; not even merchants

but real payroll types with assistants and coordinator types to drink from its location.

Only the homeless still drink
Natty Bo out of conviction
on those park benches not sitting at intersections

(and those too who where this city on their sleeve).

High rise condos and high end cafes are leasing the future; reconstruction
without the alcohol is making happy hour special: dry and polite in martini glasses.

Brewer’s Hill doesn’t need to be said with extra r’s –the workers
who built it would have. They would have pronounced hill
somehow with a twisted cockney hrill maybe.

Hrill will be a cocktail or the name
of a wine bar in a development
invented from hops and salt, where politically correct suits
will discuss the Ravens, never having known the Colts. It is not
right racist remarks and slights on how big a wife’s ass is;

but it’s that crudeness, the taste of thin
shit beer is that it’s thin shit beer
and thin shit beer will always be cheap and wet.
Only thing easier at the end of the day would be closing one’s eyes
and chanting the name you wish you had.
Dining Alone

Really, I have no memories of Baltimore prostitutes
but I know them. Names. Street corners. High school boys with STDs
and husbands who keep their wives far from their bank accounts.
My prostitute story isn’t even here in this country,
but on the French speaking streets of Quebec. And all of them were kids,
the pimp, the dealer, the hooker, the four of us standing there on the street corner
discovering what it really was to be American:

we identified the market
considered the investment
relied on sound judgment
the future is here
and working the streets of Quebec.

I don’t remember paying for anything, maybe I did
buy that package. It was small though, crumpled tinfoil
and yellow. Maybe I did walk thirty blocks
looking for it on the other side of the border
my high, my means of being electrified—

I was talking to Jerry. A seven foot tall,
seven feet tall that night in crisp white—he was a rapstar
of a pimp standing in the doorway
of vacant Canada. The sun had not arrived
had no intention of shining. At five thirty in the morning
I found out exactly it was me, explaining to Jerry
that the girl in the white was pretty
but not worth anything torn and bruised
that he needed to invest, to be American about his business
buy them clothes, buy them shoes, intoxicated with imagination

I wonder now how I made that moment
how I believe still that all conversations do take place
should be had at bars and seedy carwashes and drive in dives
that I should be dining alone and conduct business with strangers, strictly
stay far away from any language that knows the meaning of home
and far from knowing the name of any such commodity
because there is no evidence
no item, no proof of this poem any place.

It lives to be memory, not sure of an end, not sure if it ever began.
I and it and Jerry have no items, nothing to serve us later:
no metro tickets, no pictures, no scars.
A1

Do you know what I am talking about, the thick sauce that bottles true essence America from table to cafe to home to delivery, that spice of eating well, that spice of eating what you like, like a contract from company to company, with company and in need of company (bananas and pineapples—piñas where they're picked) you can pour some onto your plate, use your fork, use all your cutlery to cut, and cut the smallest and largest ounce you can swallow. Be free to taste consumer undercover flavors, to remember word for word, a pledge, an international table top cleanser smelling of pine and bald eagles

sap sap sap sap sap...the syrup sound of sax and trombone play behind poets and in department stores from sea to shining sea with tips and coffee creating money and matters for watchers and clock cubicle tick tockers and magazines line these hallways announcing new ways to improve of our lives: arrange your kitchen according to the compass, spray herbs and whisper isms, isms to live by decent people and god fearing folk to believe, b'lieve and donate your thank yous for tanks and video cameras, post your printed by the dozen, boxes more than donuts filled with Boston Cremes and jammed in jail cells, love for letters, love for liars, love for refineries and,

A1. Protect these state lines and patrol the cars parked next door using your maglight flashlight for billy clubs and preservation of spirit. Safety is not subjective and the words from New Jersey are dangerous and so we must, we must, we must increase our bust let Rosie rip podiums down from stages and break the bulbs of lights that show off cheekbones from strange places quadrant A1, quadrant Philippines, quadrant no one's home

...removable cities and traffic jams clog arteries and burn all of us into glorious sunsets of cattle and corn fields, glowing...growing, growing old after two hundred years...
after two hundred years and five thousand no language
will be able to do it, explain that I equals I.

Today I drive down Constitution Avenue. Each corner
is a catacomb of theories, with benches and undercover guards.
Each with one or two men on a bench,
leaning on light poles, watching everywhere... this month
airplanes spend millions for evacuation
and students are found to be at fault,
all over again, but they took out the parks
and amphitheatres, protest means nothing. We turn to theaters to see,
our last chance to see light sabers come to life.
Phonetics Considers Culinary School

eating is/ philosophy
called

by the food/ network

a/mediocre act
itself

mundane/ repetition
ensuring

eyelashes/ to bat
and for songs

to repeat/ over
and over

into vowel/movements/forward
fontina cheese

and duck pate/ stew later
stock/ from liver/ from heart

each organ/each ingredient
common/ sharing

folk/ is early morning
ritual/ a savings

account/ for coffee

is a prayer/ for help
most days/ no bagels

stolen cream/cheese samples
in the cool/ er drawer
save where/ you can't
spend pounds/ (fool)

and pennies/ (wiseman) creates
caviar/ an old woman/ should have

said/
spirit this/ sweetly
into vernacular/ believing

words to be /the same as /nurture.
One Hundred Points

At the crown of my head there is a point

where one hundred ancestors meet

and tell me their stories, how it was for them...

for them to leave everything behind

the hitching post marked with growth spurts

and childhood romances initialized

to come to nothing, where the imbalance of language

and family provided long straight lines

to follow in and out another new york

my grandmother Ana must have known a coldness

impotent to the page or screen

in White Russia
    winter shows a patina foreign

to bronze or wood; it's crystalline to the eye

and on the skin, an untraceable birthmark

impossible to hide under a yellow star or village crown

no—this layer is stone unbendable design

propelling fast, far from home—I dream

of it inside the marushka dolls

that open upon another, smaller versions
of themselves, plaited obsidian hair sleeked
to the sides of warm faces

somewhere between Minsk and Pinsk

my father would say, still says today—look it up
the metaphor

the mystical vortex with no coordinates
in the atlas

in a history book

in my memory
all I could ever find between M and P

is now, the immeasurable marrow of a family rib

learning always, somewhere until it was gone

that's it

how it works, indexing passport stamps and foreign coins
to be memorables for flashbacks when Alzheimer's sets in,
an American oxide of new beginnings, formed

in the mercury before the meaning of not—this im
balance is half hardened enameling that looks pretty
up close and empty in the light that examines
the floss on the rose, the blood the scientist knows
locating the exact cell that
left us with dancing knees or taught us
an ancient curse;
    this is the prayer for the gypsy inside,

once removed, who I carry forever with

in the crown of my head.
Appraisal... An expert valuation of property.
Hereditary

It’s the same bunion mother had
mother before mother and the mother
that no one talks about anymore.
The curve stands beautiful, red with sex and turbulence.
It’s true, Pisces are ruled by their feet
and it swells with the highest of orgasms
ridging over the white mountains of New Hampshire,
indecent like the peeling of birch trees.

Itself is a walker, a sixth toe, imprinting the dirt wild
with possession and time; it’s state evaluation
and circular weight presses down with each step,
mud with it, ricocheting raindrop
splashes to its left partner, sometimes
under the instep.

In unison with everything
it bounces with the mother before me
the one after me, maybe not the next but someday, again
like the witch’s prophesy or a tale told sign not destined
to repeat nor fade to eventual contempt for the body.

This wives’ tale will ordain the grotesque evolution
of new elegance, my bunion
to be passed on with importance
my bunion
to be passed on with Thanksgiving’s stuffing recipe
my bunion
to be passed on with that bent wedding ring
my bunion
to be passed on like that peeling portrait
hanging in, hanging on the living room wall.

This is to be passed on.
Passed on alive and in the flesh.
I will be passed on
and stared back at
to stare at myself
because it’s the same bunion mother had
mother before mother and the mother that no one talks about anymore.
Aix

Thirty two floors above the street, buildings appear in Lego blocks of genius proportions. See the green angles

in balsam curves, the roots of wings
rising so high, so thin that light
doesn’t need to pass through.
Exists, spelled without the i,
would mean nothing in this canopy

of streets, singing in quetzal
chirrips, chirrips, chirrips.
The sound of horns and brakes mated
with the eyes
with blueprints realized: new organisms,
new types of dirt to sit on ledges

sit similar in the redwoods, sit next to unidentified organisms; they practice cohabitate
not impeaching nor imprinting

(the first siren in memory is striking.).

Preparing we do not realize
as we lay one track over another,

one beam perpendicular to its mate,
one line with one arc
one calendar with one time.

In a celebration, where masks and billboards make signs and make makes of rainforest and mountain, we do not see the catalog of our wealth
as each name becomes archive,
killing its initial root
as it stares from eye to eye with its fake counterpart.
We are preparing on the ledges of window cleaners, on the edges of architects who know these buildings to be nothing more than paper weights. Weightless in the sea of eruption, water on magnum are running on time.
Teen Violence

Beer bottle glass shines
gemstone in the sun setting
brass through my wash, beyond
the sidewalk of Jeffrey’s Lane.

It is wide behind apartment complexes
divided by gas stations and linked
in lights all the way to the St. Rose Emergency
room.
This wash abandoned is not a
waiting Descarte
living block; I know

I miss the East
walking barefoot in mud
and in between thorn ivy
woods I would lose light
earlier (than)

this Western arrival of Winter film
across the four o’clock sky of peach linoleum
lit out over the canyon; this sky is so damn dirty
in footprint and in pet stain
from nearby testing sites—it’s unavailable here
the cleaning service of condensation
doesn’t anoint with Cayenne Chesapeake or a fresh water gin

in the woods, pocket
knife signatures
decorate in trail heads in hearts
an acceptable violation in the wooden alleyways/

Here the wash is owned
in the initials D K R
swirling into a smiley face
inside the arc of the R on the sides of erosion
walls and on and through in basket patterns
over the stones unable to bury the runaway grocery carts
—perhaps

the graffiti can
make this uneven
space calm and quiet,
something natural to live in.
Prayer

Damn It! I want to ride a zebra

Through the hallways of casinos
And high schools. The muzzle
Of my stag will stop and chew

At the foliage in lobbies and on ponytails
Of house, wives, car salesmen sitting
Chained to flashing images, the blinking lights
Of superheroes and tall blondes decking
One another, in patterns like car accidents
In morning rush hour. And my zebra

Will step on toe rings and celebrity footwear
Catching breath and tripping movements
Outside of the dings and dong of bells:
It is time to move; it is time to eat; is it time to leave yet?

Stickers and cell phones will deconstruct, then
With me and my zebra passing through comet style
As each thing in the hallway falls to pieces
Without proper nouns on T-Shirts in dialogue with those
Who do make more than six figures.
They will say when and wha, wha, what

—sounding infantile and returning
Into sublimity
Of very beginnings, unfinished by a pint, a driver’s license, a marriage, a pay check

Was that—a zebra. And in the casinos and high schools and

Everywhere between energy returns to the universe in refined notes, lacing twilight to
Tomorrow and to yesterday, releasing
Laughter and tears into that joke, the meaning of life.
Ahh—what is, is, now child, breathe...
Expand your lungs to the expanse of time. Be a hinge for the beginning and the end.
Even Bite

In somewhere among the lectures
on histology and bacteria

my friend the dental student learns
that beauty is symmetry

in cracks and turns
chew lines and gum reds;

how true when we speak
we should evenly

(to each)
it is individually:

the shape of our mouths, muscled jaws
sleek or plump—seductive and ugly

hearing and looking
seeing and believing (that word)
we smile

beauty. in the mirror, the lover, the grocery
bagger and the stranger in line.

Is it aesthetic, to be a movie star
to prefer plastic to paper

to practice and umpire, to believe
in long kisses after war

to grow symmetrical and
into our limbs—

I tell my friend
the dental student

that beauty is not art
but maybe a proverb

we hallucinate and ask for.
Eight Wives

Would we be here
If she hadn’t lost her head

In the red petticoat
Trimmed in fur

If her dark eyes
Had given Henry a son

Before the Church of England
Relinquished her abbeys to ivy and poets

To dandelion
And burdock

Both crying
For a higher law

To be the most happy
And refined...

(would we) be eating prosciutto
At breakfast

And painting our Christmases
In Tuscan Red and lurid sunflowers

Celebrating the sanctity
Of protracted marriages

Instead of tutoring on
How to cope with Tiny Tim

Would we be here
Seeking the pure in Puritan

If Henry, then
Had procured a son?
My Manhattan is haunted, I know this.

I looked through the streets' holes, portals of wooden split rail walls and black iron frames in scientific fantasy placement so many feet below where my toes touch.

There are hills and bones of an uninhabited island. But Romero doesn't write that. He writes his name on the removable walls, Romero, Romero, big and strong in solid colors, his signature is not fancy, not even a tag of spray paint design—he's waiting for that Juliet to walk by with the same ink.

Romero and the E.Houston corner men of the Bowery are all waiting. Two sit on the sidewalk, yelling. About disrespectful men, “can you fuckn’ believe he treats her like that” and to that the old man, muted by the noise of the street, lifts his baseball cap, tipping it like a top hat to every Juliet he has ever met

and we all get distracted at this pedestrian, the man in that quiet second of a gesture until the subway vibrates underneath. All thoughts change direction as the ticker announces a new time and new place to be. It was only a minute but ghosts are never visible for too long.
Acrylic

Egyptian medicine is the pith of biology; red marrow remains in adulthood wrapped around all the body, the possessive vitalities of the body’s ribs, vertebrae, pelvic bones survive the length of arm and leg shafts, rise to the skullcap, they are acts of inclusion, an armor of enthrocytes exhorting clear and cylinder-like for the divinity in things; before broken with people and the quintessence of life inside. It is pretty, this mason jar filled with formaldehyde, sitting perhaps on a manicurist’s desk—it’s mixture so cohesive that it’s impossible to determine if it is a solid, if it is a liquid if it’s forming a new habit like a business now asking if you’re a male, a female or in transition.

The fashion of body is undone, wrapped limb after limb in white. This kind of dress tape is anointed with the names of ceremony with the names of things: hand, knee, collar bone begin to be; and remain of chemistry, remain only inhabitants of a structure that has only, loosened.
Pretty Girls

Two pretty girls dipping on the floor:
one sits padlocked in colored pencils
the green shades feathering from overuse,
the second, arrested in words, speechless.
Both have kept their eyes down for sometime
—a choking sight, when the inner lip peels
pink away, revealing only brown stains
and darker grains across a mouth’s inside,
soon the tar will wear the skin deep, irreversible
worse than the loss of virginity,
worse than payment for,
worse than a lie...
two girls dipping
with their legs spread
and nails bitten (brides for tomorrow,
and today’s divine feminine); honesty
keeps their heads down
and their fattened bottom lips
out of sight.
Friends Return From Summers Abroad With More Answers Than Before

Bring me to the museum and at least then
The picture of the world will appear framed
Inside sincerity and legitimacy. Place it behind
A door and through halls of great marble steps.
Let it be important and pregnant with blood and
Battle stains. Put the armor shells before its entrance.
Display them delicate and heavy on modern shoulders.
Let each visitor place their cheekbones inside the masks
Put them eye to eye with warriors, snipers and survival.
Let all of casting be seen as an art. Include the tickets
The café and the instant return of local news through the exit doors.
In this circle, I am not asked to share what I experience, the woman
Who left her shopping cart in front of my moving car at Wal-Mart.
And then ran away to the curb. I got up to go to the bathroom.

Returned. And was asked
Where did I go this summer and what was it I bought.
My souvenirs are petty alongside plane tickets to Europe
And blister-scarred toes from getting lost in foreign countries.
I had a blue crane and a blue crab at low tide on the Eastern Shore,
Things so common they appear on my license plate.
They were free and instate, not new, nor exotic
Neither requiring a permit or grant to renew.
My life took a natural turn, with a nephew born
And a seventeen year old Labrador that fell asleep.
This summer I got up early and stood barefoot in mud
And listened to what was right around me, filling feeders
With fresh bird seed and sugar water.
C.C.’s Smart CEO

He tells me a story about the men in his office elevator
Going up, going down, the loan sharks, the cell phone salesman
The cell phone talker who doesn’t stop first thing in the morning
To turn his phone off; he wants everyone to know he can afford a phone,
A drug deal. And he can afford to get out of the courthouse with no
Detainment, no felony. He can afford to move around this city
With no judgment at all. He calls this wealthy guy a yo.

He tells me about the men in his office elevator
Going up, going down, the loan sharks, the telephone company
On the second floor and the guy who looks like a guy who could be
Stealing the purses on each floor on Tuesdays and Fridays. There are
Three elevators, no security officers, no cameras, the last of its kind. The two suits
Are what he calls them. They get nervous when a man with dreads
When a man in pants that look like shorts, when a man in a Pistons
Jersey joins them for part of the way up to their office floor. He laughs
That anyone cares about the Pistons in Baltimore.

He tells me about everyone in his eyes. They view Charles Street in colors
And check points. He calls it a subculture without being racist, he divides
His objects by worth, by shape, by child. That yo dresses his kids better
Than himself, I bet those suits don’t even match like that. He looks out
His office window towards the harbor. See them yos, those suits
Can’t do that, keep their kids in a straight line walking down the street.

He’s a bondsman without the trade, able to cling identification
And body on a keychain. His ring is full of sharp edges and odd cuts.
He knows he selling me a story for every fingerprint and trace of sweat
In this shop he calls city. With his silver tongue, he lathers details
Around strangers, around the corners and headlines of this week’s shadows,
Yeah you, he’s good, yeah yo, he good at this job of his, this damn smart CEO.
Balustrade... The rail, posts and vertical balusters along the edge of a stairway or elevated walkway.
Precociously & Before Closing Time, The Parable of the Dragnet is Re-told 
Eastern Standard Time in the 21st Century, Near Rockville, Maryland

The Parable of the Dragnet “Again the kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind; when it was full men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into vessels but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.” {Matt13:47-50}

But today’s crimes though, in October lockdown over highway exits and bridges, 
Chesapeake towns limited to a gunwatch 
stammering fingers looking (not since the Civil War) towards 
heirloom vanity triggers in silk lined drawers, 
preparing for a glimpse of a familiar sniper, 
(the headlines themselves needing to finally break

from exhaustion). Mathew cards a full flush over Joe Friday 
or so I am told in the next episode 
as if today was the day of the Dragnet 
as the news is delivered across 
the sticky bar counter and our guy Friday discovers 
he too, is caught within the net.

All together we shrug for happiness before closing 
the file filled with shots of people on coasters or matchbooks 
near a full tray of olives sitting by the register, 
no bar swank address but the matchbooks glow in the dark 
with shiny wings on the front flap 
clear enough to judge your lipstick buy 
small enough, no one see you asking

the angels to recast the net.
Belief System

Heroic grass shines in
The absurd weather. It is
Raining heat

On my back and my ribs
Cannot touch the crutches
That I need to stand today.

It is too hot anyway
To stand at the gravesite.
I cannot read the names

On the graves in front
Of me. The bushes
Are allowed to overgrow
And consume the space

— but I am told, they are family

Gardens for graves, allowed
To fill in the space
Much like drycleaners, Chinese
Takeouts and nail spots.

Traffic jams on the guard rails
During the hymn, quieting sentimentality
On Long Island, making smaller this memoriam.

People have places to go and red
Lights get in the way. My sister whispers
To me that the cousin, over there, has been blackballed
For dating a mailman.

I do not know these relatives, what the star is
or how to, yes even this, return to this site.

In this future there is no plot for me.
There is no star, no cross
or even oracle. Somehow
I have been left out of the system
With no answer easier than the question,

What do I believe in other than the dirt
Underneath my nails and feet.
For Enheduanna

Enheduanna is the first known poet, Summerian (what we now call Iraq) moon priestess, middle of the third millenium b.c..

They walked in to find painted cement
and plastic chandeliers inside Sadaam's palace walls—this is Baghdad Spring
and I am thinking of visions of what ...
I imagine myself to think
or to say
but I do not respond
my heart and head left
open on the sill to find
its own union in old Sumeria;
inside a marbled oracle, thick
in its own composition, at its core, small particles repeating into
itself over and over and over succeeding at its own vision.
The stairs of palaces bejeweled with caricatures,
portraits and busts dressed in red.
A cowlicked soul of man met
by machines and shracks of metal
sold to public fields
is only prescriptions as he casts his shadows in a still emptiness.

The reporter has traveled with the troops inline, pausing
for small crackles of noise and swigs of sand;
their tour nothing more than visiting gardens
(a presence with no body has stolen a power )
and they’re searching for something
only matched by the moon— he is a ghost
caught in two worlds, narrowly
in the sides of a desert trellis
casting itself a sundial reliable in mansions
that no one has paid proper admission tax to be admitted to.

What is there to say these days
mend yourself with others
or tend to the only self,
thinking in apple and berry colors
found in the beds of new lovers,
a priestess and spirituality stand alone inside
the oracle casting us forward into tomorrow
seeking a new name for this new country
(this new me) both stand quiet near a red cloaked alter
intimate and fresh with devotion,
only as strong as what the other believes.
Touch Down

9'11 is not nine down and eleven to go.
It is a sign of churches, airplanes, an emergency, a hall of fame
Finally lost to time and health complications, a loss marked for Baltimore.

From a distance, it was only a death and the natural cycle
Of mortality. One day and another, some more, then a few. This is how we live,
The bargain given when eternity has no more memories.

It is hard to forget records: the passes that made the field Mt. Olympus,
The people proud to be near the blue collared Chesapeake
Whites. Ecstatic and waterfront. Trash and man screaming
Hon this and hon that and hon you in so many words.
Each head on agreeing with the golden player that this is A-historical,
That mythology is a myth when golden days are real.

There is a time before St.Louis. Before midnight robbery and smuggling
Treasure west and inland with the rest of invention
And corporation... but soon the nation knew nothing of crabcakes.
No more sailors. No more colts and phillies. No more
Pimilico racetrack. No more lime filled green, the kind of grass
That's good for grazing athletes, good for migratory birds, good for the orioles.
What was left were playing cards, posters and some last names
Making the eighties seem familiar after the seventies.
The stadium hollowed and film makers shot engagements
Over Colts trivia, creating an archive for years to come.

In 2002, an anniversary impossible to celebrate the new world
Turned one. And little BWI airport booms the city out of desolation
With tightened security and the removal of inflight entertainment.
The fields and drive ins have been replaced with warnings and peanuts.

A legend lays dying in a hospital with the theories
Of national safeties bedside and on the monitor. A heart attack.
Like crashing jets is impossible to predict today. No new test,
No new title, no new law can determine responsibility
Or answers to perverse peculiarities or explain the verbs
Attack, save, name, pay, pass, run and surpass.
Answers are names. This was one for the many hons. One man
As champion, husband, father, husband again, friend
And a dream come true for the small state shaped like a gun.

Death shoots memory into the conscious immediately.
In this syringe, only one comes to mind. Senior week:
The celebration of ignorance and drunkenness. Eighteen year olds lose
In Ocean City and Johnny U is ringing us on the phone
About his new advertisement campaign. Try no jail,
Tell the boys no hookers and I’ll see what I can do about free food.
And if there’s a problem down there, you call me first…and the needle releases,
That was it, his last words to remember him by.

The papers piled on the Mid Atlantic for specials, front pages
For remember whens. In any other region life was precautionary
And quiet hoping that runways would catch their flights
And that bankers would be back for dinner that night. In small Baltimore
The eclectic charms of the city smiled, said farewell
And recalled the time when all eyes followed this crab town
With its breaking news, an accidental athlete had done it again.
The Geology of Two

I lost my diamond earring in Santa Fe.
Not in the square, where locals drive
Their cars like fresh spats,
Sleek, polished engines dance
Laps waiting to be noticed
As tourists partake in real Mexican food.

And not in the frog bar, with kisses
Tequila kisses, liquor so cheap
It made us believe the bikers chicks—
Daring us another double in the Land of Enchantment.

Nor did I leave it amid the turquoise parade,
Reminding me of uneven stones
Mossed and silked from years of current,
Such a prism would be home here,
Reeling in all the blues like Rita Heyworth
or the Blonde Bombshell.
Baby Harlow would make this story
A box office hit with her mod scarf
Covering her one naked ear.
That would be the first shot but no.

My fossil sits inside the mattress
At a Budget Inn, maybe that’s the name,
Barred from sharing the fractions
Of accidental paintings,
They call sunsets in these parts:

Teal stretching then tilting
Before spinning out
The last of cinnamon rays
Over the valley
Down the river’s stream
Before dressing the ridges
In ripe shades of lilac—
The land so smitten
Tiptoes back into the obsidian
Forgetting to say goodnight.
And my patina remains blind
To the luster and unheard of in the papers.
No autographs, no pictures, it is its own story
Waiting to be found, no one else’s but its own.
Mellow Sailor

Poor Clytie, you always new your place was not
with me. You accepted the simplicity in tending
to gardens or was it playing with dolls...I can’t remember now.

Some afternoon forgone on some adventure
Clytie carried a treasure map and a piece of coral,
the map some scribble on notepaper
from her grandmother, given from her deathbed.
It read “Use these not to write me
but write you, write wherever you are, Dear, Dear Clytie,
I will answer your letters, always.”

The map, a block plan of child artistry,
somewhere between make believe and never ever.
One day it would be never have I ever,
and Clytie would respond I have. I am.

Carried off in the days, asking where
will this map lead me and is this coral
part of home. She’d toss it, if the pendant went East
it was fifteen paces East and if face down
fifteen paces South. West is any direction
on any map, anywhere, anything.
Clytie began walking
on a path found but not first seen by her,
she descended towards the cove
of that odd mermaid, a statue with some legend to it
—Clytie knew it to be the make-out spot of girlfriends
and boyfriends, a mosaic of menthols and ultra-lights.
Clytie stood alone at dusk. Did she know this
mermaid at all?

As orange swelled across the horizon
only to ripple into a bruise across the sky
the statue, the shape of it
was lost in this new light
and like a siren, she whispered,
“Dear Clytie, do you know the source of this light?”
Charm City 2004

— but they’re prehistoric
old in their ways

demanding that everyone must listen
as their blackness grows

on our knowledge
of the present; always missile and incomplete:

they are soldiers
some and everywhere in the world,
waiting

for the right time
to rise
and breed
a fertile economy, a lineage

for another seventeen years
of stock market downshifts—oh the bugs
(that’s all they are, really)
will need to change

insurgents, transports
snipers
insect, locust and cicada

everywhere the body turns this summer
towards TV, towards track and sea

the same emotion avails

no one wants leave anymore
hoping that closing doors can protect

that ignoring the problem
will go away without participation;
even the yellow ribbon stickers
on cars are peeling off from the frustration.
The Iraq National Philharmonic Performs The Marriage of Figaro, 2002

This time in Baghdad,
arias of human love and romantic fictions wax
over an orchestra hall and the last oboe player
performing two times a month still,
(for less than ten dollars each year)

is paid through feudal fifty
-cent tickets that distinguish oboe
player from dwindling dapper dressed audiences,
the smoke suits are tired and holy, losing

fifty cents to the drafts of shot pockets,
a currency too poor for even art to replace,
the people remain constant

(—and how in post traumatic mess)

as harmonies of vigilance grow hard to decode
what comedy is, as tricks and foul play crescendo across the stage
one Ocean, separated humanely
in smaller names— if only this tragedy

was such a comedy of trysts

and intrigues dancing under
lantern lights in an Italian garden,
where in act four, all identities reunite
with their rightful Name

to wed a love story closed, divulged
without any Rules as standing ovation
disregards baritone explosions for an organza curtain, briefly
saluting the solidarity
of a shell shocked conductor
remaining patient for an auditorium
that stands in solace,
through movement after movement
and, sanction after sanction
continuing on
in sweeping choruses
of another's song.
Topos

Until mythology has become reasonable,
It will embarrass the philosopher...then the two
Should meet, go out to dinner and get drunk,
Maybe decide to elope in Las Vegas
With Elvis, John and Captain Kirk as their witnesses.

Reasonable is rational and embarrassment, emotional.
If they were to unite as the past and future kill the present
With the sunrise over the strip, both would glow
Only as dull shadows because lights do not shine
When the sun is up and the lights are on—only the dust
Of remnant tourists, cab mufflers, the particles of fast food
Can be seen.

If myth were to marry the thinker, maybe something new
Would grow, something not born from the rib,
The ground, or the sky. The symbols would have no
Names, be a-historical in their own right.

If myth were to marry the thinker, maybe some of this earth
Could be saved and cathedrals could be coherent letting anyone
Sit in any pew and pray to God knows who.

But even if the adage is true, that opposites attract
It is a much a do about nothing; neither myth in her organic
Gown of ornate culture, nor the thinker in his calculated
Sustainable view would ever compromise
Their pride. It matters too much to be right.
**Rough Opening**...The horizontal and vertical measurement of a window or door opening before dry wall or siding installed.
Ballroom Dancing

The ice cube skimmed the surface of the dance floor—as two united dancers should, the shape grows smaller narrower as chances carry it from one wall to another. Firetruck face had spun it from his cup during the break in a gesture of whole elegance; our eyes had forgotten (to watch) its blaze—Firetruck’s scolding was too frightening, would they ask us to leave, ever? The floor center grew damper

Plaid Suspenders and Navy-Blazer-but-Black Shoes had reinforced the protest while getting lemonade during the postured confrontation with the dance instructors, they had managed to steal extra Dixie cups loaded for TARGET-WOODEN DANCE FLOOR. Our vaudevillian giggles were evenly dispersed in boy-girl-boy-girl-boy-girl cross legs and an eased-shoulders pattern making it impossible to determine which side had attacked as Plaid Suspenders and Navy-Blazer-but-Black Shoes returned to their seats, the second cups were passed off to their dance partners. Both pairs of Patent Leathers bowed for sips covering any evidence of espionage.

Our mentors ruffled at the front with heads nodding and shaking in disappointment. Their roles to return us refined, ready for our parents would take at least one more class or a year, perhaps even suggest, the board consider weekly sessions over the every other Wednesday policy.

How much is that doggy in the window turned briefly in broken chords before a Charleston was chosen—the center floor was slick. Our thoughts had long drifted from Firetruck’s original deed.

With a Charleston on, the game shifted to us, cheeky and hooty, a Charleston meant pointed toe time. In several dances it is customary to display physical intimacy, there are three points of contact: an arm wrestle a toe step

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and a shin kick
of the three, the shin kick is solely reserved
for drolly little ladies waiting to be.

This right more important than any rite of passage,
far more crucial than buying a seasonal dress, drop
waist with bows were the shoes. They were codes
of honor and badges of respect—
the pointier the toe, the more poignant the kick.

one two three four
  one two three
    one two three four

(and return)

one two three four
  one two three
    one two three four

A beat sirening on guard
invited us to leave
our seats in boy-girl-boy-girl-boy-girl-boy
uncrossing legs and balancing shoulders
boys extended their right hands, palmy and sticky
from munchkin doughnuts to each girl.

Each pair completed a circle at first,
slowly each link slinked in and out
filling the dancehall with offbeats
occasional claps, muffled sighs of athleticism

and on rare days, a whistle
usually cut short
by a ribbon of laughter.

Today though the infantry aimed higher,
Plaid Suspenders motioned a dare
at Navy-Blazer-but-Black Shoes
who in turn looked at Firetruck.
Six eyes were now focused on one thing
as pairs tried to keep up with the Charleston
three matches had trotted closer to centerfloor.
With twists and exaggerated turns
the girls were in the line of fire, the puddle
only dance steps away as Firetruck motioned moves,
his Green Velvet went in for a coup,
her right patent leather came back

and then up and across—contact made.
Firetruck wobbles from the corner kick
as Green Velvet catches the water trap
delayed.

She hits the water
without grace
or composure
Green Velvet destroyed.

The dance instructors race to the center
forming an ocellus of the eye, green encircled by black
with all eyes wide on crying Green Velvet
as she gets to her toes, Firetruck is grabbed by the elbow,
escorted through curtained double doors—to wait in the lobby
to apologize to Green Velvet
who is now hiccupping for breath.

The album skips to window, window
how much is that doggy in the window
the one in the ——mute.
The music is cut and silently the results are announced,

boys 5
girls 15.

Apologies always count for more.
Inconvenient Occupation

Discerning cicadas
frisk out of the dirt.
They have been sucking blind

for years, at the base of the trees; but now,
unearthed and no longer rooted

their wings beat furiously in the summer heat:

ta eat beat ta deat
and creak and deat, deat

ta eat beat ta deat
and creak and deat, deat.

Each evening lasts
longer in May
as they swarm the streets
of upper class neighborhoods.

They cling to windshields
pick pocket pocketbooks
unable to grab anything
or bite down on a coin,
so as to carry it—they can’t.

Their unfortunate life span ends soon;
in a few weeks, their shells will be mowed
and recycled into the dirt, into the little league fields
and horseback riding rings.

Their memory fades
with the novelty of chocolate bugs
and the jokes, the sounds of

ta eat beat ta deat
and creak and deat deat

ta eat beat ta deat
and creak and deat deat

will finally hush for Fourth of July barbeques
summer weddings, leaving enough time
for people and their seasons to exist outside.
Musika, Charm City's Heartbreaker

The muse was commissioned to compose a poem
For the year of the rooster. Conflicted
With whispers, with whether or not the couple had the beat
Down on Charles Street, if they got their kids to school, to dancing class
And practice. And she turned pink at these thoughts,
More pale as the day grew closer and the closet, deeper
That she kept her secret in. It was times of Antigone
And Tudor England that reflected back
When she stared in the mirror looking at herself
As if she could bring inspiration to herself. There was nothing
To write about marriage these days, all
Of the ones she knew of had broken with marble
And earthquakes, evolved and transformed like tropical birds
In Central America—the genes similar but their mutations
The result of crossbreeding, raves and tin cans, in hot
Temperatures...all shades had grown possible, familiar.
And so much, that they were no longer special enough
To earn their own names. In all the modern reference books
It listed thirty possibilities, difficult to identify, more than likely
With species A, B, C, X5 and Z. She had been in Baltimore
For the last hundred years or so where the species were thinning
From A, B, C, X5 and Z to indistinct hybrids of yuppie, grunge artist
And athlete.

The muse thought to herself...it was May and Preakness, the next day,
How this world resembled signs of man after the days of gods,
After myths, after even the natural world forgot about muses.
Equations a client once said, you think of us as equations.
I'll take my poem now. And muse passed the poem
Without asking her for check even though her rent
Was well passed due. The client clamored cuss words
To her civilian status, such mere mortals, she should replace
Herself, muse go the hell back to Antiquity or whatever
It said in the history books. High school that's where you belong
And the client raised the middle finger and slammed the door.
And muse thought to herself, an active hieroglyph. She wrote down
To place a bet at the track on her grocery list where the first item
Was garbage bags, twenty gallon size.

Muse needed the work. She participated as much as she knew how:
Got a checking account at the Wachovia, filled out W2s, laughed
About how some of her early pages would have seen the bubbles,
The black and white, the internet signatures, how long ago
They used ciphers, marks elected
And adopted to sculpture the self. Now, it was numbers.
MUSE looks so lonely in the boxes, on her personal identification card,
Her social security card a monopoly dollar.

It was the year of the cock—the cock a cuckoo, coodle, do, do whap
Be bop melody. Influence has dwindled integrity but even muse
Couldn't bring herself to apply for some positions, such as the news.
She couldn't find fault in maintaining, to report to stadiums
And soccer matches because soccer fans are passionate big dogs with big claws...
Fill in weathermen, fill in Odysseus, fill in Icarus, fill in addict, fill in fool
Fill in president, fill in CEO, fill in poets who pay muses, fill in rock’n’roll,
Fill in, fill in, fill, muse, fill in till it’s full. Six billion full. Six more wide.
Geologist and Architect, grocery bags and parcels. Fill in, fill in Muse,
There’s still more room. No one knows she is Muse in Baltimore.

Muse mused and sang hopes into the window sill.
They spilled through the screen
And down to the café, bookstore and supermarket entrance.
She didn’t watch
The beggars disappear, tossing their brown bags and bus stop sleep boxes
Into the trash. She didn’t notice that the light rail was full
And people were saving their gas tanks.
Dreams found realities and apparitions, prescriptions—this
Modern world removed remedies
And beats from the streets—
Obscura historia—a translation with no authorship to own

And doesn’t want it she thinks; not the eighteen wheelers, not the drive thrus,
Not the supermarkets, their advertising large parking lots, not the barbaric yawp
Of Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole, Here We Go, We Go, Go, Go, GO, GO,
GOGOOOO—and they do go
Back into the dirt, back into the ashes, return in City Paper Classifieds:
Men seeking women,
women seeking men,
men for men,
women to women, transition
Into halves,
in transition seeking a whole.

Muse changed to banana paper some years back
For its natural thickness, its ability to absorb change
And scratch outs, scratch ins, the names so much like lotto tickets:
8, 47, 15, 3—Henry, Donovan, Christine and Sam
Have all contacted the muse, eight times, forty seven
If muse counts reincarnation,
Fifteen for all the high school sweethearts and three for the lovers
Who reach golden anniversaries, renewing vows—when she finds those,
She is Muse and bestows

Words like Walden's rhythms of stream and instep
Making crackling crack and talk like the infused parrots
Floating on the warm air currents on the Pacific
That have too many inter styles to have real names
And muse finds them, then, beautiful. Her mood is Arabia,
Twisted, windy and tortuous to her.
She is too often sold in commercials
At bargain basement deals
With the lingerie that entices idea
Without experience. She is
A prescription over the counter countless times, to countless parrots
Who tick tock tick tick and take it till it works and time release pills

Release into the blood stream making men and women
Into mythical creatures, crawling deep beneath the sheets
Of night and ancestry. They crawl and waltz till they see
Themselves muses, relinquishing muse from her eternal duty
Of supply and demand, create and undertake,
Miscalculate to formulate once more.
Once more, muse will remain,
Return with something of a mystery, a word
That will sink into the harbor
And rescue the bodies that have drowned
In freak storms, in relationships, and in hearts.
She’s trying her damnedest in this city
Making Arbutus sound pretty,
Humming Broadway in melodies,
Calling everything Calvert,
Reverting the wax museums into life
So the fish markets stay full and free from Mercury.
Wilderness Beyond This Point

My foot slips on loose desert. It’s a trip
into the wild sage and braided cactus muscle
claws my calf but what scar is permanent
what skin stays the same: it will
wrinkle/ stretch/ expand/ shrink. It will
go from red to purple to quartz.

And this canyon will be under water
again some day, National Geographic says so.
Two hundred more years
and the prehistoric kitchens and fish petroglyphs
will need to be discovered with scuba masks.

Then my foot will swim.
time ceases in assonance /and the hours/have no quarters to roll

they walk in /no money
they walk in/opening the door

one says to another/fuckin'
poet is /shut out

from a phone booth/ once more

short notice/ follows

new plan/films
and experiences/seem new

have been/again (is)
(but )smaller/traveled
towards/more
dead/since then/weeds
the plants/ in the city for color/in the quarry for cleanliness /in the graveyard/the edges

are thick/hedges
fill in all the space

between the plots/ a names is lost/ in Long Island

a cousin asks/where his grandfather is
pulling/ pockets/ for

a rock to give
back

the loose /ends travel/ within the hour
out of city/ to airport

a cadenza/ with ice box cookies
following/unused pennies/outside
a phone booth/ on Second Avenue

converse/ in buttons
to machine/ leave this city

this money/ behind
the swing door/ to run out

after/ pornographer/
paper change

after soldier
this/sidewalk

erases/footsteps/no more
Reconnaissance

I want to give the rib
back. Be able to wear
a corset without any tufts;

use my right hand
for rings and my left
for doing dirty stuff.

I want to give the rib
back to its owner
and find

myself in the beginning
when Gods and Olympians
were not even thoughts.

I want to give the rib
back to someone
who really needs it:

a megalomaniac
an infant
or the victim of an accident.

I want to give the rib
back to see how much
I would weigh

if my height
would change or prove
that all numbers are the same.

I want to give the rib
back so I can choose
the maker, learn who to sue

or accuse for broken hearts
and shrinking feet, for why only
my dance partners are offbeat.
I want to give the rib
back, take the too's
and conjointly attitudes

back to the counter
to find out why I didn't fit
or why he wasn't well.

See I want to give the rib
back to the carpenter
or the banker

maybe the mix tape maker
to say thank you, to say
hello.
only dogtooth violets

Someone should have said that only one day is left one miserable day before the world comes into its own,

that Power is a dielectric between A and B the current only current progressive intellectual running out of need

in new seas of bad pop music and cheap love soliloquies don't we talk anymore about the big stuff the knowledge that scares us to sleep like lab bred diseases and the children freezing (shot well on TV)

that we don't know how to be active

with
out
brand names
and
cocktail parties

singing oohh singing ahh
to fresh ska sounds
to new punk girls doin’ it funky, misty
and
still
even there
innocent

saved
corn goddesses, cockettes, any cacophony

looking for the next big thing

(the degree
the ring
the the)

i was most
pretty
when i told my mom to
fuck off
for the first time;
she saw it too
that
every
thing

was bigger
than Baltimore
than area code
than time zone

and power
was outside
laughing

in
the rain

wet and sapid, phyllotactic;

that is
we all
share
one vein, only one.
Recollection

I said I would never keep you in my company, again
(but I am wearing those blue beads today)
because they really are that friendly
and I imagine the man from Africa
in the parking lot of gas station
somewhere between Utah and Grand Junction that day
with the fronts of Spring Snow so obvious and clear
that bad weather could never be called a prediction
out there in the middle of nowhere.

So I am wearing them and including it in the poem,
a place I swore I would keep you far from.
But little bits of you has stayed with me
those somethings and cravings
at my feet like carpenter shavings...

your live Robert Hunter in Nashville,
those small strings so large on that recording.
If it’s quiet, I play his fading voice
over and over as if I were the whiskey in my own hand
imagining the taste of Terrapin Station,
how life is simple notes on the tongue

and knowledge about starches and charkas, cashews and ginger
—I still don’t agree with your stringent needs,
that garlic is the only root the body needs;

but that Italian idea of life, you do,
how to eat from the earth and scream from its dirt

out of habit—but Italian was your problem
even your grandmother said that,
full blooded Italian,
my dear, that’s hard to handle.

A man so mad, a man so full human...
we were dating when war broke out
and we smacked one another in bed
tried stuff that people rent videos for

what is love in between too many news reports
and interruptions with national announcements,
reruns of Democracy Now and how I disagreed with your views
... I knew then yoga and Republicans
had to be some sort of organic threat, maybe a guru’s regret.

Full blooded human. I could say more
but I never planned on this moment,
talking to you again while wearing your beads,
the blue hearts with Play Do flecks of color
rising out of their inconsistent forms,
the blue beads, with the one white heart that falls
every now and then in between my breasts.

How did it happen—you managing in the end
to stay so close
...blue beads for nothing from Africa
such memories in the strange of my heart are impossible to remove.
Change Order...A contract for modifying plans, speculations, the price of the construction.
Theory of the World

Shifts are compressed plate tectonics
for new muscle rages and marrow ranges building new
history with electronic deities...they will surpass, new stories too
with ribs and idols and Henry in the same shared dust.

One day, Henry, all the scars of the world
will be murals of vermillion cleavage—-mistakes lucky
like all the guilty primates.
cities

i.
this do to this
remembrance to me;
add the word how

and sleep, people,

how people eat

retreat
and listen to the direct verses on Direct TV

in the windows of barricades and causeways

placed in the allies of traffic
that the lady with a black rose

knows to be Jesus’ blood and the accountant

with the name resurrection

( really )is Jesus’ son, from Baltimore

from Oregon, from a trail of A’s who vote every year
who grow older every year, who grow smaller
as they grow larger

walking the streets and avenue, this is the accountant:

discerning how to save,
discriminating against the discriminated members

who have bruises and black scars

who have been caught in trolley accidents

looking for history

returning to the answers we never want to see
but be and are the words made from characters
made as we repeat
we do this to thee;
we do this to thee; it takes time to be symbols.,
how much time it takes, and takes.

ii.
The bible woman on cable
is talking about her trip to Nice
and how she stopped in Amsterdam
filled with vim, vigor and vitality
with a southern drawl
she’s passed forty
and refuses to say how much
—does it matter, she shares with us
how to take communion
that she avoided snuffles
and loves her daughter
and loves everyday
in her house
with the Jerusalem bible
with fifty two, verse thirteen.

She wants you to know she didn’t get sick
that she knows his acquaintances
and sickness is no stranger;
please him and you
take in the bodies of others...
and take in your wine
in plush club chairs
remember heavenly
and remember thankful
as we consume
the wheat
the trees
the water crest
of clean air, clean there
and living where
and living where the ears, nose...
She screams pancreas from the cable box:
receive and consume
this is gastronomical advantageous (in genius)
world and world and universe
aligned forever in crooked angles of belief.
The bible lady on cable
who sits in the poses
they teach on the home shopping network
explaining how to change clothes
how to be healthy in good hands.

iii.
The streets disconnect by design
and the removable city label peels off
from the humidity and salt.
The zones are sugar cones
hoping their tears of green and smoked cured leaves
will refrain from singing
because they do
they do and wop, wop
because they sing when they exist

and song
pulses as we claim
words different
for each address

played for
steroid cocktails
amphetamine
outstanding physics

and folds of folds

fall out of the possibilities.
Each section of the floor
plank and snap grid

carpet and tile

for dirt, for origin

can be unsnapped

for discovery.
The removable city
has sunk to the sea

and returned
to catch the lava of gods

the dust so heavy, the city slept
for thousands of years
before the clues blew across
the desk

with curiosity in
the chair, new songs
new tents and signs.

We look to pyramids and
rainforests for the answer
for the earthquake.

Each city design
is built for absence,
each street corner
hoping to arc into anonymous
colorful numbers

that new stars know nothing about.

iv.

Bluesman lost his voice
and still he sings from the stage
of a minor league stadium
where hotdogs are charged by credit card
and the smell of cotton candy
is sent through air ducts. Old blues, oh man,
he was responsible for so much;
the street corners of protest
were painted with his saliva
spitting, beads over a mike,
salt and water for society.
Should've seen how simple spit is,
part ocean, part sky, part you, part me.

You could hear his spit
when he sang, when the keys were pressed.
(voice is shot from screaming for so long
over skylines, over headlines, over airways) And it's way, way, far from here...
Bluesman, rock’n’roll man, singing man
old man how did you live so long,
how is it so, you make it on time for me
at the end here, in the farm team’s dugout
playing for no one.

v.

It was Albany, not even love. And some one talked on and on about the streets of Paris
over margaritas and she cried, to herself and quietly.

Options really are discord, so happily un,matching dreams with this moment, now gone
into history and all that’s remembered, these streets French with music for lovers because
lovers use the stage forgetting who has slept with who if they even get along have
fancied hating each other, lovers...such a second for sin
before consequence dawns...lovers
no nothing of the daylight.

vi.

There are no spiders in cities, rats yes,
but no spiders.

vii.

(Amsterdam perhaps,
makes the most out of cities.

Shapes and graats into the circles into the moonpies, 
sounds of boat and bell ring over stone roads; 
it’s only bicycles.

Few seconds matter more 
than green light, 
red light, yellow flashing 
light for tram 
light for walker 
lighter for man 
for cab, for sedan

learn to blink as one machine 
and mingle with Kings and Queens, 
every person is a piece 
of this world.

At least there, in the city of straats 
timing makes perfect sense 
and remains a wondrous quandary: 
what’s this rush if it comes down to timing 
to timing when three out of the four 
are always a measure off. There are 
red lights blinking for walkers, yellow for cars 
and green and green for bikes and trams. 
Confusion is solved by looking out.

viii.

This may never be done, 
done when infestation is occupation 
and inhabitants become insects and cicadas 
know nothing of their symmetry.
Charm City

Pink flamingos have neon lights for wings and webbed feet—on the Avenue on Eastern on Hess on Fleet Street—and stores sell the plastic kind—one café has a real big bird stretching four stories from roof to pavement in pink paper mache—in pink sealer in pink and pretty—resisting graffiti and garb

(how did they) became

Tokens and unifying passports—for the old and the angry—how did a bird grow into symmetry over voting lines and picket fences, docks and trollers—how did a bird grow into a symbol into a joke into a movie into a restaurant

How did it bring something inclusive to towns towns that have been seceding for centuries

Hereford Arbutus Highlandtown Federal Hill Riviera

— why is there such comfort in being able to watch the clock while someone, intelligent, why not, educated discusses Japanese suicide where did it go, time—how did it find itself in a room without water and without accents without the kitschy (re)marks of the mundane, like DHU loves ME and THIS PLACE, SUCKS exclamation, exclamation and point to the vernacular on the desk, so everyone understands

No one talks jerst like dhis, not hrerer.
Bettard grab erh brewskie.

102

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this is not—not where I am from—not my neighborhood—it isn't about suicide—
martyrdom is rare and idealized into football games and lacrosse halls of fame—shot
clocks are different in charm city—maybe ecstasy—maybe gunshot—and hit and run—
maybe carbon monoxide towers—maybe asbestos abandoned with the mills that still
stand—steadfast in Brooklyn, yellow glass and that’s Brooklyn, abandoned on the South
Side on The Harbor, abandoned with grandmothers and cheap dinettes and schools—no
one don’t live here no more—not in the area of broken glass—nothn’ but the Mills—
sitting near McHenry and sitting along the Jones Falls—waiting for the flood to wash
them over—this winter—this hurricane—that time soon—maybe when the polar caps
arrive, dock next to the Mary or the Elizabeth—maybe when the buildings are bought—
and are dry with wrought

—those days, on those days row houses are anything but convenient
when the water overflows
the flamingos still float
almost always unhurt, almost always whole
no broken beaks, no clipped wings—the plastic stays strong
cohesive amongst the strange resilient tones
of the cockney accent
shouting from stoop to corner around each block

oh hon itw’ll be jerst fine, yer schee

the voices—confident with ease—that this estuary—will shed water for years—the
sentiment is sedimentary and crustacean, scavenging at the bottom of the bay—the
flamingoes are hearts and badges—dishonorable dispositions—so stubborn—unable to
recognize that the foundation of the building as eroded—that this place—is unlivable—in
danger—within a year—the block will be refabbed, jammed—with security codes and
passwords
VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Victoria Elizabeth Plasse

Address:
PO Box 373
12428 Garrison Forest Road
Owings Mills, MD 21117

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, English and Political Science, 1997
Bucknell University

Special Honors and Awards:
Honors in English from Bucknell University

Publications:
Poetry Motel, Winter 2002-3
Curbside Review, Spring 2003
Interim, Forthcoming

Thesis Title: CHARM CITY

Thesis Committee:
Chairperson, Claudia Keelan, MFA
Committee Member, Dr. Nick LoLordo, Ph.D
Committee Member, Dave Hickey, MA
Graduate Faculty Representative, David Loeb, MA