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Glean: Poems

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GLEAN: POEMS

by

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Bachelor of Arts
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1999

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2002

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree in English
Department of English
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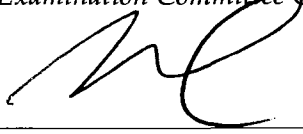
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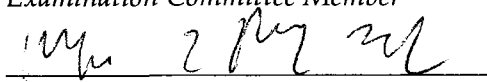
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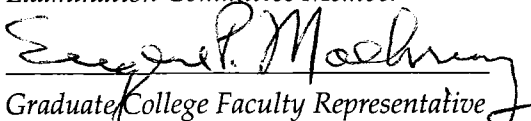
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Doctor of Philosophy in English


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ABSTRACT

Glean: Poems

by

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Claudia Keelan, Examinations Committee Chair
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Glean, a reference to the gathering of grain after harvest, explores the appalling trust implicit in any act of faith—that prayer may not elicit a response. Spare and evocative, the collection struggles with a language at odds with itself. How do we write about an absence that can never be fully possessed or known, an absence that may be all we ever glimpse of the divine? When does spirituality become more real than its pursuit? Moving between doubt and vulnerability, the body and its unresolved spiritual fate, *Glean* dedicates itself to the exploration of faith, simultaneously investigating the possibility of salvation and the difficulty of its attainment. Echoing other religious poets and figures—John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Saint Augustine, Joan of Arc, Simone Weil—the collection focuses on Catholic iconography and ritual, particularly the concept of the crucifixion. Although these poems engage Catholic ideas and beliefs, they are always more personal than denominational or ideological. The focus remains primarily on the question of faith and the private struggle with its absence. The form of these poems fluctuates between the terse, pregnant lines of George Oppen and Paul Celan and the loose, expansive lines of William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson.

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Thanks also to Eavan and Amber, for their company.

CALLED BACK, CALLED BACK

Acquit me, make me
purblind, unbloomed, a thing that,

when aroused,
 remains dormant, unused, none
among many. As the bulb that persists within its sullen,

despondent mood, alive, but no more, no better
than some kind of senseless meat.

I turn away but wherever I turn I encounter
the same soft refrain—

 I did not call you, lie back down.

I did not call, lie back, lie down.

There is death and then
there is sleep, or I no longer know who's calling or
what I've heard or what I'll say. As, when roused once more

by your voice-light, its endless drag and weight,
I move

as a tuber on the verge of swelling, the called-forth,
fruited body, caught between monad and many,

between almost and already.

APPROACH, OPEN

1

What kind of name

is a name asking, when the one
spoken to, continually attenuated,

does not speak?

Steady affliction,

my entire person, this embodiment,
what went missing in the first place—

self, samara, the winged fruit.

Called also, key.

2

What follows self?

This slow foment of shape, this semblance,
similitude.

This sham,

 a ghost town assembled, so spectral, so fabulous
it will not fade—

 it's me, it's me, it's me—

The lock fixed in which a voice utters “turn.”

3

What was intended?

A form

in which a name could elicit such trembling,
each limb buffeted and broke and separating.

The self now sundered, now apart.

O help me through the fact of you, unfasten
whatever arrives.

Someone wants in.

AUBADE

Metal is the most honest.

You knock and nothing answers.

A raised fist, an echo,

 snow sliding sideways

from a tin roof, and the sun gone for days.

The difference between waking and sleeping

has now become no different,

 the sheets empty

and in knots at the edge of the bed.

By laid bare,

 do you mean you won't bring this up again?

By asking me to come, do you mean to have it out?

I remember a stick leaning in a hallway, a hat
on a table, a narrow road
outside a window. The stars
like something I wish I had said earlier.

Now you want that.

What they said.

MY EASTER

Breathbloom, the resurrection lily
spent on its stem,

the pale throat thrown back
announcing—what?

Behold, all at once,

the flesh-like knot
undone, each petal released, their beauty un-
mistakable and

already gone.

~

I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.

~

How then explain the resilience of any sacrifice,
when your body becomes

a willed disclosure of flight, a transience
arrayed, briefly, to make plain what will soon be lost?

How await the expectant,

render such an arrival
when the flower comes apart with an ease and abandon
hands cannot stop,

or don't want to?

~

The lamb that taketh away, taketh away.

~

But what has been taken—

your body, broken now,
over and over— has been taken without enmity, without
struggle even.

Only, that grief, this elegy, is remarkable
for its insistence.

Appearing to withdraw without yet leaving,
you remain, incur trespass, until such a breach leaves you

errant, wandering in this garden
among your relics, your ruin.

~

I followed, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold
of me, but I left the linen and ran off naked.

~

Give me this—
one more day, one more day.

That I might have it,
your just once embrace.

BODY AS GO-BETWEEN

I

Gone.

My body, all the guests.

How will you recognize

my nothing, its barest twig,

the charcoal passed from pedestrian to pedestrian?

Transposed, the dark line, my name (somewhere) calling?

2

I agree with charcoal, its scintillant nub.

We became this cipher,

code appearing, reappearing, and then

what was sent as invitation to call the body back.

(Who was sent?)

Called to, beseeched, and then

awaiting the inviolate guest.

Hands that prayed for hours each day without answering,

they wept.

3

Overmuch, the deluge, its redundancy.

Rain continuing

to batter the field beyond field.

It gave up holes, this body, its porous nature, the lack of it.

The way it held still (tho porous).

And escaping all the while (again) the body,
its redundancy.

Too small to read from here, each letter, my name.

The white corrupting the white of each syllable—
why the charcoal was passed.

They made signs that resembled digging,
but I was too far above them.

When they got on their knees
to see better, I didn't look back.

HOW WILL YOU RENDER IT, HOW WILL YOU HOLD IT,
HOW WILL YOU BURY OR CARRY IT AWAY

Errant

In the empty rehearsed space this chapel our hands
folded like so little else but us o us praying and more
gathered to press a name to the specter halo of moisture
the one ghost surely the only ghost to have graced this town with its wet
signature
today the assembled left to right
the assembled huddled close and shivering
if ever there was mention of before now comes this
in so familiar a way
we went further and further coming out
the assembled the applause the other side.

Straight (not straight, and broken lines)

This would follow after but no one told me
move slowly when moving at all
the road a chalk-line night a faded blue
reach around and touch me while everything else goes by
because everything you've said I've already forgotten
say something else then repeat come close come closer
the distance between us now shut in both directions
now only a finger pointing away
before this my entire life
a stick leaning against a house.

Church of the Corpus Azul

Threadbare the lampblack body drawn with carbon

the soul made of horsehair

this pilgrimage leads to a single shade of absence

atonement piebald

penance ash-faced leaden

and on the mountain the air

is continually bruised

by prayer

the words themselves beating.

Errant

Comes a crow on the back of a horse gleaning
such hunger from the landscape
makes an image itself hungry
meaning this crow as none other than myself
trying to get to you before nightfall
before remembering m'lord how contingent upon my wandering
your voice vanishes ascends descends vanishes again
no rigging beyond its partition
this journey always so sudden exits.

Green Hymn

To eulogize elegy to mean
erudition continuing throughout everything it touches
until necessarily reaching it
stubborn perch the crow recedes upon
air draft the slow alluvial churn of wings
in tandem hands fold into one another
each other caught unaware
in prayer homage
holding fast tho unfinished perhaps
it can be read as it is.

THE WOUND IN WHICH THE WORD

Word or words, their folding in.

The field, the fold, I herd them
toward, upon, against,
in reply to, face to face with, touching—
you.

The puncture, spot that flecks your skin, slit where the words go,
where they live.

The sheepfold, their wool shirts marred by red, one sepulchered body
after another, their din. The clamor of their tongues, their evensong.

I was told to take them in, reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side.
Only the words then,

so easily led, through it all, reach hither thy hand, every one
accounted for, when I reach—perforated, open, the running wound—
you.

O HIEROGLYPH (FORGOTTEN WORD, SPREAD YOUR RED LIPS AROUND ME)

1

As if the wet vowel might speak.

As if, plundered,
it might give up its blank stare, and
suddenly, shudder in my mouth.

We exchange a language

 dumb as flesh, pressed into and bruised
beyond recognition, its only response the black eye's dull circle of speech.

2

Blue, blue-brown,

each color offset by the surrounding skin,
the calcite thought of your returning again.

I cannot muster

what I should have lost, and in the wish gained
more steadfast: your curio, what swings from a locket upon my chest.
A message that now only speaks
with its fist.

THE WHITE NO WHERE

There is this deciduousness inside me.

Shedding or losing

the scion, my heart, remains adamant, repeating
against what does not wish to keep it.

The body (my body)

erases, from repetition, what was once
the reason, now the result of such fury—

having been led so far to encounter
this never-ending whiteness, each artery, blended, beats against it,

as if to create,

out of motion, out of the sickness of motion,
a color to contrast what consumes it:

o opaque world, de-veined limb, you my lord.

NEVERBODY

Unsaid,

 but that the hand makes it
known, a gesture not yet clear, but veering
close, close.

And what else should speak for you then?

The sparrow

 caught in the soot-limed chimney,
its wings thrashing and thrashing and
thrashing—

What revealed then, what rent?

Bone, ivory, dentin—

 the body's bright Braille to sift through
as harbinger, herald, or messenger—each a sign
almost certain

to assemble an architecture worthy of worship,

but that your livid offering,

the sparrow again enlivened, its parts

quickening to pronounce a way back, should

want only to linger or bide

or persist, uninterrupted, in this,

its marrow-house.

DEAR ORPHEUS

Bright alley-up, the nightingale's munificent cry
would later be remembered as song,

but for now settles in the back of the throat
like a cough. Is not any haunt or prophecy this burden, as it passes

from one station to the next?

It provokes the mind to a culpability
hitherto unaware of—

these sheaves of music, this predilection to name.
When we arrived we were invited to invent one another in various forms.

Me, the lyre. You, the head absent its body.

FEATHERS OR A CROW ON A DEAD BIRD

Consider the immutable, what must have been,
before now, before this—

The road a dark line. Your finger, our guide,
what interrupts. The blood still deepening (somehow) the pavement.

Registered or at least glimpsed, the form or shape or remains
have separated.

It is not death, nor even (no) the bird, but (again, somehow)
its reproach—the mouth's open posture of disbelief, flight now

fluttering in my throat.

THE SCRAPE THAT STARTS THE FIRE

1

You keep others away to keep the wound
for yourself.

In your ardor,

it resembles a signal fire, a commotion
of spark and flame, an alarum meant to warn (again)

others away.

There is nothing now but the wound and its warmth

2

and you within it.

The way you are held

within it, a thing rubbed beyond

ardor, blush, rubescence, a figure meant to lose itself

along the way.

Your body, the shadow of the wound, the red

that runs

3

through everything.

HE CALLS ME LAMBENT, LUCENT

What I said, I said for fear of the fire.

—Joan of Arc

1

The days are embers lit in my throat. When I speak, the timid fire
that is my voice, erupts.

When I am hushed, the dark coal collapses back into itself
and nothing comes out.

The fire lasted for as long as I allowed it to sing.

Then it became a scattering of intermittent light that shone,
intermittently, upon my breast,

a tableau vivant where my heart used to be.

I did not foresee my words becoming such a reverie of mimic and refrain.

Once I spoke, I dared not fetch them

from the flame.

We speak like matches in a mirror: Each flagrant reflection a portrait
of restraint.

There is so little to go on, each wooden stem only lasting so long.
Soon, we are ash and soot to be swept up and carried away.

An absence, a stain.

An occasion for memory.

There is no more resemblance to light, only the words
that continue to come out like bits of ash,

like a bird passing through
an uninhabitable flame.

3

Inseparable from the fire, your words take precedence over it.

What you have to tell me

 begins as a half-lit flower,
but then unfolds and erupts.

And although the air smokes with its petals, its holy perfume,
I can still make out your offer.

Overhead, I hear the shuttling of wings in the dark.

Your voice, a spark that goes on firing.

The fire not far off.

4

Head full of soot, I cannot give pardon to the wind that whips
my thoughts about.

Absorbed as I am, it isn't easy being led. I follow your chemical trace
through the sulfur pits.

I will use their chimney smoke as vaporous crumbs
to find my way back.

But if I return, I will burn everything that reminds me of you.

I will pretend the journey never took place, never left
its indelible blush in my skin.

Its fitful fever of again, again.

5

To pass with impunity through the flame.

The hand does not think so. Singed or else caught in a labyrinth
of orange and white,

white and orange, its fingers
cannot take hold.

Between cinder and flare we meet,
the alleged arsonists.

Is this warehouse on fire your love letter? Do the sirens add ornamentation
to your already engulfed voice?

The conflagration of wings that are the others
fleeing, do you mean to make them so brightly lit?

To give them your timid fuse, its promise
of touch?

PERFORATE

Swallows fly through a fresco.

What hems in around them is the air.

And the days seem happier

because they pass, pieced together
to resemble a habitable pattern.

Part real, part conjecture, we are about to become this
ability to touch.

There is no other resolve but to fill in.

Down from the sky / Came Eros taking off his clothes / His shirt
of Phoenician red

The closest possible rendering.

To have drawn such luck from the beggar's bowl.

APPETITE OF THE BEREAVED

Pain's slow drip.

The fox gnawing at its ankle, its Venetian red—

how even this becomes derivative of nature.

Red, mercurial,

each effort replaced by more meat on the bone

to be devoured,

the even coat spoilt from the butchering—

how quickly one red spot wells up into another.

The eventual

ease of self-mutilation, the tendon loosening.

And the snare bearing down with its metal grip—

how often I have imagined the clatter.

But not enough,

not ever.

NEVERBODY

Called torn, break-away, asunderer.

SURFEIT INCENDIARY

Among the roseate, I saw a white hand descend into the glade

and pluck out a bloom. It was too soon,
its petals too tightly wound,

the white glove discarded, fingers flushed
from coaxing. Its always like this, voracious and dumb,

mutely signaling assistance. I saw you burning,
then only the burn.

I returned the flint and steel lent to me, expecting
another favor. I was told to look at the flowers in the yard,
to call them by your name. I burnt that also.

DEAD LETTER: THE VENERABLE BEDE

A gash runs sideways through
the letter. It widens as words do.

Circle of speech,
 elucidation, its radius,
from the stone to its brokenness, smoke

and dispersion, the hand to the palm
to the lines within it,

 comes dispatch:

The barbarians drive us to the sea,
and the sea drives us back

to the barbarians. Between these,
two deadly alternatives await,
drowning or slaughter.

The sleeveless errand—

man running from fire; man

running from waves; man

running from man—the remnant.

Their days spent thus, commiserating.

LIMINAL (YOUR VOICE SO TERRIBLY HUMAN, ITS DISTANCE)

Charged, the despotic fire banks.

(It was told to)

Ash arches even further, its single shadow
listless, pre-determined.

Summoned by the great cloud, its remains scattered
in every direction, I stand neither here nor there.

The interminable space, the unbeliever.

Tell me to breathe.

THE WORD IN WHICH THE WOUND

Signet, marker,

the mercurial upshot, blood spreading
and seized, the air my voice takes hold of, tongue

(now, always) wrestling forth—

do not thou strive in words—
but still in words it is achieved: communion, wedlock, the last invite
by which to please.

Summoned to conjoin,

to give it speech, the word of him
leans, furtive, away—the word of him not bound—

but (now, again) uttered,

thrown out, so that whatever remains,
this apprehension, the mouth's inevitable complaint (o forgive me),
is said, raised.

TO GATHER THE GRAPES OR DRY STICKS

1

Ruminate, remember.

To become acquainted with what is or what is not
or what could be or could not be the matter.

Enjoined, the two of us, coupled
as both reminder,

remembrancer.

Your body, now, bright white, visaged
and all the more stranger.

Your name, scavenged among us, now
(repeatedly) talked about,

sought after.

2

What I call you,

Comforter, Consoler. Dove

that alights upon that which cannot shake it loose—

the adored giving itself, unabashedly, over

to the adorer.

What I have only just begun to gather up

in my arms.

The stone rolled back.

Your body no longer.

3

All morning, this truancy.

And all along the way,

the tenantless road, offering

its promise of departure and return.

But what of arrival, its fortune, and those

who said their prayers to be counted

among the missing?

I am here and still no one has left.

4

What came before you
but the desire to reach
some terminus, the post or stone set

by which we recognize an end?

Now your hand is raised as in parting
or welcome.

Either way, it resembles,
from here, a bride's
half-turned face, which is turned (as it must)

to resemble (as it does) my own.

DEAR

1

Stand. As in trees. As in, I am standing near you
but cannot be seen.

O screen of oak leaves, when will you turn
upon your red hinge? Soon there will be nothing left

but skeleton keys, winter, your finger trailing in dust.
It accumulates.

Standing up, the knees give out first, filled
with their fluid. Then your voice, ravaged from such a distance.

We glimpse one another. We cannot speak.

We endure the melliferous drone of our folded hearts.

2

A swarm. Your heart the hive busy at work.

One body yields

to the next, as they pass from chamber to chamber.

Somewhere in the vena cava a community stirs. They are hard at work.

The air turns viscous with their yellow light,

the light of their labor.

As it dawns on them, the queen pulses with heat.

But she is still so far off. An entire life spent before reaching the spot.

How light travels, on the end of a dead signal.

O TASTE AND SEE

The wound
inflicted,

the rapture—

Pursued, pursued,
like a dog continually returning
to the prey from which it has been driven.

Not deterred,
nor disheartened even, the animal
impulse still worries the human surface,

or is, unbeknownst,
already obeyed.

~

So when the spear entered your side,
I waited.

What kind of witness is this?

When living in the body,
 being body, I take up
your dark and twin redness, endure
in its always torn and fed upon
shape—
 thou dismembered,
dismemberer.

~

Necessary, or else
 said to be so, the damage
made all the more real by my thirst for it.

Mouthful after mouthful,
the speechless act.

But let you taste and see.

WOUND SEQUENCE

Armature

Series of coils group of
wire a way of warning without words through which our conversation is induced
come here and talk to me you who made my mind your home
coinage raised velum and tongue
the consonants formed and pausing a finger
pressed against my lips first there's and then
we must keep up our various ends
without each other we tear at each other
passing it back and forth.

Judas Kiss

Hands over the rose of Sharon as payment voucher
the turgid yellow flower that began as bud
became a tumor burgeoning on its stem
a pallid thing aberrant among the crowd drawing near
pointing at your skin how it does what it does
the life of it ruddy wound opening closing
the sky rent its saints disbanded
loosed from their casement
one by one
your body its partition of bone.

Red Hymn

What breaks so fervently loose
from the traje de luces sequined with saints
their lights gone out one after another
bearing nothing particular but song in particular
because everything said is true
at least once the Veronica led the bull's head
away from you
tho now we watch
incredulous the posture you hold
announcing the horn in your side.

In the Honeyed Head

Plagued mouth spill your infestation we grow
weary of waiting for the animal
to lay down its remains
to slacken make ready their bed
the hecatomb the interred the walk throughout them
brandishing honey in my cupped hands
out of the eater came forth this meat this man
out of the strong a honeyed drone
and easing open the animal its body eased upon
a knot undone to keep the dying away.

Caret

Omission gradually or by cessation

the herd passing in the midst of its breath the stone dropped

through the surface falling

what continues between continues

when the wheel turns so much loadstone cinder and chaff

handfuls of ballast come loose and rolling to a stop

how far we have come

not to rectify but to render collusion

a body up and going about its advent.

SOJOURNER

Taut and unyielding (but a little, a little) the gristle-
creak, wings swelled,

an arch of muscle and bone spread
(but a little) wider and still (a little) wider, until

what beneath, what lying in
your shadow, is—

an occasion for soul or spirit or stay.

LET THIS CUP PASS FROM ME

That the body blames itself
for its own unrest.

That desire has nowhere else to go
but into blood and skin and bone, into must and
have.

~

That the leaves of the fig tree appear
only after its fruit,

that Christ made it that way as punishment
for his hunger, unabated, when he reached Jerusalem
the fig tree had nothing to offer.

The body wants and does not wait

for an answer, but continues on
into each new desire, until, withered at both ends, from ravishment,
from disappointment, from more or less desire,

I meet, in the middle, you.

~

That you come, green and unbidden,
before your heralding,

the leaves you pass through, retreat back into,
not there, not yet, but only appear after you have left, as if to promise a return,
as if, more likely, awaiting another gift.

~

That hunger begins with absence, the bowl of figs forgotten
because they were never found.

That pain begins as an echo, reverberating

throughout the body, making it bruised and swollen and unfit
for anyone to eat.

That it consumes itself, chewing and chewing
and chewing.

That teeth tear and bite and bleed
from the act, convinced such meat can be swallowed.

~

That it can be, miraculously, recovered, once it has been destroyed,
that which above all

moves through every thing—the, your

Through each thing present and spent

Through and through.

LONG DARNING NEEDLES' HINT OF SUTURE

How we want

and then become, so easily and without blame, without knowing even,
what we want: juncture between two bodies, whorls of a gastropod shell,

joint or line articulated, we remain seam-like, threading our way
toward stitch.

USURY (THE HEART, ITS GIFT AND ACQUISITION)

Love, interrupting solitude, grants
forgiveness,

where before the body sought to conceal
whatever wound lay despondent in its side. A flower

perhaps, of another sort, though its bloom
through the bandage

resembles, almost immediately, that of the rose
on its stem. It is this we speak of (the rose), more often than others,

and have come to understand, long before
the interruption

of love. The salient color now conjured
up in the mind, the mind working it into a further brilliance,

the likeness it holds. How it comes to bear it

(the wound), without effort,

every time. How it becomes, inevitably,
an image for the mind to use when in the absence of love.

Or, closer still, within its confines, the wish to wear
our blood like (the red) roses do.

CHURCH OF THE VOLATILE ALKALI

Promiscuous, air is air. Nothing falls through
its sundry.

For days we starved in small clusters, compared only
to the saguaro's blossom, its adoration diminished along all fifteen feet
of its one green stem.

Once our instruments reached their dead end,
distance was dead reckoned.

We came to the column of swirling dust
and spoke to the clamor. We made an altar of breath breathing there.

MAKESHIFT (YOUR KINGDOM, ITS CURRENCY)

Because I wish to prostrate myself, you will spend me
to make more money.

 You will live forever within the fiduciary act,
isolate, a sentry, the one
who counts on his fingers the dull and glinting money.

Because you starve

 without my money, the hunger begins
in your palm, its ruddy purse
opening and closing (always) on money. You will pull
the drawstrings tight,

 you will continue to clutch it to your breast,
the spent and unspent money.

Because I borrow of myself to pay for myself, because
I make good money,

 you will choose me over the rest. You will
fill the ledger, my heart,
abundant (always) with your script.

APOLOGIA

Errant

Your hand having affixed awhile my life opens
in one direction only came the bovine rose
from its bough
a thing for singing to for slaughter invocation
of the beloved the sacrifice of one so partial
this part rather than the whole body
received as gift or money what others might have called
alms this my flower offering
its involute petals every which way lulled to the parting.

O Miracle of Our Empty Hands

The question used to separate a part of
your hands full of holding
came back with so much the flower
placed in your hair another name to remember
stamen stigma style
the trestle aslant
and someone climbing down rung after rung
excuses became parenthetical
one does not possess we are told one gives
wherefore you shall know me another name.

Cut Flower Garden

Ecumenical the tumult its crowd of petals
tourmaline and of a great beauty when cut
they desire nothing coveting one another
we came to appreciate each other forever
for a while for as long as it lasts
stalks bleed wet sugar
filling fit to burst a globule
beaded along the blade
what we return remainder scrap and trim
shrugged off the loosed casing.

Fought

Slack and dryspell of thirst

it's hard to tell what they're saying

squeezed tight like that the unapproachable roses

finally eased themselves open

and spoke more plainly

I heard the latch make its latch noise

the wide and widening of the forgotten

and expected someone behind me

an unfamiliar voice asking to shake on it

together our hands a lantern swinging.

Mantilla

Labial of wind pursed but no longer a sound
this engine of breath small words in print
alighting someone came down
if only to thrive the mist
and waking from the dream make room for the dream
water vapor or mist
image not the image however circuitous
the bangle of condensation it held
words stray light
the motion of this going on like this.

NUMEN

Provocation, voicelet,

what moves in me awaits

credulity, a torn sheet in which to wrap its weight.

Solicitous attendant, o pilgrim, from the charnel

house you must transpire,

a shudder, a complaint.

~

What stirs is not ancestry.

Nor the inception of any one blood.

But the insistence to wake,

to bear witness, comes

as a stranger, from no one's mouth, no

other arrangement.

~

Your tongue, speech-pocked, unnerved, a whip
circling overhead.

My body forced to it, listening and
listening.

The imagined crack, its hiss, or what
it might have said:

let those believe who may.

A summons

(let those believe) that gathers
to itself a certainty, (let those believe
who may) the more

it leaves one behind.

~

And belief now an unrest, growing
singly in search of a pair,

the absence of some other, your voice calling
out to me —

skeptic, refuser, Thomas' head
as it continues to shake.

(know this)

I would not be here without you.

THE LARK, ITS SPUR

Image of flight,

the horizon there but for the eye
to follow, a dark spot flitting hither and hither.

My hands, hooked at the thumbs, each
finger meant to lift,

to leave, to liken the body
to what it cannot possibly possess.

And waits.

And does.

COME HITHER

Without regret, leave.

Or wait for water to collect
and overwhelm any evidence of your ever having been

here.

There is no other way. We lift ourselves
beyond the casualties

of what came before (the flood, the swollen river, its overrunning),
and kneel, enclosed, in a departure of sorts,

now that each body has been placed
into its ark and sped away.

~

I hear you
still,

so close the silence full of water, what rocks
beneath us, what is shared between,

heavy breaths that pull at the air as against ropes,
each cinch tightened and relaxed, tightened and—

~

The weather vane courses on through the sludge,
its wings flapping with the current.

What man couldn't fix, you, Lord, had,
and now the sediment

loosed as carelessly as a sack of seed split,
spilled—there is no recovery from such loss.

~

Dark-fumed,

the water now receding, now pulling us back.

Visit or visitation, whatever was meant

to warn through drowning.

We expect honeycomb and locusts, sign and wonder,

but this corruptible

moldhouse, this fleshrot, wormwhorl, the finger of you, Lord,

beckons, draws forward, lays upon the body its burden,

makes it

heavy with water.

~

Baptism never seemed so deep, the head

pushed still further under,

each embrace substantiating faith or surrender,

the senseless body floating among the waves' incantation.

~

Who will draw you out, now
that you've given yourself over?

Who dissolve
your body like a host on their tongue?

What stopping place will be provided, what
rest?

Where am I in this emergence—
who comes?

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