Samsara

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SAMSARA

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Abstract

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

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

The poem “Sojourner” in particular occupies this liminal space within the lyric tradition: in the poem, a woman undergoes an abortion and speaks to her unborn child, choosing to send it back to wander in the bardo, “Come back to me another day.” I feel strongly about taking on this topic, and in a way that diverges from other poems about abortion. There are many contemporary books of poetry about the experience of pregnancy and motherhood, but very few about having an abortion. On the one hand, this surge in writing about motherhood is positive in that the subject has been deemed too trivial to write about, a “woman’s” subject. On the other hand, these books reify a
broader cultural fetishization of the pregnant body visible in the media’s obsession with finding every celebrity’s “baby bump”. In light of this cultural trend that works to the exclusion of women who are not mothers (either by choice or necessity), I believe the experience of abortion ought to be written about more. One might even argue that this trend of writing about motherhood and pregnancy -- which may appear feminist on the surface -- is actually just another way to reduce women to their bodies.

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

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

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

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

Confrontation is usually the province of men. It is honest and open, while women often have to resort to subterfuge. Women today speak not just for themselves
but for all the women before them who could not. For me personally, this is my mother, as it was for the Baroness von Freytag, who chose to confront her father directly and physically about his abuse of herself, her mother, and siblings. He almost strangled her to death in front of her stepmother as a result of this confrontation. Thus she revealed him for what he was: a brutish tyrant. Although she loved her mother, she refused her to live like her -- in silence and in deference to her husband. Critics see the Baroness’ family dynamic as key to her aggressive and shocking performance art and poetry. I would put the Baroness in my poetic “family.”

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

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

There is something grotesquely beautiful about St. Theresa’s distorted face. Likewise, in aggression, ugliness, and the grotesque all have their rightful place in Samsara and form a counterweight to some of the quieter poems like “Changeling” and “Devotional”. This "aggression" is a way for me to critique the "feminine" norm – the speakers in these poems are trying to not just break free from Samsāra, but from societal restrictions on women's behavior and expression by mixing high diction with low, eloquence with obscenities, and invective with prayers. I believe anger is often the only
healthy response to oppression, particularly in the case of class or economic privilege, where the oppression is so often invisible to those who have the privilege and unspoken by those robbed of the means to speak. With *Samsara*, I hope to make the invisible visible and invite the possibility of transformation within the poem through the power of the imagination.
Abstract
Samsara

I.

Fashion Report
Women in the Trees
Ripe Orange
Cartwheel Galaxy
Satellite Garden
Roses
Calculator
Sojourner
Lichen
Sculpture
Itinerary
Simon Says
Estranged Blushing
Fairy Tale

II.

To Have and To
Infidel Echoes
Red on Maroon
Pregnant with White Noise
Epithet
Mis-en-scène
Corona Discharge
Only Ballerinas
Veto Bodice
Buddha Vibrator
Albino Styx
Crayon Savant
Lamaze with Still Life
Story of the Ear
Knight
Booby Trap
Hocking St. Theresa
Rebound

III.
Judging Vermeer (a documentary video), 2004
Tango! Tango!
Oracle
Vanitas Pictures
The Hourglass Delivers
We Will Continue to Attack
Blue Cockpit
Hysteria with Hummer
Muir
Mobile
Stampede
Wake
Bargain
A Good Death
Remainder
Remainder
Sky Cathedral
Capture
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“Hey stranger, will you wander off with me?”

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

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

The ones you say aren’t there. Abattoir on fire, crimson waves too long under we
pucker

Papillon greening. As they preen their machinery—Into your mouth the leaves, what’s left is
this: the serene bodies falling back into place, legs
lifting to

petal the air
RIPE ORANGE

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

The thirteen colors of horses.

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

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

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

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

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

Nimbus ripening.

Missile minuet, he said.

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

Arose a slinky stair we did it with the butcher.

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

We kept getting up and number his was.

The war to my piece.

The torn to my dicey.

The star to my mink.

Mine pie, mine one lies strewn machete.

Cuticle two the center, hold it.

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

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

I wander through white birch, a splash of blood on the wrist of your sweater. Which is also white and blue. Bruised. Or is it you that wanders, lover? I wrote, a month after my stay at the hospital, “He wanders through white birch.” I thought of you patiently making that daily pilgrimage to my bedside, my crazy side like a laughing white horse that will not let you pass.

Violin

We slipped into each other’s skin like quicksand. The casualties were few and often.

Intestine

The body is dark. Firelight sighs and cries to enter. My mother floats like a ghost by the apple trees. A dog barks in its sleep.

Civilization

About Kosovo the newspaper says, “Drive for self-determination – passionate and often violent.” The paper clipping turns brittle and yellow in her lavender journal. After the abortion,

Work

Surf the web for porn sites.

Blood

Relentless as love, the boy stutters Relentless as love The tide moves in and Out the waves are greenrelentless as memory the knock on the door you don’t want to answer (and it’s all recorded) the march of History one black boot in front of another boy stutters
SOJOURNER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

had names. It was
a burgeoning. In the encyclopedia

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

A boy with a girl’s name whispers
c:\virgin runt\ into her ear

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

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

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

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

something she has to
attend to. Things born

with certain proclivities, like falling. Or opening
like an airplane. Is there
a name for this, something written
down somewhere?

she asked and the air
became light as if newborn.
SCULPTURE

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

in the palm of night: a glass cathedral

the archer: blond ambrosial

target: rolling green

laughter: ought to be drunk

flare: reaching for his hand

verboten: a red X over, snarling bulldogs

question: who are those women in the trees

order: cleave, tighten, release

fear: getting caught in his serene machinery

surrender: her delirious her delirious

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

Play

a child on a fringe of orchid.

Play

a sailor in Beatrice lace.

Play

a face.

Say

tiara, tiara me, tiara over.

Say

a “muse” in this mildewed notebook.

Say tremolo, scalpel.

Repeat until.

The face shed its pages of harps.
ESTRANGED BLUSHING

Someone else conducts the snow. And the debris marries—

A city of light, an anemone
glowing underwater.

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

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

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

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

Soon I stood under a tiny antler.

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

Scarsely hundreds of children waving mickey mouse sparklers.
II.
TO HAVE AND TO

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

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

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

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


No fist noosed the air.

The hand, cursive Aristophanes.
Swimming in the higgledy-piggledy rouged enamel.
Myopic hum of a skirt.
Cresting saints’ warts lanced.

Said by Wilhelmina: all sex is a neologism.

A tidal, ripped script.

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

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

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

See the gladiator of parenthesis?

Delusions about what we marketed in Faluja. Never a question mark but, less often, an exclamation of body count. No explanation.

Margaret with both hands
Float away swaddled alphabet

23
INFIDEL ECHOES

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

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

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

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

*After Rothko*

I started like the masters and skinned my rabbit blue. A live burial on canvas, they called it. A chapel, a one man show, an empty gym where the fat ate caviar. No, Seagram’s, Four Seasons, no. Red on Maroon won’t take your money. The subway became my only audience and muse.

I turned to Texas oil. I burned my lungs to shit. My marriage collapsed, an artery clogged, a heart so full of color, swung onto the operating table. I cut it out to show how blood’s underbelly’s black. The rainbow I chewed up and then I spit it back.
PREGNANT WITH WHITE NOISE

Tiptoe medicine

Munk

punched

cream

umbrella

a

calendar

ap

pummeled

apples at my head

I am a net

meant to catch every color
EPITHET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My abstinence from anger

Imagined
only ballerinas kicking around
a mushroom cloud as you spoke

Played
silent
host to
a
narcissi

Starring in his own gory porno

a new accomplice?
you’ve changed

your coat

smells

like vodka.

No shower in days.
VETO BODICE

Blamed you for the lip

works from a frost-bit

Tree we still

exist my majig sayz

zero
BUDDHA VIBRATOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I drew a cashmere bath for the crayon savant. He said I do how do you?

I said PSHAW. He took my freckled kite below the sea. I took his gooey light into a bestiary. Each shrub

I pruned until BALLOON

then cut it free

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

Have a nice day.

Okay, Donne.
I died, balled in a sock.
LAMAZE WITH STILL LIFE

anodyne lullabies

Picked from between my teeth: a parade

of pubes. Dilated all the clocks and did Lamaze with still life.

Nothing came by five

Cufflinks you to me insured umbilical

long

So
STORY OF THE EAR

snowballs pelted our blueprints

t o
t o
t a b l e a u t o

melt to gold

Ring ring it goes

WHAT

are you?

Van Gogh

ate paint

I picked luck like glue

bandages

T he clock
KNIGHT

errant hair from aureole
.
Tore us

a sun
BOOBY TRAP

I napped in a down closet, a Bolshevik nosegay folded in prayer across the middle of my crammed chest. I was a booby trap meant for all the lathed boffos, thimble receipts blocking a tiny vellum telescope. A coat of many crayons. I was bogus, and he knew it, like he knew how hope was little more than antifreeze in an old jalopy. But he wanted me to oracle eye his dreams, a job with health insurance, the esteem of his people. I diademed his wife instead. We were two rank porcupines, nudging closer until our soft bellies touched. Until she lanced my heart.
HOCKING ST. THERESA
After Bernini

I tried to pawn our faces

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zed crepe
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ched anus
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t he

dusk

had

waited

long

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

You

shot a

rubber
III.
JUDGING VERMEER (A DOCUMENTARY VIDEO), 2004

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

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

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

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

You say those who are killed are killed twice,

The man accused looks directly into the surveillance camera.

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

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

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

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

Lava and skyscraper, pray me an elevator. Hungering ascension. Caesura! Caesura!

Come down now, growling new intelligence,

and hook my name to sleep.

As if everything would sharpen, which is uncertain,

unravel me.
ORACLE

Shaking it said “yes, in the new millennium”

it said “no, no, a thousand times no”

Booming Crystal ball: no

we won’t Shake the Oracle

We’ll Smack Its Space Head

Bury this ringing Sea

kaleidoscopic with her own whispered

mountain anheap shifting samsara

heat

“callow lightning: fallow yields” precocious

carnival is your zeitgeist an earthquake?

your news a noose?

swinging a slender hour

glass

sands of letters

pour steamy lines

no cover

no spine

what order?
VANITAS PICTURES
After the VMFA exhibition, (2000)

Kissing suns impassible.

I walked on my own.

White as intaglio.

A child’s skates hung on the threshold.

How many fingers have flowered on the veil?

Or checkered jesters skulls roll?

Re-pulsed, two clocks once in sync fallout.

Or repaired banana skins and oranges.

Lost in yellow baths of butter and fat.

Out of pig hides come caskets filled with light.

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

The faces of the dead Swiss are blurry as yours.
THE HOURGLASS DELIVERS

Shining

shampoo noon

promise shasta

with child entrance or crush orange roe compromises

pounce ensconce bloc ensconce

the stench of blossoms

Push

Push
WE WILL CONTINUE TO ATTACK\textsuperscript{1}

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

\textsuperscript{1} Quote borrowed from Donald Rumsfeld.
BLUE COCKPIT

a sailor almost drowne d

spread now like Denmark

upon a rock

A mermaid

with her tongue cut out

Shovels didn’t shout
HYSTERIA WITH HUMMER

I threw a navy

Tree are alive, Septimus said
MUIR

For the sailors

Hunger in my mouth like the pit
of a plum. My turtle turned on.
Clawfooted or foxed, lightspit –
I hit my head on the moon’s bow,
went under. You were there,
an actor in a sharksuit. Trailing a fin
swathed in kelp and coral. Muir
along the starry floor and aspirin,

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

heads or tails up, braid me with pig gut and murmur.
My rainbow broke or else I’m snow. Muir –
I awoke to snow outside the train window.

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

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

In the marketplace, dead birds hung like Dutch still lifes. And my tongue
to a rusted nail; the only one getting laid. Later, we went to a concert. There was a boy

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

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

I sat composed before the harps,

but wearing you, electric.

You would follow too,

if you

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

I knew I would lose

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

The New York Times reports that elephants are going crazy.

Are the stars going crazy? Here, eat one. It tastes like chicken.

Sorry, is that too obvious and cute? Ok, it tastes like elephant. It tastes like the bloody tusks of you without you in the ground. Even when the tusks are gone, I return to this spot to nuzzle your bones. The elders are gone, and young males rampage through the village, trumpeting like apocalypse and upsetting the occasional fruit cart.
WAKE

My medusa head is heavy.

make a swimming halo. Stain of lipstick, red streak

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

speeding cars leave in their wake. Tiara of electric

sperm

egg

e r i ng i

n t o f

i l a m e n t

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

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

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

Roses are spilling out of the toilet.
The house I played pony in went giddy up and gone to dust.
BARGAIN

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

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

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

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

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

Shit very faint like someone
humming in the next room.
Drawers full of girdles, tumbled
jelly fish, a clear albumen,
tentacles (the rubber straps) stretched
to hold in her fat. Drawers full of match-
boxes, sugar packets from McDonalds, tin foil.
I’m caught, ashore, in a doll’s cradle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To hunt underground, pregnant, snow uncertain.

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

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

A girl in the last pew.

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

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

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

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

Mouth to mouth with it.

In silver cages singing arrows.

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

Hooves, cinnabar, stalactites, chancre.

It sleeps, a pearly film stealing over its eyes.

Whether I say love or whether I say love.

It sleeps.

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

Never mind your division loosen

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

Backwards hilt of what was parched, could braid

All that marries insoluble (turn towards it)

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

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

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

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

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

her armor (it sounds like) the making

of a tourniquet or amulet.
DEVOTIONAL

And so we nail. How to hold peeling off. How to hold off finished. How to slake our thirst for thirst.

Cradling sounds unvanquished, solo prowess at the tip.

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

Oh cease your circling, tarry awhile in the soil.

Unveil your gilt blush, turn us turn us turn us.
INSIDE THE SNOW

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

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

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