Heyday

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HEYDAY

by

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And I? Yea I can remember
standing by the wall
and the gods shout above our heads . . .

—David Bowie’s “Heroes” misheard
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with love and gratitude to my parents, my siblings, and Ryan Thill.
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The poems “Friends” and “Remakes (After Beauty and the Beast 3D)” are dedicated to Amanda Hollander; “Tranquility” and “Afterwards” are for Steve Blau; “Ex-Boyfriends” is for Dan Vela; and “Are You Okay?” is for my younger brother, Seth. I wrote “They Lie Who Say It’s Over?” for Paul Monette and Roger Horwitz; the poem borrows its title from Montte’s 1987 AIDS elegy “The Worrying.”

“When I Was Straight” appeared in LIT. Westwind published “Orpheus 1,” “Orpheus 2,” and “Orpheus 3 or Another.” “Those Winter Months” and “Getting There” (originally titled “Correlationism”) received the 2013 Academy of American Poets’ Fred Weld Herman Memorial Prize; “Tranquility” and the first four sonnets included in “Remakes” were awarded an honorable mention for the same prize the previous year. The Orpheus poems and earlier versions of “Are You Okay?” and “Calmly, I Prepare” co-won UCLA’s Shirle Dorothy Robbins Creative Writing Award.
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NOTES
One
Getting There

The way they drove their Mitsubishi Galants to Kenosha or made me catch a signed baseball. Those cubed protective Lucite cases. The way the trade show smelled, the comics in their plastic sleeves, in their long cardboard boxes. Every corner smelled like mildew. What compulsion drove us through the heat to those glass and wooden halls in the parking lots by the empty arenas? Where is the backside of the belief in things?
If we could come to a staunch belief in our own interests, if we could decorate our rooms with photographs of boxing matches and stock cars. I tried to explain to a friend that we must get something out of subpar, even terrible, situations in order to remain in them. He disagreed. We don’t get happiness, I said, but a promise. To say a thing and mean it. To show you mean it in your eyes. We are enfolded in a vast and chemical love that says to us be nervous, run away, disappear. There are many things we should never say.
“Long, Long Thoughts”

In those days, you thought it pretty neat
to lie back and drink
boxed Rosé from the mini-fridge,
when we were cut-out
patience, your voice whispering, *One day, I’ll write the symphonies
I hear, when I close my eyes*, the uneven
brick roads and kleptomaniac future,
that practice room
we’d commandeered on the top floor, its plate glass windows even
with the cresting of a hill,
whose name I can’t recall, your secondhand trombone
squealing in fits as I read
“Beat! Beat! Drums!”
the first time, cross-legged on a piano bench,
or that massive asylum on the bluffs,
“The Ridges” closed by 1982
where frats staged hazings through numbered stones
traveling downhill like white ellipses
to the Northwest Ordinance and their brand-new Krogers
where flies shone nearby in dark dells
along route 33, now obsolete,
“The Hocking” swooping round, cradling all, or “Strouds Run”
wherein—they said—a woman drowned, forever
sunk in murk, the rainbow-painted
canoes frozen in upland cricks, but not forever, the path that seemed endless
through runnels, groundhog fields,
rusting rails and railroad cars still clad in blanced graffiti,
toppling canopies, low-slung coverts, where cottonmouths ticked out of sludge-green
“rivulets”
near a house once white and occupied
without streets, clotheslines webbed wherever,
byways beside 4-wheeler arenas
winding to other amusements, Centerville’s “Pumpkin Festival,” “Kings Island,” “The Beast,”
cops profiling you outside
Mount Vernon, Rundgren’s “Want of a Nail”
on *repeat* in that golden hatchback christened Sisyphus;
weren’t we assholes
then, parents not speaking to us
one day, anyhow, the relatives you’ll never know.
Tranquility

I’ve only known to wait.
Waiting became a calling without an end.
But is this patch of growing brush, this path without a path, where fires of white scrub out stray tangles, eat the sky, and throw the lot into a cold and vibrant excess as if there never was a thing that wasn’t more—
is this the end I’ve waited for? A breeze that lifts and eats so that I know the gain, the hope that what I have is proof enough.
Dismantling is a type of weaving stuff?
Where’s your hand then? Where’s your vision? So long I’ve led you through terrain I thought I knew.
Your strangeness added onto mine, until I stopped to look around and you, my love, were gone. Are we always to love at odds with the wild surfeit of our sudden lives, when we are sliding one by one, when I, at times, can see your back and reach for it, forgetting we are fullness? That’s what we are?
Should I say stop, you do not know the danger—
Afterwards

Though it could have been anyone
said the evening broadcast about the star’s sensational
death off the coast of Key West from where it could be seen
in the curlicue of geography near the island’s commercial center
anterior to the more unseemly serenade by the senior classman
in Cinemascope, made private in the army now, going to painted scenery
owned by Kelly Rowland, but hidden on the time-share bus,
as we must. “This is the sacred cleft of Tallahassee,” reads the sisterhood’s
billboard too, claiming the jackpot for us all—

Just like that, that day
in Macau, that thriller starring us, when we skirted the reclaimed
land mass, then hopped in a cab that sped over Portuguese
bricks, past the broke-down cathedral in the short about our past,
like night markets, the scorpions on sticks on the cover of *The New York Times*
on the wire stand next to copies of *She-Hulk* once written
in an Aramaic style, whereas antediluvian radium
leaks from botched nylon casings, attempts at containment,
unlike the papal wardrobe in the Olivier black and white
history wherein divers at the head of an expedition
staged for travelers and the tapes are sold, everything charged
on magnetized room keys. Like Keno. Like Yahtzee. Like lava in Bali
seeping—oddly enough—from the ‘06 Messina quake by a statue
carved in pumice looking away, even Yanni’s roughhewn pupils
and the long black hair while whipping from keyboards, the celestial
tones of synthesizer scoring the docudrama about the molten core
of pneumocystis carinii, the thrush in the mouth of a cave, the taste
of pennies at *Evita*’s end,

after which we climbed into the meadow,
however many decades ago, the guide asking us to envision the world without
the sun’s rays, the groundhogs rejoicing as if liberated at last, kicking up
dust from the ruins of their huts, the education
that would reign over us all our lives, but then what? Only the willows
as they bend and dunk their neon bangs in the curving brook and tangle in the mustard
weeds
like in that silent one about the sorcerer and the nymphs.
Those Winter Months

1.

The winter months were cold but the springs were colder, in their way. There were fonts of water drizzling down on the heads of the grasses, mushrooms,—As if a garden sprite lived in a red plastic watering can, as if the old raid alarm were blowing from the elementary down the block, reminding us how the kids used to walk to school in clusters, like chunks of snow lasting in the most unlikely of places, cool somehow. This is not to say we were always there when we so obviously weren’t. We hardly know the meaning of there. We mean so little and so much, as is our luck, as we stack sacks of planter’s mulch with such fervency these days, fervency, vigor, a certain force of which we’ll never know. There is little peace when one comes to the end again, it is more a mania. Far greater is the serenity, once it has taken you in, made you feel wanted, warm. More than that, secure, like a nozzle in a hole, or an inconspicuous rivet in a clunky piece of jewelry at the height of fashion. Be good to me and come home, there is so little time.

2.

We had no use for screen doors, yet we’d make sure the hinges were greased with the fat of a hog we would harvest in the bitterest of the winter’s months. Why would we want anything shrill to interrupt that monolithic view of the white mountains stretching off into the distance like the soft cradle of the heavens which would so often appear moody or distracted, like the vision of a child I once had, coming out of the water with a miserable look on his or her unstructured face, slightly deranged and nightmarish? We didn’t look at things that way back then. We made sure there were no holes through which the hypothetical dust storm might come. We barely had feelings of the simulacra of such. We dusted and chatted about nonsense, but knew it wasn’t nonsense, sensed there was some kind of meaning in the broadest of memories, a shrewdness in the most unlocal of thoughts. Where did those days go? Those myths? Those terrible days of dull colors, when everything seemed soot-covered?
Where did the people from those days go?  
Why does it feel as though we turn our backs and those days rise up again at our backs? As though we were driving on a straight hard road and the lines of vision were unwavering, the Colorado air crisp, almost pink or purple. The unending stretches of the road swallowing us like horse pills without water. Did we have brains? Did we think or did we succumb? It’s so hard to say who you are when you think of the past because who you are seems uprooted and who you were seems mechanical. Are we automatons? Are we brutal likenesses of another person, now lost somehow, always hidden behind a hand-sewn quilt of thick multi-colored grosgrain ribbons?  
There is a person running down the hall, toward a destination. There is carpet, tight, tufted, over the concrete floor, so you can hardly hear the footfalls. It might be a horse, stamping down the dirt, in a gulch, in a storybook. Why do we not go to it—to that sound, to where the sound comes from—when there is so little time?

3.

We must prioritize, they always said—
This is the lesson they said we must learn, that is why we cannot do what we want, or what we always want to do. A type of tautology. What is the difference? What is typology?
A fragrance in the air, so heady it tickles your nose. Dice rolling on a Bakelite tray. Tortoiseshell glasses. Lee Press-On Nails scattered in the grass like petals. The most esoteric of laboratories. A numinous feeling in those months we would go wintering. (Does anyone winter anymore? And if so, where?) Where are the drawbacks? Where’s the crowd, the crooner purling our names out beyond the waves of the sea that flatten as though playing the Limbo Rock again and again? We should always drink out of Tiki mugs, their noses pointing at each other, as if in debate, gridlocked over a fiasco of some kind, something the Rain God could have prevented. I should not make light! I should not screech and carry on. But I am scared and you are not here to hold me again, telling me to shush, that we may wake the children that we’ll never have. Have you forgotten me? I ask you because it’s becoming apparent. You are so distant and will not be good. No one is ever good if we are strict about it. Who, after all, can draft a perfect circle? Who can open the door for everyone? There must be that point at which we say, “I have a body”
and “I have too much to do in this world.” A diminishing point into which we walk, unassured. Not everyone is like this.
I thought of whimsical things. Of mercy and fragrances so pungent they’d make you cry—cry out for joy.
I saw a pink jacket in a shop window. I didn’t buy it.
You always loved the way to the stores, the way to the banks.
Every kind of bank—the fiscal, the hydraulic:
the way you move in the water in the wave pool at the waterpark.
I have so little time to tell you every detail.
You must come home so we can relive it all,
the grilled cheeses we used to eat, when it is so difficult to imagine such things, these days, as the rising tides pound against the seabords, the moulins rushing to the seas, as if we all were rising. About to burn.
Two
What if they hadn’t lived in the same place—what if

they didn’t even know each other and it weren’t Jove
but an ex-lover wearing a magnetic earing and a pleather
jacket, a test, in this formulation, to see if humans
could be kind to those who scorned them—
of course, they could, our heroes,
our procurers of wisdom, Baucis offering her last green apple
to the monster with the bullhead, and Philemon, possessor
of so little, casting his Pocket Rocker off in a jiff,
both uttering the same exact words after hearing
the deceptive land-phantom who had argued with the harpy
hanging from the golden tree in the black mists of the Crystal
Forest—the harpy declaring
no one had ever loved
the cloven-footed, that it had been but words that curdling
in the blooming peonies consumed them so, distressing
their minds to microbursts, even after Einstein conceded
black holes were more than mathematical quirks. The former
lover determined to prove the world did not deserve
the malice of immortals took on a human guise
once more, a young mechanic playing guitar in Tennessee
William’s *Orpheus Descending*, flapping through the night
to the dwellings of strangers, blighting those, lax in memory
foam, pretending they weren’t home—yea right!

But when
the unmet lovers heard his tale, a peroration
on loss and fealty, they wept and said, in separate condos,
“Your cruelty becomes my joy, your misery, my maker,
O gyro, Gordon Lightfoot,” Baucis wearing a green
bib, Philemon pawing through a sack. “Phantom,” cried
the harpy, sweeping in jetties of mist, tearing the Granny
Smith from Baucis’ hand. “Shenandoah,” she surmised
doing worse to Philemon’s behind.

The harpy’s opposable claws
then quartered the couple who still had yet to meet though they looked
surprisingly similar, due mostly to their lanky, loose-limbed
builds and Caucasian castes, their identical words so fusing
in the breast of the bullheaded ex, who wore an Indiana
Jones coat from J. C. Penny, that his murmuring lips severed
from his face and drifted off into the constellated glades
above our heads, as if murmuring a wish for the would-be
lovers to spend the rest of space and time
as one
together, the last-second words of Baucis resounding thusly,
“A strange sensation stirs me from within. Odd leaflets
from my finger’s sprout. The blemished ruts of bark befall
my skin. Will someone please put Fido out?” Philemon
squealed as his trunk delved deep into a firming morass
for all at once he saw the face of his forever
enshrined in rising limbs.

There they sprung, two trees
one trunk in the Wisconsin Dells, an oak and linden caught
in a wooden hug, the tourist’s attraction advertising
everything but the knotty look where their eyes had been—
Till now, it’s there they’re found, where the kids are lost and calling
past the central courtyard of the Krazy Mirror Maze.
Remakes (After *Beauty and the Beast 3D*)

CHARLES, formerly the teacup “Chip”

Was Lumiere my father, or the cook?
And where have all my siblings run off to?
I never knew their names. I want to look
back at the years and *know* I never knew—
For instance, Mother told me nothing then
but, “Pish-posh, in the suds, you broken cup!”
She was too old to be a mothering-hen
teapot, but how she sang of cleaning up!
With adult love, I watched the aging Belle,
who lived much longer than our king, The Beast,
and now they’re gone, all gone, and I can tell
all, if I hated them—their lies, at least.
When Belle dispelled our immortality,
we felt the two-ness of reality.
BELLE, the young queen

It crossed my mind that it was Stockholm Syndrome. That moment in the woods, those wolves around, I could have let the “monster” die, left, been home, but saw his weird bulk frozen to the ground as past, my life caught in that frosty breath— What might be left for me but the same words, provincial slipping into social death, or brooding with the throbbing wave-like herds? What would a kiss against that wooly face, those horns, blue eyes, adventure in the somewhere amount to, feel like? Then it came, a trace of danger in the intellect said, “Come here.” It was love all along, not make believe. Papa, Gaston, we come just as we leave.
COGSWORTH, ESQUIRE, formerly a mantle clock

The busiest sort of architect made this
datial masterpiece, the way the light
soaks through the floral windows, what joy, what bliss!
awash in Bach-like grand baroque delight,
and never once do we presume to guess
how we have lingered through the centuries
in isolation, imbibing nonetheless
the benefits of structuring with ease.
But listen, Lumiere, my foe, mon frère,
tradition is our past, our destiny,
and why I’m English, why you’re laissez-faire,
why a pendulum was where my heart should be—
We must obey the master’s wishes, lest
we find we are no better than the rest.
THE KING, *formerly a beast*

It all unravels like a—sweater in
the slipstream, yarn that speeds off, pulled by hands
I cannot see but feel much better in
my dreams, which say, through tree-like teeth, my lands
were gone before they came. I know. I know—
I’d bet my hide it’s true—the sorceress
with angel wings came back. I let her go.
Her father. When she wore a yellow dress.
How fitting that my line should end just where
my line began, just how the lights had spread,
the crazy angles overstepping—they’re
the double-reconstructing of my head!
It was so clear. Through magic mirror I see—
through molten dust—another form. Not me.
MONSIEUR LUMIERE, formerly candlesticks and a holder

After the duster took up with a fork,  
I found that I was free to prowl, once more,  
the castle—something, though, was off. The cork  
refused to pop the way it had before  
for one. Unnerved, I cried, “Perhaps I’m ugly!  
This droopy lower lip! These jowls! What’s worse—  
now bound to flesh—my ruffle fits too snugly!  
Enchanted days have lifted with the curse!”  
But when I poked around, chérie, I found  
that mirth—nay, love—slinks off to subtler ways,  
days pass like waltzes, droll retorts abound  
as staff consume the surplus crème brûlées.  
One’s joie de vivre bursts to flame again  
to be not fool, but luck’s comédien.
COMRADE FEATHERBOTTOM, formerly a duster

What scags and swine—that stupid, flouncing lot fulfilling what our boy-king asked or didn’t—
Yes, yes! without a second—or first thought, as though depthless mirages: nothing hid, hint of nothing—that’s what scared me. All they lacked—their measly, happy actions seemed prescriptive, yes, even mine—but mine, by choice, an act, my tawdry accent, getup—merely fictive, each swoon, each feather plucked; Yet, did I love my dull Don Juan? Oh no. My ends were answers; espionage of the charm or cause thereof that made us mindless maids to courtly dancers;
Love, Love, they cried, will fix us! Love of him, they never cried, penned us in metonym.
THE ENCHANTRESS, a witch

Repulsed by ugliness much more than others,
for eras I’ve endured beyond the frame
of groves, brooks, dales, glades. If I had my druthers,
I might erase the act that brought me fame—
not that I recollect it all that well,
some hasty prank I pulled near Upper Rhône.
In those days, I adored casting a spell,
but these days, I prefer to be alone.
I wonder why that curse affected so
many beyond its scope—why did I deign
to reconstruct his looks, reward the beau
with beauty? Do I care the eras feign
to love poor Baucis and Philemon more
than pretty tyrants who enthrall the poor?
BELLE, the aging queen

At times I’ve caught him watching in the halls—
Charles now—at turns boldfaced, at turns demure . . .
Should I renounce this fancy life, the balls’
deft music swelling through the haut couture,
cheap egress from our former suffering?
Perhaps I should. And yet, I don’t. I do
wish I had had more time to read the King—
sprawling before the fire—a book or two
just as before. That’s why amidst his illness
I stole the portrait he had torn and hid it—
though it’s restored, I sometimes search the stillness
of its fine face; for what? Still he forbid it,
the whole west wing; but why? Now he’s deceased,
perhaps I’ll glimpse beyond the Prince, the Beast.
31st Birthday Psalm

―“Sorcerer, who is the master?”
Stevie Nicks

1.

He obscures my view
of the beeches
on the Amtrak Acela.
“Now that’s beauty!” “The highway’s prettier,”

he replies. Who cares
where? A new place I recall somehow.

The past has grown.
One might call it a goal.

2.

I have come to you
as I have come before.

How have you come to me
without my permission?

I am powerless not to appear,
duration after duration,

gingham thudding off the bolt.
Ermine caressing my cheekbones.
Three
Resort Town

What many people don’t know is there are resort towns all over the Midwest, some near and some not so near the Great Lakes, which mimic oceans, complete with coastal dunes. Some of these towns make sense. They exist as most things exist. “Gingerbread Victorians” hawk saltwater taffy and coconut strips.

We might travel where few call home, to each and every one and feel they’re not the same. Wrapped in circumstance, their attics could be clean. Or hidden in damp eaves, cardboard figures, mechanized dispensers and displays, porcelain elves assembling watches.

What’s wound and what’s electric is a mark of time. The difference is a mark of time. Boater hats floating like daggers in a mist!

We might visit, but never find our lives so new and unhurried. Do you know what I’m bound to say? We tread what’s past, as swimmers who, fearing they’ve lost sight of shore, stop to glance back. The Ferris wheel rolling in dusk, carnival lights flashing one by one.
Where You Have Gone

You were born in an aisle of wheat stalks and MTV never existed. The next-door boysenberry farm groaned when the corrugated roof of a silo rusted in where the shushing waters in the creek south of the exurb in the rocky hills of the northern region of the poorest county in a summer breeze. You’re using a pinky to surf a smart phone by the doorway to the grove, grown now, and you never moved to Seoul, not even once. Nearby a single-engine plane crashes into an access road, injuring a cyclist by the Coptic church built of imported stone. Your family sends e-cards that only ever say, “Please come home soon son,” as if long ago your grandmother purchased an orange quilt from a washerwoman. Somewhere someone is traveling away from you, you specifically, furiously cursing his fortune and phoning the telemetry museum for support. Alert, he crosses beneath an overpass where Arby’s wrappers wreath milkweeds. Long ago, when you were lucky, the sounds of pillows sizzling, like Rice Krispies, before you were made official like a glacier park, when you had a premonition you were fattened by beef stock. The room you left behind, the matching wood-grain laminate set, the back of your head.
Pet Shop Boys Sing Willie Nelson for an Elvis Tribute on YouTube

1.
It’s like you’re standing in a room.

2.
It’s like you’re standing in a room.
Are you standing in a room
electric lights throwing pink against a cloud?
I have a destination.

3.
I have a destination.
I turn down the white hallway.
The door pivots out, with a touch,
as if recently greased. I could see you all the time
out that glass door
as I talked to anyone
I loved. I see it now. The green silver maples by that bike path,
that green field.
The marble statue, unbroken
in the city plaza. In the round atrium.
Between brickwork, I walk to work—
to a cubicle.

Will you ever not stand, lovely robot, never cry out again

when I am so far on my way?
Getting There, Another Way

The cloaked dale breached by the okra
slipped between steeds clovered over
with humungous hormones, hart staged
and staggering in hoods, even the cauliflower
becoming taut, Syndicate, dear Syndicate,

ceaseless ramparts, hour upon hour like sliced
bologna sans Zippos or junipers, sans duck
or smorgasbord, the manacles snaggling
riven in our gloaming lonely, the shed
neatly fled and flogged, O Harley tourniquet
tottering on oaken forum, the weigh wait
and paling visages marsupials and soup,
the North-enders chuckling homophonic
hee-haws and wonky wall-eyed conical
clocks re-spent with rebar Velcro-ing
the skiff for the fog near gone like silent
sieving away, progenitors plucking freight
mucked down by the falls like carob chips

now and greasy flags collapsing in white
the cleats swiveling weakly under orphan
hairs flip-flopping in the windswept eaves
like stray winches, evil tricks, stitched
in matter and galvanized motes, the spiral ox
zipping missives in limbs hard-slapped by clod
and Claudette, cudgel so raw the burning
deck budes, O vehicle churning in the stage-
coach night, shores in the umber bouquets
and Debra Messing, this was or wasn’t,
this claw or beak, the whole lambent
undulant teething as though brownstone
eggs in the baskets seeping home to Thoreau’s
laundry room hidden crawl-space thatch
gently wrenching Weed Wacker spots, hot
heaven and hens, weren’t we like that?

that tanner, that mechanism, that klieg
festering garter gaveling slaw in flank
like stench or rot, still flaming corkboard
handy pallet ligament lightning and William
the Rower rooting in pantries, remembering
Sam dropping Manhattans like bombs on
travertine, once, thrice, always a tank, our parents weren’t even there, all the way, the marble slats and “Love Shack” so fleet and lancet like treats He, He, He-ing in attics, for instance, or clinging to cast-iron marquees to avenge gewgaw geese trailblazing yards and unearthed rubies in blood capsule turnabout mouths, one in the other out, the Aztec feathers zip-lining frozen Catalina Island, Wriggleville fences pounded down to be taken like wallet frigates by the dinghy garden stoop and shoop-a-doop unfailingly caterwauling, _O henchmen, O steam engine of studs, O Carnival Cruises’ semi-precious metallurgic dramaturgy_, fault lines cooking in the sun-beast-ware, the H.O.A. arena taking cooktop marbleized walkways—the work is not done

pooling minds like lozenges in the Antwerp travelogue we always flacked and quilted mittens into inadvertently magnetizing the runnels, Hoary Hope, _Soap Dish_ in the basement lot freezing in spray bottles littered beneath snow-like land and cakes, horse trails, byzantine dugouts the hinterland grows reck-less in Klee’s masterworks (utter frigid mastery!), then the vines clip-clopping out of Sturtevant, one part cyborg, one part lion, the prop closet flowing preschool tarpaulin like hand weaseling out of armoires an iota of kudzu wrapped umbilical like lice

so wisely, but if every thought could listen, Kraft Lite, if every thought could and withstood Fortune unmasking herself, bowing before us with fatigue, intoning, _Clytemnестra_, _I’m home_ and if it weren’t always equivocal wearing derbies or bicycle pants or holding Roto-Routers, languidly singing “Knowing me Knowing You,” if we didn’t beg immediately for less but better life, if we gleamed fertile like Amtrak paper packets Horace should initial here, here, and here, if we want to see ancestors gallivanting down their onset boulevards, hear breezes whispering, _Sorry_,
you were all beautiful all along, if we
begged and slammed down hammers, rifled
daybooks, moving knights, took rooks, if potted
plants, rosacea, Serengeti and taxiing
came round to check out fairgrounds, if it
was or wasn’t, Syndicate-Friend, then
fraudulent marauderings would these jetting
pineapples one for the other and none
for another, these appendectomies trilling
firefly flagstone walls mined from battle
fields clotting lights, the plentiful numbers
in kitchens hedging after hedge far back as
reckonable, the flood out back taking tackle
boxes into primordial sludge, the flabbergasted
Foghorn Leghorn’s resulting cornucopia in
the mirror dice, stichomythia, and many others,
Change Jar, you, these, rotund Cottagers
flying toward squares, if it were or weren’t
it was or wasn’t there in the outer rink
lifeless sort of way hearing Belinda Carlisle
bawling, O daffodils and merry mount,
O merry and breadth of many cracked till
dry near the matte rotary, the parquet floor,
the wood-grain wainscoting painted gray.
Four
Friends

How will we look when we are old,
gowns at our feet, a goat sloshing out of a trough,
crows yipping at the air, some waddling beneath spacious elms?
Will there be a wooden house, a trim garden waiting to spill out?
Do you see the Spanish moss in my hair? A mound in the lawn
and a rotting rubber wheel, from a tractor, around which we gather?
The scent almost rounded. We’ll barely conceive of an outside.
The youngest will ask us to lean over, as they whisper,
their growing hands feeling the lumps under
our already knotted hair. Is that you
on an Amish chair, a pageant of powders glittering in light,
with saucer eyes, drunk on the relief of loss and of surfaces?
A dash in the corridor between cornstalks that I reach at
not knowing why it is calling or what or how to reply!
We reply without knowing, as most breaths are drawn,
until it is as real as fiberglass and the wild words bear hushed tones.
Ex-Boyfriends

You message me Rachmaninov piano concerto No.2 on LinkedIn. Are you tired, my stolen,

your right leg shorter than the left,

the heavy brick-building doors, in Boston?
David Lean’s Brief Encounter?

Frank Ocean’s “Super Rich Kids”?

The strings reply, It wasn’t fear,

these thirteen years, that brought you here
to every edge you’ve ever known

and what is not an edge over which one walks?
When I Was Straight

You should have seen me when I was straight. I was (as they say) overweight, not happy but laughing.

I called you once, called you twice but you need more or less than love like all the men who have recessed into my memories. It’s easy being that blood spot on the slide: false. The spot was not there when it was taken but should have been and, oddly, is there now.

You should have seen me when I was perceived as heterosexual. I could listen, then, years surfaced like scuba divers. She’s kissing me in this one. Do not peel photographs apart like picnic napkins. Do not ransack their interiors. Photographs remain like remnant carpets after renovations, makeshift doormats and worthless scraps. Where do you look when I turn around, peering past the soot of classes and cultures into the threatening shadows hung from a new brow? What did I forget? What is this new thing?

—Spring 2003
Farewell Politics

The detention center slunk by after dinner
where all the inmates nestle in their fronds
where the linden by the Roanoke grows thinner
by the backlit abbey in the ambiance,

and the youngest portion, quaffing at the table there,
cocking its cutesy brow, straightening its tie,
must say in sacking clough, “We’ll leave when abler
to calculate the proper hues thus verify

the AM/FM frequencies of fell
like darkling thrushes in a field of furze
or underfunded missile JPL
whose border yews . . . ” Oh hark, my hearing blurs,

so gay askance the Silverado’s trunk,
I wave and blurt, the inmates shouting, “What a hunk!”
Fearing You Still

When the nighttime suite was over, when you grew immaculate and The Phantom made its comeback, when the intoxicated barista sold his Corolla below Blue Book, that was a farce, then, although you pined away while dining on rye and pickled herring, unhearing like a comely man pushing girls in mittens in a grocery cart in wire-rim glasses. As has been said: “It’s a long way to go,” especially for a bialy and a parcel of margarine! But so what, bon marché, your coughing apparatus, your dialectic, your accents tripping up the abrasions in the GIS helix like clockwork. Spot on. Spot off. The empty coffee pot, clanking orifices, hissing fog in the barn of the gasket and fittings factory by the Buy and Bag, the feint of Havisham, the candelabra in Meatloaf’s baroque-est clip, the atrocity sleeping on the restroom floor, the open door and florescents flooding on—for a search party! These and soap operas, these and tuna tartar, these and Welcome Back, Kotter and the dank, darkening wisteria hung in your archways, your brief license to kill too, your long drive toward home, your prosciutto, the pimento in the bottom of your shook martini, that comment you made over the phone, your look at Disney Hall and your happiness at my expense. These and the cable box. These and the deluxe jets. These and your AstroTurf photographed and slingshot, your voice, too, catching in acid reflux, your pounding-ness and the hand on my knee long since gone, Dudamel lifting his hands, a grin slapping that Maestro’s face. Play Brahms’ “Tragic Overture,” play! Play, the oboist with the dispassionate, aquiline nose, brown, curly, drawn-back hair, propped on the edge of a Rubbermaid chair, still
except for her fingers pearling off anachronisms, giving us grief for a moment—
grief and regret. To glance over and see you’re old, I can’t forget that. These and my Cuisinart,
a severed anchor rusting in the downturn of the Indian Sea until the brink of your prank
lips catching in the histrionic flood plain, your torso contorting in rivulets,
your ties and firm behind, your Sonicare regimen, steamed Brussels sprouts, Design Within Reach, fulminating in my jubilee where I was founded in a foundry like a surplice in the limbs of trees. The dulcet chimes telling us it’s time to return,
wherever you are, before it begins, again.
The Coming

1.
Timpani thump
or oboe low
can simulate
the undertow;

unlike a prayer—
unlike a call—
supine, the hollow
eats its shell.

It is a stillness
that whittles lack
as mathematicians
debate a chart.

2.
Even as I want—
the interface,
a shift of air—
I can’t keep pace.

I can’t get there
and when I might—
evaporate!
into light.
“That Crazy Sound”

The cumulus condensing, so I said, Go, go, Gadget Arms. Still, duplicitous thought persisted like trout near the surface of a pool in the Midwest. I watched the Maltese Falcon when I grew older. If not this, then that. I don’t believe in corroborating doubt but I’ll descend around you, crooning, Willow, Willow, Willow, murmuring, “Don’t go. These are your sisters, this is your hat,” an eon of Noriega. I’ll form the gold bars of your conclusion and you, dismayed, might bark, “I bought us tickets to the Mets,” or if not, then something worse. It’s always something else. Don’t look down. But tell me this, at least, what color was it, that doily in the shop window and who made it and when, for what reason, what lengths or boredom drove to it, like the music I hear now, the linguistics, and yes, even yams and science? The blue lights represent municipalities. The green lights represent gentlemen’s agreements. The silver lights represent Norse gods. The red lights represent bathhouses, sadness, altruism. The green lights represent cocktails after six, according to Greenwich Mean Time. The yellow lights are for Christmas. The movie about the Shoah. The toad in the alley behind the country club. Club sodas. Julian of Norwich. The Argyle gravy boat. The first and penultimate words in Hillary Clinton’s Hard Choices. Come with me to a place where I know that there is love. You’ll be home by eleven, watching I Love Lucy, Everybody Loves Raymond, reading Raymond Chandler in a soft cowl, your mind climbing over rocks. Please lie in your bed, nothing to pay for for a moment, nothing to mourn or dread, shut off valves, halogens glowing like a scene from Seneca, the political current a soft tickle under your chin. Nothing’s gonna harm you, not while I’m around. What if the secret is staying in one place? Not while I’m around.
Five
Heyday

The Steinway in the gallery by the harbor or the bioluminescence in the harbor or the bridging of the harbor like it didn't see us tap-dancing there or nothing and everything’s for us like they once promised it would be. The used casement windows propped on the lawn, long division, every man or Aeschylus, pan flutes, desperate events shrinking like fog along the moors. The everlasting arms pecking a turtle near uptown. Cheerios. The industrial park by the tramway where pictures by the basin beneath the crumpled sheetrock above a knocking dynamo, oxidizing within reach. Don’t go back that way again in the heyday of our leaving, like a nurse shark. Just what left us ribbons to tousle while changing the channel, while Wheat Thins, our englobement, yea, all which it inherit, shaking like moths in a carport in St. Louis— If it weren’t enough, then what held us in this joint these years? Day camp? Water skis?
They lie
They lie in the ground.
They lie in the ground
They lie over and over
Who lies over
They—who lie
over and over
over
lie—
Whoever lies
whoever says
who lies
Who says
It isn’t
Orpheus 1

1.

In the blue bathroom on the last stop before it all fell like cotton candy from a Ferris wheel I recalled the fear of lack.

The cracked spackle after the quake.

But my past is darker than that, a fir in the shadows of an icy glen.

2.

Speak to me before you stop speaking.

I’ll love you as a sign to others, until

the blot in the hall pretends to waft toward us, before we know

the paper is slicked with oil

and the ornaments will never do.

Take my hand as we traverse this foreign globe.

I wait beyond your excavation—

like a polarized paperclip

pushed by magnetic fields, I shuffle along the gap.

The more you take the more I lack.

The love descending like Purell.

The spindly grove on the unbuilt lot.
Are You Okay?

I used to think they were fanatically discreet
but they were certain what was was
just barely. Impatience is for those who appear
to have the most time. Why do we allow this to be so?
I used to think they had decided against it,
had washed their faces to incomprehension, pocket doors,
but that day was all days and the seasons never came.
Before such a time, it was pleasant. Strangers could talk of motorcycles.
Now we wait for affiliates to announce the time.
We might have forgotten. I am one of them.
I must let you know I am one of them.
I can’t say it’s found its form as I thought it might,
this longing attached to incidents and afghans.
Devices, logarithms walk me to proper ends.
Mysterious as that, the bug net already descended. Transistors chant.
You realize you’re in another place
that bonds the wetlands with the sharp
lines of glass. (Not that you want it any
less. Maybe more.) How calmly the stone appears
around the corner. The embers do not light the dark.
Gradually we find we’re no more singular
than we were, perhaps less so, yet we remember
what we locked in the metal cabinet without a thought,
distracted as we were by some other agent
selling problems to the gods, perhaps
our favorite cartoon or a past timesheet.
You don’t need to remember the way to the edge
over which the ferns and succulents hang.
This is the occasion that, probably, never was.
The breath that specified you, called you into the room,
the foghorn that was, the foghorn that recalls. Tease us out of the breaks
in the folded land. Formless, it promises not to let go,
thank heavens, we wake or dine out
with whatever family remains. It will not lie,
stoop to tell us that we’ll be ready, that we’re prepared today,
that we can be ready. Alarm is okay in this room.
It might be required. The only way to ask is to forget.
It does not matter where you place the vase today,
how often you shift it, the angles of the stems.
(You might think I’m flinching.)
The room crackles, crisp as a dry sauna
but that’s fine. Fine, we couldn’t ask for more.
You’ll find your way whether you expect it or not,
whether you want to or not. No one will turn away.
Orpheus 2

1.

How have we come to days like these,

the horn that blows in the willow trees that screech and thrash like terror-bursts at the
tedge of the carnival where the fog was?

All over the world migrates:

a glut of crows under the viaduct crosscurrent with LA cars.

Why does Frank sing, “Fly me to the moon. / Let me play among the stars”?

Yes! I know!

2.

Tell me what is. In your words. At that location.

The answers are written somewhere the wind misplaced.

Say what there is to say

then stop. The thing makes its way . . .

The thing is hunger.

It displaces. When you turn on your TV at 8 PM have you thought of me lost in unfolding
parallels like Jacob’s ladders?

Ask why I’ve come when I come.

The answer will appear.

The room is changed when I’m not here and you are here.
Orpheus 3 or Another

Where have you gone when you have gone?
Since the last age.
Is that a film over the yogurt?
When last I saw you you were drinking in Boston and now you say you don’t drink.
The sky’s apparent.
Everything I become has been achieved through secretions.
Who told that cyclist to wear Lycra drag, red like lava tumbling uphill?
Forgive the foreign language I speak. I do not speak it.
How calm it is, when I am calm.
I speak to you through an intercom.
Come to the edge of the park where we first swung by moonlight and listen for the night-
alarums that break the rotten twigs.
A world of contingency.
We have lost the bet.
The mown grass squirms like tentacles. I remember
the bank of that brook (Jordan) where the sleek Semitic men played “football” in wet no-
fly briefs,
turning the switch off, the disposal’s blender whirring to a stasis of the time’s making.
I don’t know what to make of it.
Open the chestnuts just so.
The hordes are watching.
I will walk to the border too.

We must not forget an iota. The unsliced loaf wrapped in raw silk muslin was essential to a gilded-age picnic. I don’t care for peppery jams or any. Your motion has ceased. You have dematerialized. Again. The ease I collapsed. You’re poised on oblivion. Wait. Do you know your choices?

It’s like I forgot how to do things or willed myself to do them as they’d been done. Nevertheless.

I will strictly calculate the radius of the fissure’s mouth.
Farewell

No more contraband. You’ll only ever be this tall
and the gates are heavy and dynamic like a spoon
in an empty Yoplait toppling in slow-mo. A whisper.
Where is the wise-ness in this sideways mess? The witness? I never found it
yet or went away. I only return. I turn and return
again. I can’t away. Which makes me laugh
most likely. Fountains look diaphanous and statuesque from far off,
A long, thick piece of grass pulled carefully, slid from its tubular
sheath. So long everyone! Good-bye! Farewell! I fell down a firewall.
I mean well, but don’t achieve my all because, because, because, because,
I came from a low performing school. Well, that’s easily said
and makes sense, so that’s good. Sometimes we say so
and so. Heck, that’s right. I see the logic now. Sometimes we speak in foreign tongues
for fun. Adios hermanos. Sayonara. Sweet and low in the backyard hammock,
you’d fall asleep, I bet. I started off with a sleek autogenous purpose
but got mixed up in the wrong affairs and lost. Lost the remote
too. I shan’t change the channel—that’s annoying when I’m trying
to break it. I’m trying to break candy glass. Sugar gum myrtle family.
Convivial. Maybe there’re nylon strands woven in and a booming bass
in the boys’ low-rider that won’t make me sleep. I don’t mean
to complain, but it always happens—the way I feel
it might. It might not happen at all. Let’s picture rhubarb
where it grows in the world. Let’s look it up!
Google? Bing? Encarta? You must make many decisions
manifest, Farm & Fleet, redundant, mercurial, Mike & Ike
or the wandering naiads will return to scream their tunes
and you can’t see me and I found a Canadian penny on the ground.
Calmly, I Prepare

I imagine you’re out there
day after day—A vital message with a hyperlink telling me how to apply for an
Australian Electronic Travel Authority Visa
comes from an address bearing your name and the name of the office where you work
and I think, What a farce! Then

the night exists and there’s the thing of your-voice rigged to the air
coming from I do know where

replicating pauses that say thought before passing into that force
called—for a lack—sleep. Later, after I’ve taken the Santa Monica bus to where the
tumbleweeds and last commuters go, it is, when remembered, as if you’re
fluttering

in a mason jar beyond a poster of an underground tunnel’s entryway. Busy, I do not hear
you. It is barely sight. I take what little proof I can get. Advance

out of the ether! Trick me into trusting what I must
to get to you, past the bureaucratic lattices
that flash accomplishments day by day.

So far, you’re where I’ve looked in Manhattan Beach or an appointed place made clear to
me, the frailty of your splendor—
the clangor of a rusted bucket loosed from a loft—a frank confession.
Envoi
Switching Back and Forth

Until you’ve gotten a straight shot of a buck and back of that a sun-blasted glade so rad the leaves split non-existent tares on a plain stalked by sickle.

Please, these days income’s fickle.

Roombas, Billboard, that’s how we does it, a dosey doe-ing, how we know how we know we know it; some say, “Prancing like fauna,” some plarp, “Leeching like flora,” some, puffed out, “I adore ya, Señora!”

But if we’re persistent in this corpulent instant, if acquiring friends again and again dashing by wires, the snow in the bauble waylaying the glint of night’s merlot. If growing slack and then thicker like a boa constrictor enrapturing prey, day by day, we stray.
NOTES

The title of “Long, Long Thoughts” comes from Longfellow’s “My Lost Youth.”

What if they hadn’t lived in the same place—what if responds to Thom Gunn’s “Philemon and Baucis” and Miguel Murphy’s “The Goddamn Lover” as well as, of course, Ovid’s Metamorphoses. The phrase “wooden hug” comes from Gunn’s poem.

The occasion for Where You Have Gone is John Ashbery’s “At North Farm” (1981).

Pet Shop Boys Sing Willie Nelson for an Elvis Tribute on YouTube refers to the song “Always on My Mind.”

“That Crazy Sound” takes its title from David Bowie’s “Don’t Look Down.” The poem also loosely quotes Michael Jackson’s “Heal the World” and Stephen Sondheim’s “Not While I’m Around.”

The italicized fragment in Heyday originates in Prospero’s famous “We are such stuff as dreams are made on” speech in Shakespeare’s The Tempest.

The title phrase of “They Lie Who Say It’s Over” comes from Paul Monette's AIDS elegy "The Worrying." Monette wrote the poem in 1987 and addressed it to his recently deceased partner of twelve years, Roger Horowitz. The last third of it reads:

[. . .] they lie who say it’s over
Rog it hasn’t stopped at all are you okay
does it hurt what can I do still still I
think if I worry enough I’ll keep you near
the night before Thanksgiving I had this
panic to buy the plot on either side of us
so we won’t be cramped that yard of extra grass
would let us breath THIS IS CRAZY RIGHT but
Thanksgiving morning I went the grave two over
beside you was six feet deep ready for the next
murdered dream so see the threat was real
why not worry worry is like prayer is like
God if you have none they all forget there’s
the other side too twelve years and not once
to fret WHO WILL EVER LOVE ME that was
the heaven at the back of time but we had it
here now black on black I wander frantic
never done with worrying but it’s mine it’s
To date, more than half a million gay men have died from AIDS-related complications in the United States.