



6-1-2009

Little to No Stars

Shannon Tate Jonas

Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations>

Recommended Citation

Jonas, Shannon Tate, "Little to No Stars" (2009). *Dissertations*. 688.
<https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/688>

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



LITTLE TO NO STARS

by

Shannon Tate Jonas

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
Advisor: William Olsen, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
June 2009

LITTLE TO NO STARS

Shannon Tate Jonas, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2009

This collection of poetry, *Little to No Stars*, holds poems that often represent the landscape, language, mannerisms, and way of life of the peoples of the Appalachian region of Virginia. In many ways, I view *Little to No Stars* as a re-visitation to various parts of my childhood, that still linger, where the experiential emotional tension is often balanced, if not countered, by the presence of recurrent landscapes captured and explored in images. I think my work strives for that flow into and within and without the world of the poem.

Childhood and the past are alternatively immediate and distant, constantly informing the present self. If there is a spiritual concern in the work it's with the dead, but only in so far as I view them as a necessarily stabilizing presence and not a mystery to be solved, but not wished into terrible being, nor wished away. If the dead exist it's because the mountains and fields and birds exist. Because we do. That is a great mystery, but not one to be "solved" as Proust warns.

Conjuring the past is conjuring a mode of thought, as writer and as reader: like entering Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns*, or James Wright's Ohio, or Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality." The images of the past are the signposts and landmarks in the dream of the poetry. But where we ultimately arrive is not altogether up to the poet's design.

© 2009 Shannon Tate Jonas

UMI Number: 3364679

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform 3364679
Copyright 2009 by ProQuest LLC
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the editors of the following journals and press where some of these poems have appeared, sometimes as different versions:

“Dialectic of Two Siblings After a Murder”; *Wisconsin Review*

multiple sections from “Samsara”; *Diagram, Goodfoot, three candles, 3rd Muse*

multiple sections from “Hobo Signs & Symbols”; *Typo*

“Hackneyed”; *Rhino*

multiple sections from “Nights Alone with Frank”; *Barrow Street, The Iowa Review*

The chapbook *Compathy* was published by Cannibal Chapbook Series, 2007

I'd also like to thank the following who've played a role in the completion of this manuscript: Matthew Henriksen, Adam Clay, William Olsen, Nancy Eimers, Michael Heffernan, and my family. My deepest debt of thanks for all things belongs to my wife India.

Shannon Tate Jonas

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
BIRDSONG BREAKS FROM WITHIN.....	1
APPALACHIA.....	2
UNION & CONFEDERATE CEMETARY, MULE HELL, VA.....	4
3 MEDITATIONS: BROM BONES IN PEW.....	6
A REALITY NO HOUSE IS FULL CHARTED.....	8
THE FOURTH DIMENSION.....	9
THE OTHER.....	10
THE SPREADING LIGHT OF DEATH.....	11
WHEN WAS IT EVER GOOD ENOUGH NOT TO THINK ABOUT SLEEPING.....	13
THE YOUNG HOUSEWIFE.....	15
THE FIRST NIGHT ALONE WITH FRANK.....	16
ORPHEUS SINCE HELL.....	20
NEW RIVER GORGE BRIDGE.....	21
DIALECTIC OF TWO SIBLINGS AFTER A MURDER.....	22
REMEMBER THE GIRL.....	25
MICHIGAN WEATHER.....	26
THE WOMAN IS THE HOLY GRAIL--I TELL YOU.....	28
OMNIPRESENCE: BROM BONES POST COITUS.....	29
POEM.....	30

Table of Contents--Continued

MY SWEETHEART THE DRUNK.....	31
SAMSARA.....	32
SELF IMMOLATION.....	35
HACKNEYED.....	36
THIS MUD FAILS.....	38
IN SEPULCHER SINCE TOILS URGED OTHER.....	39
DREAMING IN REVERSE: BROM BONES REVISITS THE SCHOOLHOUSE.....	40
HOBO SIGNS & SYMBOLS.....	41
FATALISM.....	49

Birdsong breaks from within
the branches--there is an acre of wood
where I walk alone through the trees
thinking of the words I know
that correspond to the surrounding trunks.

Today I heard a minor god sing.
Today I am the speaker, in the business
of atonement. Please understand I do not sleep
under cloth or answer the taps at the window,
the apologia tacked to the door.

Listen. If there is any abyss, it exists
here. The jaws of the night,
the crow's roaming eye.

This land is locked.
Listen for the sounds of whale-ships
in the blue mountains.

I buried a pinecone, a secret
between myself and the earth.
I thought of the scales
growing horns through the soil,
spreading downward.
No small warmth, no light.

APPALACHIA

1.

the sky is possessed & ornery

reassembled-fire

the mountains are shrinking, dissembled

dying chords, chords dying

semblance--my mountains

fire is the perpetual motion

all depression

all rise all rise all rise

& be seated

voice and after voice

fire is the perpetual motion

sand & throat & sand & throat & sand

is what is fire

what fire is

the fire is awake

the mountains are withered

2.

I wasn't born at the division of the sea

breathing the sea

I didn't know the shore

but the mountains & I know the mountains when I know it's like being a child

with no speech, when

I knew why--

what hurt & what did not

the boy that I was tells me now when I am afraid

I'd follow you to my blood, my death, the field that would drink my life

& so I am not afraid

UNION & CONFEDERATE CEMETARY, MULE HELL, VA

The mill groan sung heavy through me, though
the waterwheel was shed, broken among rocks
and circling fish. We all relinquish precious silt,
exhausted, carried off in the river's arms.

My body was a blanket I was under.
A bruised thigh, a simple puddle of mud, a hidden
blemish, a brand, a new word winned lips spoke :
my skin survived these stains.

The clock was stopped and set face down.
I came to the stones, drawn to my kind. I knew
the names without touching. The jay whispered
something, took the seed, its leave.

The clouds that moved inside the drying hay,
blown by storm-winds, are now a tongue with which I mutter.
I cut a thorn from my skin, watched dawn raise up
from the well. Damp wood where once I had eyes.

The creek through your field was flooded : its bank
collapsed by the gathered cow herd at the edge. Birds flinched
from the recoil of thunder, alfalfa bent & drenched.
I rowed to your house & tied my boat, moon-sick.

In the darkening house I was folding time.
The noose hung at the top of the stairs
& light fled into my eyes, then out. They waked over me
in the front room. Me wearing a ring I cannot take off.

I woke soundlessly to the field that was blue & fogged.
My eyes were starlings following the herd.
I gathered dew from the grass into my hands.
It was morning still when you woke with wet hair.

3 MEDITATIONS: BROM BONES IN PEW

First

--& the nauseating repetition of the bell.

And my hangover. The damned jaundice-faced kid
hanging on the rope. The hell with him. He'll shit & fall in it.

The ringing is like rain falling slow from trees
which is heavier than from clouds, & like family that vanish
slow after death, remembered now & then with effort.

I've heard of a man that vanished forever in a field of wheat

as witnessed by his own wife. What do you say to that?

What's your answer to that, good book? If it's not in you, then where?

Second

What do I make of my boyhood now? I want to reclaim the burned
out cars of my youth, mile posts I used once to navigate
the woods, wrecks dad called uprooted crypts for snakes & dying vermin.

The day I kept spitting out the window, my eyes watering
from the wind, the spit making silver webs alongside the pickup,

& dad belted my good for it, & my eyes watered some more.

The morning I made two horns by shaping my soaped hair, & got out

of the freezing metal tub in the mud to look at myself

in the water. I was at the bottom looking back.

Third

There is a strange thrill in the guilt from drubbing a man

to death in a different town, especially when it's not ever proven :
& there's a keen clear memory that comes from a kind of stale dark pit
like water in a bucket whenever the name of that man is said.
The memory is like sneaking in & taking pictures from the walls
of an enemy & burning them in a steel barrel.
The memory is like it never happened. But there's a difficulty in forgiving the dead,
& the living. This I've learned in my short time.
We're all sons of bitches, or bitches. But I don't feel bad.

a realization no house is fully charted

there is a breeze unnoticed

every day

I've learned

it's easy to forget hallways

but natural to like them

as it's natural to like self-portraits

as it's natural to like moonlight

reflected off a lake

swallowing itself

spitting up your dreams

flooding the main hall with its light

THE FOURTH DIMENSION

the universe in the fourth dimension
is comprised of empirical tears--
the universe expands because we breathe

we are all infinitely connected

in the fourth dimension :
with the living, dead, to come--

I do not judge & luckily cannot number the stars
you watch nine crows escape the bare oak--

the crows are stars

the crows are tears

THE OTHER

say the mind is a crutch

--a tool for navigation

--an end table

say the imagination is an eye

no : say a hand

fondle a stone & say I've forgotten how to think

kiss the lover's mouth & say you are

a warm smooth stone on my tongue

--say I do not choose you

--I need you--I feel pain most because you exist

THE SPREADING LIGHT OF DEATH

her body's light spread outward as best as nature will allow anyone--
she was dropped off from the school bus--waiting til dark to walk the softly
dusted road home--
the blue tree-line going bluer & bluer
walking like she wanted to suckle an asp--

thinking :

life is a stark series of obsessions
with other bodies--
two bodies orbiting each other, obsessed--
this is love--
& being alone in the blueing night is love too--
& death is a very long list, not of additions but reductions

how can what disappears accumulate in our minds--
it's with words, our language

that's how--

I want to marry Christ in the grass--

she thinking : *I don't care about many alive. I care about most dead I knew.
Sometimes they walk this road with me. They come back to me. I worry*

in this picture black blood is pooled under her eyes
like it might run down her jaw--

I've studied this picture of her to death--
it has faded in my dresser drawer--

death is slick & smooth & unreal
but you can hold it--like I do now--

some people in pictures smile--some don't--
what choice is there anymore for the eternal gone--
their eyes are sometimes red

& sad--

but it's all how it should be--

I think the ones that smile are safest in death

or saddest

when was it ever good enough not to think about sleeping
when was the time I could sleep when I wanted to sleep--

when did I stop studying the faces in photographs & where were the girls
when I needed them to tell me how to be around them

I eat everyday but I can't sleep
or dream myself well

when I try to sleep I think of how lips work & faces
& try to hear the sound of the flag-pole chain in the field in the wind

I was a boy lying in the dark
& I was sure there was a whiskey-drunk night watchman
stories below the earth in a near-blind shaft

& I was sure he hoped the one he loved most was sending down thoughts
to him about sure rafters & no floods

& underground he ate his supper with his hands
off a stone plate balanced on his knees

& every night before he put food in his mouth
he said grace : there is a god who knows I think of you often

though I do not say your name aloud--

how can anything not be

a figure of speech--such as treading water

such as buried at sea

THE YOUNG HOUSEWIFE

Hume again has fallen

down the wine-cellar stairs--

A fish man sibilant & convulsive

swimming the landing--

I've learned not to offer

a hand in his ascension--

I smooth my dress over my hips & thighs

rub my eyes

& exit the house--

By lantern light I thrash the hedge-maze with a sword

THE FIRST NIGHT ALONE WITH FRANK

he left his boots to dry on the tin roof--the laces loose

there was a machete on the cutting block in the kitchen
& a black & white photograph of a finger with a painted nail

the blade smelled like rose water

THE SECOND NIGHT ALONE WITH FRANK

the search for the holy grail he said--
the holy grail is the *search* for the holy grail

& the search for the holy grail he said
is the search for one's self in another's body outside yourself

& men love on whores, I know, because the search--
& everything is sad. the holy grail is yourself in another's body

I said she is the deer in the night
& I am the night

THE THIRD NIGHT ALONE WITH FRANK

the grail is the figure eight
two zeroes orbiting one another despite oblivion

for some time he had recorded himself repeating this

THE FOURTH NIGHT ALONE WITH FRANK

don't draw up your will in the middle of the night he said

don't whistle in graveyards or around a woman who is new to you

death will set watch over a body

--let the body live & return many times in a life

death will set his watch by a body's moving

I said have set my watch by her body though I've seen no body

THE FIFTH NIGHT ALONE WITH FRANK

no sleep. rain--little to no stars

THE SIXTH NIGHT ALONE WITH FRANK

a black truck pulled up to his house--

there were two men in the cab & one in the bed

they drove off once I turned the porch light on

the man in the back spread a bag of rock salt

over the plot Frank had tilled

Frank said the men were piano notes--

lost notes from down South--

ghosts in a boarded up music hall

THE SEVENTH NIGHT ALONE WITH FRANK

drunk he said sometimes I feel like there are two people inside me

I said sometimes I dream of an eye behind an eye

& wonder if this is my idea of what God is

do I love God because I love myself

or do I love myself because I love God--

I do know this I said

she exists : so God must exist

THE EIGHTH NIGHT ALONE WITH FRANK

Frank said there is no truth but in converse symbols

sometimes Frank walks in his sleep taking pictures

of the walls with a camera he holds at his chest

& I wonder if this too is how God makes known

THE NINTH NIGHT ALONE WITH FRANK

what is my idea of God

but a weakness I shoulder

in my absence from God? it is not God

I am conscious of--it is
my weakness of which I am--

I told Frank this came from a dream
a lie

THE TENTH NIGHT ALONE WITH FRANK

dead drunk Frank said sometimes in our sleep we touch the body of another woman

I said nobody is evil--just lost

& said what is beyond me will not hurt me : therefore she exists--

the holy grail is yourself in another's body he said

& what do you say when you find yourself there?

& you & you silence me & you & you & you

you say

thou thou

thou thou

ORPHUES SINCE HELL

--after Gregory Orr

I will put out my eyes
so I will only hear
the voices inching slowly
beneath the fields--
& the birds--lost
to the cores of the trees--
& I will fill the stones
with song--
I will slip them
into the stream
& my voice will drift
down to the bottom
into the clouded silt
into hell within hell
where the birds mouth the notes

NEW RIVER GORGE BRIDGE

the scream

like a loosed arrow

bores a tapered zero

above the nacreous rapids

births an un-fleshed

womb into the air--

the world holds--

then silence closes

around the perfect

DIALECTIC OF TWO SIBLINGS AFTER A MURDER

Brother The moon tonight is a lick
 in a far pasture.
 I stumbled up on a lone deer
 & followed his terror
 toward your door, nocturnal in my roam.

Sister The columns creaked, bore
 the weight of this house
 as I watched the clouds
 sigh out of their cloths, color-shed
 & ermine, settled & stacked
 in drifts. That morning nothing seemed
 awake under the sky.

B. I kept a red rock from the grave
 of the man you loved. I hold it
 at arm's length while lying in bed.
 I have it in my pocket, a heavy ruby.
 I laid him out, sliced off his shirt-
 buttons, put the tools away,

 weighted him with crossties.
 The sky above me
 was nothing but crawfish murk.

S. Lord, he is so beautiful still,
 like the strewn feathers

close to the chopping block--
or a pile of rocks above
the bones of a horse.

B. In the forest your man follows me.
I dream he chooses a sharp stone. I dream
you send him to murder me.

S. I put the block where the hen heads were cut off
under your bed. Your train
out of Raleigh derailed that night. You survived,
went ahead by truck. You saw me
& said, "Life don't pass, it staggers."

B. Anything burning is his body.
Gentle like a staircase rising.

Stones I stutter over, stones
are kisses your man left
for you, buried in dirt,
they are closed eyes.

S. From the bank I watched an empty can
sink. I dredged the washout
from the mill with a branch,
then went home. I brushed my hair,
again & again. Listening.

Hell.

The river always sounds like a stranger
creeping around the house,
hoping for an unlocked window.

remember the girl

who crouched sadly
before the mirror in your room
where silence lasts--

remember her remembering

watching the field turn blue
while she smelled the cut hay
sour & ripen at once--

how in the room, before you,

she blotted her lips with paper
& left it--
remember the smell of cut grass & tilled sod

reminiscent of the broken-necked jay

you carried off into the woods in a shoebox--
& the clock you fixed to run backwards--

how that summer it unwound everyday

as you slept in your mother's bed

MICHIGAN WEATHER

black sand--

a tracker

once said

silt--

here was once

underwater--

the ocean re-seeded

& left inland seas

to the north

sand as relic :

grain--sea--bone

Michigan weather

the flock of geese has frozen above

Lake Michigan

I can count them

I fall asleep with wet hair--

the wind smells like ice

--two small hands draw fire from the water

the woman is the holy grail--I tell you jeweled wind

running wild for the blue night behind the blue clouds--

I Will Cut My Throat Over A Washtub In Omaha--

some dead nobody left the book unfinished--

he screamed through the streets

core the light

collapse the spheres

empty the trees of their music

my love my love my love--

the women lift my body out of its body with their singing

OMNIPRESENCE: BROM BONES POST COITUS

The woman left me in the blueing morning--her dress buttons glowed like eyes
pressed out a fish's skull. I remember her dress is white.

It's awful cold.

I feel your pull devil.

A part of you swims her insides as she walks home to her bed.

& you smile.

My steel-cold phone rings after the woman is gone. I lie on my back & let it.

I will pick up the receiver with no word to you. I know

your silence. I know your silence like I know my voice.

It fills the blue & is dead.

POEM

love we attend all heavens

I wish to wake in all possible worlds

don't leave me

the light above the light is beautiful

the light above the light is all voices--gone--now--to come

before we have grown old together

MY SWEETHEART THE DRUNK

--the last kid chosen brushes snow off home plate--essential gesture--the snow
begins anew--he's been chosen for this & will learn

the moon is a rare bird--it's fog coming through the white pines--it drinks
the river dry

though untouched by rain the moon is a part of our nature--

--six strings have snapped in Memphis, TN

--the answer to every question is "Soon"

--sometimes I can read my mind

what can we do--tell me & I'll do it--the wind at twilight blows through the empty
factory prairie town--blows through the open windows of the houses

--the camera at odds with the worried eye behind the lens--the outcome
the inevitable blur & the subject that was never

the lost gravestone in the lost yellow field hedged by the lost rail fence is what keeps
me alive--the daily hunt

--we've not touched God but every inch of sky--

leave your window open tonight & think about me

SAMSARA

1.

--another sound from the dirt
beneath the house, after two years
of rain : was wearing a starched dress,
hatchets in eyes : a dry cough, a rest,
then again, then nothing : the wind
walked off with the scythe as well
& Hell is still empty. *Don't you know this?*
I wonder that the earth did its best against you,
she speaking to him past the sizzle of fat.

2.

the stillborn, buried closest
to the house, then sheer, albino
& scar, now horned, stasis & sod.
For instance time
in the house is measured by burning
lights of varying degrees

of brilliance. For instance the brief
profusion of sparks when the stove
lighted on Wednesday evening, near
6:03, the middle of June,
any year. For instance
when the dogs turn their heads, the leaves

whisking in the window, it's not the coming
frost they hear, but the wrong number
ringing in the house down the road.

II. Argument for Excision of Place

Determinant :

because the horses are spooked
when she shows; because constant
whispers weaken us nightly; because
the moon disappeared behind the clouds
for a fortnight; because realms of mote
& ashes & a watching cellar hole; because
the house is but a vessel;
because there is shape
to the fire & always sound.

Effect :

it was an heirloom braid that first rose
in smoke, a rising thing joined
with tar & sap at the attic
joists & wren nests, something
ineffable because fire,
the shrinker of things, because
it's trace murmurs that raise
a city death-ward or
it's trace murmurs that raise
death-ward from a city, or
candlelight devoured & shadows

that fled from within a drowning house,
a man & a woman, lean-looking
& quiescent, thrall to climbing flame.

III. A Six Month Spring

Trimming the antlered cactus
he does not trouble over sap,
does not trouble over the piercings
into delicate skin.

The corners of the house
teach him that gross specificity is redundant.

Thin jags of glass appear
daily in the carpet like crystals,
his wounds cool under the sear of vodka & moon.

SELF IMMOLATION

sleepless

you know sleep will come :

trailing your vatic robe & vespers to your midnight desk

love undresses after much ink--lay your head down

I won't touch you--tell me how to destroy myself

I almost said I want my last word

to be your name

but I didn't

fire opens itself to the dark

& the land expands

there will be birdsong here & there will be bread

but it will not bring us back for anything

HACKNEYED

--for Michael Heffernan

any day we are given

rotor & raptor--

machine & bird

machine & bird

there is a grave

for every fifteen keys to the sky behind the sky

the keys move into & out of many pockets

there are many machines & birds moving

language moves forward & backward

--it's what a metaphor does

I drove the school bus to a graveyard & we all sat there for a while--

me--the kids & the birds--

aren't we lucky to be here, I asked

o wouldn't you love to know the dead, I asked

each of us quietly thought for a while as we sat there in the bus along with the birds
& the sky--evolving--

what the kids wanted to know was do bones poke out of the ground here when it
rains & how gears work--I said don't worry about any of that : none of that
matters--

I didn't say a metaphor is a kind of lie--I said the birds and bone & machine--they
sing & revolve.

THIS MUD FAILS

the son heals his friends without effort

the father rhymes in his sleep

I am blessed

I don't have to say everything that lives is holy

I don't have to say I am young

I don't have to say my love

the river glides through the trees

we know what we know

IN SEPULCHER SINCE TOILS URGED OTHER

There is a scent after a hard rain.

There is a hard scent.

The sun through the woods
splintered. Discord.

The sunlight is language & breath,
a cadence of blown fire through the trees :

"There is a word I love
& a word & a word & a word."

There is a grid of moss growing into a stone
wall. There is something else I want
to touch--a planed board, a water-soft stone.

I hear a woman smooth her dress.

I see the silver leaves in the night.

There will be dawn, light
that will bend over the earth, bend
as smooth as an eye.

There will be song
& I will look overhead.

DREAMING IN REVERSE: BROM BONES REVISITS THE SCHOOLHOUSE

I'm in 2nd grade. It's afternoon. I hear a sound sort of like a truck on the road, far off, but different somehow. My teacher says let's go out and see. Everyone goes out and I see something shining and circling overhead. This is the first time any of us has ever seen an airplane. We leave school and everyone goes not far to The Virginia Iron & Coal Company in Cripple Creek's bottomland, a level field along the north bank of the creek. The airplane is landed there. It is owned by two young men from Raleigh who have come to see their girlfriends. The plane is a Jenny model, number 1414. I realize I'm trembling at its touch.

After I saw the Jenny I decided I would one day learn to fly and be a pilot. I made small toy planes out of dried corncobs I had whittled. The stalks were soft under the knife like balsa. I flew them all over. I looked down and saw the creek running silver, crows circling a tree, a dog herding sheep.

HOBO SIGNS & SYMBOLS

1.

What alms for the living can I offer--

moth-eaten cloth, parcel of salted tongue, or bovine-heart?

A glass eye wrenched from a frozen hand?

I wander the trees for neglected eggs & shed silver

feathers. I have time to barter & bewail.

The birds trill & trill & trill.

2.

& there was the watchman's lantern that ogled form

within the formlessness : & I peddled

my fear piecemeal to God

who resided as starlight that filmed the earth's hollows

with a bluish caul : & the moon was a milky eye

& I was not afraid.

I recall hundreds of wings stirring above the tracks

nearly every dawn.

I do not know what I held closest

to my body :

the breath in my lungs, the breath

held for a moment in my hands.

3.

Most animals die in the dark, in the reeds

beside the road or the gully along the tracks.

Some I find still warm. Most have clouded eyes.

Some slipper into hands I cup to hold their voices.

Sometimes in my sleep I touch

the bodies of deer, gaunt horses, hounds,

lithe & repaired, & sound,

come back. When I wake

I never know what to say :

sorrow hangs on some like a robe of flesh.

Or,

I dreamt a lie.

4.

Maggie knows of two things she owns for sure.

One is a fiddle with three strings.

One is a glass eye she found

in a crow's nest.

Sometimes she lays the fiddle at her feet

& says I'm dead tired.

Sometimes she holds the glass eye in front of her face

& it stares back, unblinking,

like a tulip bulb, like light.

5.

I miss the house where the river sang me to sleep. The house ranged in shades & sound like a season will. There were birds in the evenings & small houses along the road. One evening two women were at work in a garden. They were piling limestone rocks, pulled & clawed from the dirt. They worked at the bottom of a small hill. There were scattered limestone markers at the hill's top. I did not sigh in the unkempt cemetery that wandered the hill like rain. I did not read the names carved into the stones. The trees were resolute in their calm as sparrows doted on the bark's infestations. The two women did not look up from their work as I passed them. I believe they were loading wagons to be carted to a barge that made downstream toward a mansion.

6.

The November night is drinking rough wine

with the mansion scribes. I'm peering

around the grounds.

Ghosts of great birds lacerate the sky

over a small body of water, a hand reaches for a cello

bow & the furnace grates its fires, lumbering

against the cold.

Along with the wine stains & fennel there is a severed finger.

It has been on the chopping block since dawn.

The husband is locked in his study.

A servant mills about the woodpile, fumbling with the logs.

Someone weeps from the reeds by the river.

7.

How the fallen leaves seem to wince in response

to the breath of the coming night : their last exhalation

before the change in their blood, before their salient wither

& our ruminations on fire starting, this change of season.

Now is the time when the evening can be called piebald.

Sporadic puddles & outcrops of leaves collect the wind

into their frames : fine sand

between the teeth is a sign of the mountains' erosion.

Sorrel gatherers covet this silt, this departure

to the mundane as the sky spreads its salt,

abrading the teeth of the sleeping,

turning dreams toward enveloping darkness,

the mounting cumulus where the voices of those we love & have loved recede,

& I rise & wish I to draw a bath, thirsting.

8.

Maggie said the last thoughts of the dying are of heat lightning.

It's their dreams guiding them
through the fields of their you, guiding them
to their long home.

Their clothes are piled at their feet.

Their boots tighten & shrink,
having been licked clean by deer at dawn.

Worms digest their salt

in labyrinths of crumb.
She says what the dying see also
are their memories of trees & the trees
stir like hair underwater.

The trees wave so long.

9.

O God, it is I, & I've come to, awake again. The sun is cannon fire, I once told a man. I saw a glass eye in a dream, a star hovering within the brush, & I was drawn to its light, & I approached it, tipping no leaf like a ghost. The eye was shining. It was Maggie's voice. I've learned some dreams are common. I see that I'm freezing & thirsting for water, pale-sick & losing teeth, the river's creosote & slag, the water orange & slow, when each breath is a prayer, & I know that I'll not be long for this world. I saw a man draw tight the load in the bed of his truck. I thought that he would step out of his shirt the way Maggie stepped out of her skin when she froze

alone on the river bank, fingers taut as fiddle strings. Men from town thought she had drowned. They trolled the river & from a barge sounded the bottom with cannon fire. The body did not raise. The birds were missing.

10.

The storm has passed. Leave it to the trees to bear
the silvered frost, to bear the varicose canopy,
night of a thousand fingerprints.

The sky's damp linen is caught on November's half sunken nails.

Something shared : hunger's bond. I rest in the twilight
under the dim sun that has drawn copious blood.

11.

A human light singed
the leaves. An afternoon storm waylaid the rising dust.
The 13-year cicadas have emerged
from their buried skin. Vespertine branches
swallowed the thrushes,
the red sun, the swallow's hunt on the wing.

There is a grief in me because of a departure I cannot hold in my hands.

In the shade the wind uncovers remnants of a resting body
in the dust. What's left behind are scattered vacancies :
the eyes of statues that would follow one
through an empty house. All eyes

are colorless in dreams, essentially devoid.

In dreams we do not age.

The breeze rustles the fallen leaves,
the cicada skeletons, to & fro.

12.

Always the river at midnight. Silver eyed fish circle the moon,
cradled in the sunken johnboat : its dim likeness films
the water's surface.

The trees are without song. Maggie, birds watch as you wade
beyond your waist. You've shed your body.

It grows frost on the bank, quilted
carefully by copper leaves.

13.

The sun lies shattered beneath the pines. It is a light that goes out in my mouth. The shades twitches across Maggie's eyelids. We wait for our socks to dry. Silence is our voice repairing & this choice for quiet separates us from birds. Last night, a new moon & incessant song from the trees. The song was a *place I walked*, a branch under a branch under a branch. I imagined a sustained comfort after a third cup of tea, closing a book, listening to the darkness through the pane. Birdsong has taught me listening is a form of prayer & want, taught me to bow to the troubling dreams brought by the song that simply is, the song that is to the moon believed to be there.

14.

I carry a light with me to bed. I tell Maggie's ghost I'm watching.

I sleep. I dream. Enter what will.

15.

Tonight I have two questions for the fire :

Why does all light leave me un-nourished?

What in this world can heal us?

FATALISM

when we turn off the lights in this house

what is left in the absence of light

is a wandering

& decimated tribe of gods--

& now the anodynic kneel when I wash my face alone--the coward's hour

you lie asleep like a body of water I wish I had discovered

a mirror that holds my form--

nine crows yonder rouse & spread outward--

away from us--

the sky clears