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INTIMACY

by

Elizabeth Knapp

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
Dr. William Olsen, Advisor

Western Michigan University
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Elizabeth Knapp

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
I	11
Night-Blooming Cereus.....	12
Intimacy.....	13
The Dead Sea.....	14
Spider-Man's Angst.....	15
In the Bedroom.....	16
On Running Into Jorie Graham in a Bathroom Stall at the Armand Hammer Museum In Los Angeles, or the Poem I Always Wanted to Write About Antigone.....	17
Self-Portrait: Cold Shoulder.....	19
Unfinished Letter.....	20
Spider-Man Considers a Career Change.....	21
Self-Portrait as Japanese Stripper.....	22
What Clytemnestra Saw.....	23
The Burning Bush.....	24
Betray.....	25
II	26
Self-Portrait as Amputation.....	27

Table of Contents—Continued

Eurydice's Lament.....	29
Unfinished Letter.....	30
The Crossing.....	31
Motovun.....	33
Ossuary.....	34
Postscript From Hades.....	35
Unfinished Letter.....	36
Spider-Man on the Paradigm of Marriage.....	37
Leaving Florence.....	38
Uninvited Guest.....	39
What the Trees Have Lost.....	41
Indelible.....	42
III	44
Winter's Offices	
1. Hopelessness.....	45
2. Matrimony.....	46
3. Lake Effect.....	47
4. When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd.....	48
5. Persephone, Sotto Voce.....	49
6. Graffito: Sadness Was Here.....	50
7. Shenpa.....	51

Table of Contents—Continued

What the Body Remembers.....	52
Unfinished Letter.....	53
Grace.....	54
Call and Response.....	55
Suffering.....	56
Spider-Man Converts to Buddhism.....	57
Backyard Light, Late February.....	58
Epiphany.....	59
Reading Jack Gilbert.....	60
Unfinished Letter.....	61
NOTES.....	62

INTRODUCTION

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot emphasizes the relationship of a poet's work to the past, placing the work in what he calls "the historical sense." With each new poem, Eliot argues, the existing order is ever so slightly altered, as the past makes room for the new. In his view, tradition involves much more than just the transmission of values from one generation to the next. For Eliot, tradition is as much about the present as it is about the past:

This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.

He goes on to claim that a poet's individuality lies not in the expression of personal thoughts and feelings, but in an impersonal approach to poetry, "in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations." Poetry, then "is not the expression of personality, but the escape from personality," and individuality, when it is fully realized, is an entrance into the field of tradition.

At some point in her development, a poet must consider her poems within the context of Eliot's historical sense and define her work in relation to her contemporaries'. If she wants to get published, she must read potential magazines and journals carefully and submit to those for which she feels her work is best suited. "Am I a *Fence* Poet, or a *Poetry* Poet?" she might ask herself, as she wonders

whether she can even articulate the aesthetic and stylistic predilections of magazines such as *Gulf Coast* and *Ploughshares*. She may read dozens of award-winning first books each year and come away with the sense that much of the work seems to value experimentation for its own sake, at the risk of true ingenuity. If the overriding current of contemporary American poetry is one of experimentation, does she allow herself to be carried away by it into the waters of the current tradition? At what point does “tradition” devolve into trendiness?

In her essay, “Make It New: Originality and the Younger Poet,” Dana Levin examines contemporary poetry’s obsession with newness by outlining trends in modern poetry. In response to the often tiresome reiterations of the self which characterized the Confessional period after Robert Lowell, the poets of the last two decades have initiated a return to Eliot’s call for “impersonality” in poetry, yearning for a poetry stripped of subjectivity, grounded in the materiality of language. Beginning with John Ashbery, language itself became the subject of poetry, and a new poetic tradition flourished. What the disciples of the L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E school fail to realize, Levin argues, is that the experimentation they fetishize is not at all new:

True innovation, of course, is impossible without experimentation—those usually intuitive operations that counter or skew prevailing methods of making. Yet the earmarks of today’s experimental styles—fragmented narrative, random jumps in space/time, multiple voices and point of view, disrupted syntax and abrupt shifts in diction, to name a few—are century-old gifts. Once truly new tools for Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and other modernists, these methods often seem

now to be appropriated as much for how they *seem new* (after fifty years of plain-style narratives) as for how they might aid poetic composition.

Therefore, according to Levin, Pound's dictum "make it new," becomes the catch phrase of the emerging poet's anxiety. For once she has located her voice, she must locate her work within the vast sea of tradition and, if she wants to be read at all, develop a style that both enriches and disrupts that tradition, that redefines the nature of tradition itself.

If, as Eliot claims, the new work's "fitting in is a test of its value," who determines how well the work fits in, and how does one place a value on the work? No one but the poet herself, I believe, can make such judgments, for once she enters into the Eliotic field of tradition, she becomes her own teacher and critic. Like Levin, I too am distrustful of the current trend toward experimentation in poetry and tend to dislike L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E driven poems. But beyond this generalization, there is a more specific trend I see developing within contemporary women's poetry which I find both provocative and highly suspect. While I do not wish to make general claims about the state of contemporary women's poetry, I would like to examine two key characteristics of this subset as evidenced by particular poets' work.

The first is a profound bitterness masked by a playful yet solipsistic irony. Self-loathing is sometimes the implicit subject of such work, though rarely does it achieve the mythic fury of Plath's late poems or the unflinching gaze of Glück's mature work. (Was it ever immature? Even *Firstborn* seems preternaturally mature.) Many of these poems read like litanies of self-recrimination, though their spite is often turned against various forms of the other—the lover, the father, etc. Others

attempt to dazzle with pyrotechnic displays of wit and wordplay, as if they hoped to distract readers from the absence humming at their centers.

Having landed poems in three volumes of *The Best American Poetry*, Sarah Manguso has received a good deal of buzz in the poetry world recently. Her second book, *Siste Viator* (Four Way Books, 2006) is a perfect example of the kind of poetry I am simultaneously drawn to and suspicious of, the kind that teaches me as much about how I don't want to write as about how I do. How are we to respond to poems such as "Kitty in the Snow?" Is it an onanistic love song, a brazen declaration of sexual and literary independence, or does it mask some deeper anxiety that the poet has yet to confront in herself?

Kitty in the Snow

Meanwhile I fuck this sculpture
In my mind until it melts, then stop.
Mmm, cold.
At the party I talk to everyone's honey
And sip poison and then go home,
Get shitfaced, and get it on with myself.
I'm so good, I give it to myself every bad way I know.
I whisper in my ear as I come:
Sarah Manguso, you're a damn fine lover.
Maybe someday we can be together, too.

In fairness to Manguso, I have singled out the most overt example of a poetic striptease that fails to deliver as a serious work of art. Elsewhere in the collection, Manguso deftly handles the form of the prose poem, reinventing it to suit her own aesthetic and thematic purposes. In "Final Love Poem," for example, I believe the speaker when she says, "After ending it, I'm less sad about my loneliness than about his, which I can never know the dimensions of." Still, I'm hesitant to take her advice,

or even, at times, to take her seriously at all: “After hearing her deliberations for weeks, I advise my friend to sleep with the German, since all the universe will be the same before as it is after she sleeps with him—except, of course, for the fact that she will have slept with the German.”

In contrast to this mode of writing, the second characteristic I find in the work of younger women poets is an interest in exploring states of psychic and spiritual extremity. Formally, this interest often manifests itself through the use of ellipses, fragmentation, and “floating” lines. Whereas a certain cheekiness characterizes the tone of Manguso’s and others’ work, the tone of this mode is marked by a high seriousness verging on melodrama. The practitioners of this style are often Iowa graduates and disciples of Jorie Graham, and their poems sometimes read as workshop exercises written to garner the favor of their teacher. Nevertheless, I embrace this style over the former, and occasionally I come across a poet writing in this vein who offers a truly unique and necessary voice. Katie Ford, whose first book *Deposition* (Graywolf Press, 2002) I read several years ago, falls into this category, and I have been eagerly awaiting her second collection due out later this month. Mary Szybist, whose first collection *Granted* (Alice James Books, 2003) won the 2002 Beatrice Hawley Award, is perhaps my favorite younger poet writing in this mode, although I am reluctant to categorize her work, as her fiercely tender and finely wrought poems are in a class by themselves. In “Against Bitterness,” for example, Szybist seems to take a moral and aesthetic stand against the self-reflexive irony found in so much contemporary poetry, as the speaker describes a moment of intimacy between herself and the female residents of a nursing home:

... The wind passes,
the rings on my fingers
tighten, and the ladies

in these stiff bodies
are obligated, now, to let me
bathe them. One
at a time I strip them

but not of their sense
of sin—their heads bow,
the windows glint
at the imbecile

sun, did I say
sin? I meant how they live
by hands which snap them
out of their garments into

the straps of chairs that wheel
into a bath where I
lift each arm
and leg to a stretch

I hold open and
lather. And rise. And
longer, I don't let
go...

What I love about Syzbist's work is that it doesn't let go of compassion, even as it tests the limits of meaning and searches the outside world for an objective correlative. Quiet yet penetrating, her poems fuse a Rilkean heart and an Augustinian mind, as in the title lines: "Granted, this is not a world that keeps us. // Granted, there are some sadnesses / in which I do not long for God."

Manguso's and Szybist's collections are just two examples of the dozens of first and second books by women I have read in recent years. I was entirely unaware of my reading habits at first. At some point during my MFA program, I realized that I needed to read first books of poetry in order to learn how to write one. I started with

first books of the modern and middle generations—Frost’s *A Boy’s Will*, Stevens’s *Harmonium*, Bishop’s *North & South*, Plath’s *The Colossus*—and continued through the present, working my way through Tate’s *The Lost Pilot*, Graham’s *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts*, Hass’s *Field Work*, and Bidart’s *Golden State*. In those days, I favored male voices, though a handful of women poets would later become important influences on my work, including Plath, Rich, and Glück.

Once I had read the first books of the modern and contemporary American poetry canon, I turned to the poets of my generation. What were younger American poets writing about, and who were they? Over time, I realized I had acquired a small library of first books of poetry by women. I would regularly browse the stacks of my local library or bookstore, scan the spines for new titles, and decide which to take home with me. Again and again, the books that spoke to me were those by emerging women poets. As I delved deeper, I began to recognize that I was drawn to these books because I needed to write my own, and because these poets were both my competition and my inspiration. They urged me to write my first collection and to redefine the tradition that they had inherited.

To put my own work to Eliot’s test, certainly my poems exhibit tendencies of the first group—self-reflexive irony, humor, thinly (and not so thinly) veiled rage—but also they seek meaning outside themselves while engaging inwardly with spiritual and metaphysical questions, as in the second. My strongest poems, I believe, find a balance between the two, bringing both into full force while maintaining a tonal equilibrium. “Intimacy” and “Betray” both do this, I think, through the interweaving of history, myth, and personal experience. Using a sort of pan and zoom effect, the

poems contextualize and translate the subjective through the lens of the objective. Distance is achieved while bringing the self into focus. In my less successful poems, one part of the equation takes over, and the poem loses its balance. One poem which I eventually cut from the manuscript, "On My Thirtieth Birthday in Paris," is a good example:

On My Thirtieth Birthday in Paris

You were with another woman
in Hawaii. No rain that day,
only a vengeful wind,

an invisible hand knocking over
potted plants, sending café chairs
clattering down the sidewalk.

From my room in the Marais,
a view of Eglise St. Paul,
its grimy façade a monument

to the untenable. The lilies
my mother sent browning
on their stems. On this day,

I wanted you to suffer
as never before, and I knew
then what I was being

offered: the chance to acquit
myself or the right to blame.

The poem still feels too weighted by the last two stanzas, as if it were about to choke on its own anger. I cut it not because I do not believe there is a place for anger in this collection, but because it is not a transformative anger. Anger without transformation calcifies into bitterness, and the poem becomes a tomb.

The idea of transformation was central in my organization of the manuscript, which took different forms at various stages along the way. As I ordered, reordered,

cut, and replaced poems, I began to glimpse a narrative arc, which I eventually realized did not have to be linear or temporal. Originally, I placed the poems in the order in which I had written them, but the movement of the natural seasons didn't always progress naturally. I don't know why such a mundane detail bothered me, but it did. I then reordered the poems by season, dividing the manuscript into four parts, which in turn derailed the narrative I thought I had established. Frustrated and at an impasse, I let the manuscript sit for a few months. I came back to it only after a friend offered the suggestion of organizing the book into a tripartite structure around a central theme. He put it rather simply: Fire, Ash, Rebirth. "Interpret that however you want," he said.

The more I thought about it, the more intuitive sense it made. In fact, the structure had been there all along, I had just never looked at it that way. What I had been reading as a linear narrative was actually an emotional narrative. Sometimes, as in many of the poems from the first section, the events of the emotional narrative precede the linear one. The opposite is sometimes true of the poems in the final section. What I was certain of, however, was that I wanted to resist the idea of formal and emotional closure. For this reason, I cut the poem "Closure" from the final section, despite its insistence on lack of closure ("There is no closure. It will kill you, over and over."). Instead, I ended the collection with the final "Unfinished Letter" to underscore the idea that the past will not repeat in the same way for the speaker because she has been ineluctably changed by it, that what proceeds henceforth is a new memory, a new poem.

I have not written that new poem yet, but I believe it is there, and the one after it too, even as I occupy the living past of this current manuscript. For as I inhabit the field of a larger poetic tradition, I inhabit the space of a personal one as well. Eliot's test applies not only to the whole order of poetry, but also to a poet's individual tradition, and this, perhaps, is the truest test of all.

I

Night-Blooming Cereus

after the painting The Sense of Smell by Jack Beal

What happens after a night
of making love to a flower?
Does it leave its breath

on her clothes, in her hair?
The painting only shows
the moment she has dropped

to her knees, nose-deep
in the miracle, a tungsten
moon reflected in the window,

*its moonlike petals still unfolding,
the belling of tropic perfume—
oh, but what isn't there:*

In this story of loss, even
the story is lost. When she wakes
on the carpet, a blank sketchpad

under her head, the moon-lamp
now the sun, dawn breaking,
it will be gone—a litter of petals

on the Persian rug, a trace
of cloyed regret in the air.
It is the aftermath she will

remember. And after that?
Light reassembling like a fore-
gone conclusion. The bitter after-
taste of bloom.

Intimacy

In a word: violence. From the Latin *intimus*: “inmost.”
From there, according to Webster, see *intestine*. Consider Brutus, son of Servilia, Caesar’s favorite mistress, and the knife he used to know the emperor in the most intimate and cunning of ways: *You too, my son?* Or Signorelli, his real son lying dead on the drawing room table, entering that beloved body through the dissection of light and form. “Never let your brushwork show,” David once said to his pupils. After Marat’s assassination, they called him in to paint the corpse, slumped in the funerary bath, the body in rigor mortis still clutching the pen he used to scrawl the name of his murderer. “The Pietà of the Revolution,” it was called, implying the intimacy between death and politics. If what is inmost cannot be seen, can it be touched by rage? “In a poem, one speaks from a place where two oceans meet,” a friend writes on one of my poems. I think poetic intimacy is the fissure such joining creates. After my marriage ended, I experimented with the intimacy of sex, finding in each lover’s flesh a different kind of poetry, though my own body remained the husk I carried out of one fire into the next, like fireweed, like something that wouldn’t be quelled. The last one wrote to me: “For what it’s worth, you’ve known me in a most unique and intimate way.” For what it was worth, I’d learned nothing. Seven years taught me not how to listen, to know each curve of a voice, the bell at the back of the throat, what it wanted, what it was really trying to ask, nor to see the soul for what it might be—phantom windows of a farmhouse at dusk—nor to enter that temple, quietly, reverently. Instead, I learned how to fake it. Intimacy was an art I invented for myself. And never, not once, did I let my brushwork show. When it crept up on me, benignly, tenderly, disguised as one come to ravish or save me, I believed it, believed with all my slipshod heart it had something to offer me—trust, perhaps, the quietude of knowing someone cared enough not to kill me, and he, in turn, trusting me with his life—all this to say: without threat of annihilation there can be no intimacy. In its place, a wilderness smolders. I would not become Caesar. From that inmost fire, I carved myself.

The Dead Sea

From Amman we took a taxi to the Dead Sea. You wouldn't look at me, eyes fixed on the desert we hurtled through, rougher now the terrain, vaster now the hole I fell into, layer upon layer of sand over sky, sky over sand, your hand never once seeking my hand, the driver hidden behind dark glasses, the earth hidden, the sea.... I remember now how unprepared I was, my breath dropping with each turn, my entire body quaking. From where did such violence begin? No sign of life, not a single bird or thirsting tree, even the sun could not rise, a mottled star galaxies away. I had to shout to be heard: *leave me, let me be*. And now with biblical sweep, the first glimpse: oily with a sheen that so shattered all looking. Nothing could have prepared me.

Spider-Man's Angst

In the end, he decides, the scenery
is unimportant—pitched on the balustrade

of the Brooklyn Bridge, the lights
of Manhattan do not surprise him

anymore, the island's own constellation
of stars, burning headlong across the Hudson.

He's had enough of playing good cop
to the city, fed up with endless nights

swinging rapists over his shoulder,
throwing arsonists back to their fires,

ridding Wall Street of corporate terrorists.
Tonight he longs for a rice field in Malaysia,

the tip of an almond-eyed woman's tongue
in his ear, something foreign and entirely sensual—

not sex, though sex would be nice,
the shiver a spider might feel as he comes,

and the human side left to decipher it.
No, something simpler than sex, simple

as a Sunday afternoon in the Hamptons,
late July, a wife slicing sweet Maui onions

in the kitchen, and Etta James on the stereo:
How deep is the ocean, how high is the sky?

In the Bedroom

Once, I caught you,
startled by your reflection
in the mirror, and from the look

on your face I knew
you were surprised.
In a photo, your figure—

black arrow balancing
air, your jackknife
form suspended in the frozen

frame, straight spirit,
all elegance and angle—
gone where? What faced you

then was a violence
of recognition, my own
face somewhere in the background

unmoved, unmoving,
half not wanting to startle
you and half unwilling

to dare, safe as I was
in the lie that I had nothing
to do with what you saw

yourself becoming. Outside,
California blazed wild
and foreign. Ragged

tumbleweeds rolled
like spirits from the canyon.
I watched but did nothing,

betrayed nothing.

On Running Into Jorie Graham in a Bathroom Stall at the Armand Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, or the Poem I Always Wanted to Write About Antigone

Maybe it was the hair, or the way she looked up at me as if from a tomb, startled for a split-second, before a smile spread like a crescent moon across the gorgeous vacuum of her face. She looked almost pleased to see me there, frozen in my spot, unable to move, like some stone god struck dumb and gawking, before she cocked her head as if to say *Close the fucking door*. So I did. I guess right then I was Antigone, buried

by my own shame, head in my hands in the stall next door. Should I have buried my pride and apologized? Seconds later, I heard her emerge from her tomb to wash her hands of me. But I lacked the will of Creon. I couldn't say who I was in this story. Outside at the reading, a spotlight moon lit her auburn hair. I watched the flyaways dance, Medusa-like, her stony gaze boring into me. Here I go again, mixing myth. Reader, please

bear with me. The thing is, I always believed Antigone did it not to please her brother, the gods, or even herself. It was Creon she wanted to bury. When she crept out that night, beyond the castle walls, into the ring of stones they'd laid around her brother, she felt more alive than ever. The tomb was the bed and the living flesh she left sleeping. Wrecked under a gibbous moon, Haemon would wake to find her missing. If he asked her, what would she say?

Tell your king to go fuck himself, when he wasn't listening. Which is not to say she wanted to die, but that she wanted vengeance. Later he would beg, *Please, father, for the sake of the kingdom*... But it would be too late. The Theban moon was already waning. By dawn they would find her hanged, her rage unburied, even in death, an open challenge to her uncle. The world was a tomb in Antigone's eyes. Neither love nor mercy could save her. Stone-

blind, like her father, Antigone died wedded to spite, while Haemon got stoned on his grief. So the question remains: Who was Jorie in all this? I could say she was the voice of the Chorus—her perfect indifference the silence of a tomb once the last breath has been taken, each raspy poem a paean to the gods to please their jealous natures—but who was I to remake her? All meaning lies buried in wonder. After the reading, I watched her walk out to her ride, the L.A. moon

throwing shadows behind her. I heard her say to her companion, *Jesus, that moon will kill me tonight*. And so it did, dear Antigone. Like light from a dead stone, poetry reveals our passions. In this underworld, every line will bury its author. I went home that night wondering what I should have said when I walked in on her pissing. Part of me still thinks it pleased her, that moment between us when nothing was said, the bathroom a tomb

of failure. Now when I read her, I think her poems are trying to say
(through background noise of the Chorus) *Forget trying to please
them, the gods. Irreverence is your only prayer in the tomb.*

Self Portrait: Cold Shoulder

after Garbo

I don't ask for her hieroglyphic eyebrows, or that gaze
shuttered by sleepy lids, the lift that occurs just before

she parts her dewy Swedish lips and delivers
a line like *I vont to be alone*, in a tone so perfectly

chilled it's delectable, nor do I ask for her mouth,
pouty as this portrait is, the glamour that glossed her

right out of the picture, into Steichen's straightjacket
frame, and announced her retreat from the limelit spectacle.

And her neck—that creamy slide into fantasy,
collarbone, breast, lithe as Pavlova's when she tilts

her head back and laughs the cummerbund off her leading
man, poor sod who never stood a snowball's chance

against a woman so mythic—I don't ask for that (this isn't
a portrait for fetishists), nor hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face,

nor any other part belonging to a siren, save two:
her shoulders, twin burnished moons that rise

when she rises out of character and into pure starlight,
their otherworldly aura, their glow from a previous era

when a flash of bone brought an audience to its knees,
huddled before the mystery. Wry little sphinx, frosty

screen minx, tell me, would he love me more if I wore
your silhouette? Who wouldn't trade the finger for a blade?

Spider-Man Considers a Career Change

Just ask Man Ray, and who was it
who said, *Tears are liquefied brain?*

Rodin knew it, and so did Van Gogh,
Picasso and his *Demoiselles d'Avignon*

were in on the secret so cloistered
even super-heroes couldn't unlock it:

Artists have more sex. Let's face it,
hanging upside down from a web

isn't the most attractive position,
and those graphite hairs that grow

thorn-like from his arms, his legs
aren't helping the situation—

hot nights spent sleepless in his queen-
sized bed, morning a sticky reminder

of his aloneness, a hunger beyond art,
beyond reason. He dreams of painting

the autumn-haired waitress who pours
his coffee every morning, the sleek seam

of her throat running down to the shadow
between her breasts, down to where

his brush can't reach, a suffering so sweet
it's addictive. Each night he paints her over—

spread-eagle on the afghan, in the bath,
in fishnets, under a full-fleshed moon.

Self-Portrait as Japanese Stripper

Look: ravaged at desire's hem,
at the back of the catwalk,
I glisten, skulking, waiting

to ignite, while suits sipping
sake from bamboo baskets
bump knees under the table,

loosen silk ties. I fix them
hard with the red split
of my smile, slink like I

was born to (sinking),
my bones sleek as a bird's
and bracing for the funeral.

Listen: burn me. Burn
the boredom of this being:
night after night like a cat

under the hideous moon,
or the burn unit after midnight.
Mercy bleeds like that.

Thongs-away. Seething, I bloom
like acid over writhing flesh,
light one lipsticked tit at a time.

What Clytemnestra Saw

Her favorite daughter
offered to the gods

like an everyday farm animal,
so many bleating hearts.

Crafty, yes, but then so are the gods.

So many stupid humans,
their stupid human jobs.

So go on, fuck Cassandra
(unrolling her fine saffron carpet)—

and while you're at it, fuck the gods,
their dusty chariots and oversized cocks.

I have something else in mind.

She never asked for sympathy.
She asked for a bucket and a blade.

The Burning Bush

For weeks, I searched for a sign that it was over—
my rage or mourning, whichever came first.

I dug holes in the ground and covered the bulbs
with mulch. Then I waited. If something grew there,

I'd know I'd been granted. But earth doesn't respond
like that; there's nothing human in its language.

Words came to me, but they seemed the symptom
of something deeper. And then I saw it: blue-red

in the October sun, the color of a pomegranate
seed when light passes through it, or the amber-red

of a young Arbois, honey-red, yet bitter. It lit
the yard with the intensity of a dream, only I knew

its leaves weren't burning. Neither god nor prophet
it spoke to me, but what it meant I couldn't decode.

Reader, there are those who would say
I shouldn't address you directly, but this is not

that kind of poem—Frostian, dark, with a touch
of sardonic humor. Without you, I speak to the chasm.

Sublime, indifferent, the bush taunted me, its fire-
flecked voices I couldn't answer, its quivering vowels

slaking off heat. How was I to translate? I could say
it represented the untenable, the ineffable,

all that I had faltered or failed in (this gift to you,
my raspy hunger, the miniature graves I dug

in the hope for flower, my sad little conscience
pulling up weeds), but that would be untrue. Listen:

It's nearly winter and the bush is still burning.
In rage or mourning, I have failed you.

Betray

It began not
with a kiss of fury, the dark heavens opening
like labial folds to swallow Him complete,
whole, while Judas wept
in the shadows, fingering his promise
of gold, the pouch he
would kill or die for—

One of you
will betray me. No. It began with a kiss of indifference.
In the night, a single hibiscus bloom
unfolded despite me, despite
whatever storm would later
ravage it, despite my refusal
to water it, ignoring

its scarlet profusion,
its gaudy announcement of resistance.
Two days later, I knew, it would be gone.
Who can say with certainty
what Judas felt, as he lingered
in the garden after they
had taken Him away,

the tin shield
of the moon now polished and risen, the silver
knives of the olive trees glinting, the stones
now dumb and cold? No one cares
about Judas's own dark night of the soul,
as he slept on the bones
of his savior. I will

betray every flower
that opens for me, praying not for indifference—
the kiss of a wind that would flatten them
in caprice, or a frost that would ice
their tongues as they fold back to the dust
of my making—pray they die not in spite
but because of me.

II

Self-Portrait as Amputation

It was in Frost's "Out, Out—"
that I found it, imago of myself

as amputee, the Mansfield ridge
like a saw in the background

and the Vermont sky clotting
into dusk. Farm bells. Supper time.

And the saw, *as if to prove*
saws knew what supper meant,

grinding through sinew and bone.
Though Frost tells it differently,

I imagine the boy said nothing,
no *rueful laugh*, as the life poured

out of him and the others watched
dumbfounded, numb. Something

tells me it was no accident.
There is loss, and then there is

what the mind freely gives up:
He must have given the hand. If I cut

the part of me that wakes
every morning wondering

how I could be whole—
arms and legs intact, vertebrae

still stacked along the track
of spine, skull still bobbing

on its pliant stem—I'd leave
another part dangling, ghost-

limb tingling where the heart

once skid. Is it better this way,
body still remembered, while skin
grows thin and taut over a loss
so clean it can never be replaced?

Eurydice's Lament

after a first line by James Tate

Love is not worth so much. I regret everything.
Me, tunneling my way toward oblivion.
As he turned back, stars flew.

Hell's air rank on my skin, while he's
above ground, weeping the notes
of the living. I regret everything.

By dawn, we would still be touching.
His come in my hair, the sweet dust
of our fear abated. Stars flew

through the window to warn us.
Morning crawled up the wall, but his singing
was more seductive than life. I regret everything.

What is there to forgive? That his lyre
would be my end, that the lilac-scented earth
would see the day stars flew

and open its bowels to embrace me?
His shadow marks every brimstone wall.
Is there nothing to forgive? I regret everything.

Unfinished Letter

Have I confessed enough? My own lies caught
in my throat like starlight sucked by muses. I couldn't
form the words to describe it: years in California wrought
by silence, muffled by seasonless light. Time wouldn't
materialize. At the Port of Long Beach, ships moved
with the languor of summer, drifting in and out
of harbor, never docking long enough to prove
they were anything but ghosts. So we lived without
anchor, floating through west-facing rooms, sifting
the April sunlight for clues that somewhere it might
be snowing. Somewhere a plough was lifting
spring soil, the detritus of all we left covered by night.
I confess I remained silent. I confess time yearned
for a forgotten language we'd not yet learned.

The Crossing

Lago di Como

I didn't make the connection at first, sun-stroked
and weary of beauty, all that overripe lushness,
the panoramic vistas, as the copper

we scraped from our pockets plinked in the alms
box and incense snaked into our lungs, our hair.
or perhaps I never saw it, ferryman

to my own soul, lugging my own shadow
down winding cobblestone, past windows
framed by boxed geranium, until we stopped

in front of the church and decided for once
to enter. Inside, he left me to my own devices,
withered and wary of inspiration, yet another

crumbling medieval relic in a picturesque Roman
town. After mass we walked back to our room
and watched the ferries cross the mirrored lake,

stitching and restitching the surface, remaking it,
the thread of a threat or promise in their wake. I thought
I ferried myself alone, but what I didn't know

was that there was a god in my boat, coxswain
at the stern, ghost-love forever propelling me
forward, whether or not I chose to believe it.

I didn't see the fresco until later, after I
had arrived back home and organized
my trinkets—downloaded photos, train tickets,

glossy brochures of villas we never set foot in,
all the churches we never saw, save one—
half-mast, hunched by the burden of grace,

St. Christopher carries the infant Jesus to the other
shore. From a distance, he is Christ Himself,
entreating us, offering us safe passage,

hulled in the ribs of a sainted giant, whose sole
Sisyphean task is to keep our weighted souls
from drowning, a Charon steering in the opposite
direction, across the frothy, whitecapped lake.
It is only now that I can see him clearly, what he
means to us: At the harbor, in the moonlight,
love cornered then courted us.

Motovun

Promise me you will forget Motovun.
Promise me you will forget the bell tower,
the fortress walls, the purple vineyards rolling
into never. Never makes a room you cannot claim.

Perhaps then you will leave this weather
for a transience I never asked of you.
Across the Adriatic? An emerald canal. A parting train.
Promise me you will write your name in the waves.

And when the ferries slacken, when the moon
bores a hole into the eastern mind,
you will know what I told you is a lie
when I said astonishment is impossible.

Ossuary

Rifling through a box of photos, I find a black-and-white snapshot of a pile of bones, human and mostly femurs, some of them pointed at the camera so that you can see their hollow openings, like the ends of flutes. The bones are from the Massacre of Sabra and Shatila, you tell me. From this, I construct the story: three thousand women and children are bulldozed from their homes, led to a narrow ravine and shot. What is left is the impression that you were once there, and somehow I have followed you. We move through the blasted landscape like hungry ghosts, picking at what's left of the bodies, our bodies, stabbing at the remains like crows bickering over a loaf of moldy bread. This is not a dream, yet somehow the memory precedes me, as if you had intentionally placed the photograph there, years later, for me to find. It reminds me of the chapel in Kutná Hora made entirely out of human bones, a chapel I have seen but never entered. We walked past it once in early fall, when the Bohemian light cast silver shadows over the rooftops and cobblestones, before what was yours became mine, before the x-ray of your broken collarbone appeared in my files, its crack like the glaze of fired porcelain.

Postscript From Hades

Thinking this might be my last season in life.
Thinking that death is not an answer, that the gull's
rinsed cry is a vowel that won't cast anchor,
won't serrate the gulf. Thinking that my love

was not meant for one lifetime, but for the stilled
valley of being, for the shifting of limestone,
for the fossilized breath of the dark. Thinking that song
is not suffered but shorn. Thinking that we peel

night from our bodies like salt. Thinking I can learn
to live with it, with this scull of a soul threading
the river Lethe. Thinking the last time I touched you
I crossed the last vespers. Mother,

I think the darkness has a name.
I think hell is my only lover.
I think, come spring, I will rise like a dead woman
carrying the blackened seeds of my heart.

Unfinished Letter

Do you remember? We were in a room
with the blinds drawn, a ceiling fan
slicing the hour into quarters, a tomb-
like stillness in the air, your open hand
resting on the pew of my back, beyond prayer.
Outside, the dusty static of a muezzin's call.
You kneeled over me, in the dark, the bare
tips of your fingers rehearsing all
parts of me you've touched. This
never happened, I tell myself now.
I've made the whole thing up—from the bliss
of that first lie to the years we somehow
vanished—you, a ghost between lives,
I, one of your many imagined wives.

Spider-Man on the Paradigm of Marriage

“With great power comes great responsibility.”

As he left M.J. that November day, the skies

slating over with the onslaught of rain, his mind
turned toward Odysseus: that’s what he thought

as his ship left the harbor, as his bleached sail
waved goodbye to the woman standing alone

on the quay, suffering in silence, powerless
to stop him, powerless to bring him back

into their bed where Argos snored and snarled
through dreams, where her loss was stationed,

rooted to the same emptiness she carried even
while he was with her. What is war compared

to that hell? No wonder he invited seduction—
a long-legged witch with a curtain of onyx

hair, tawny boys with tethered forearms, opium
dens, an endless affair with the Mediterranean

itself—who could blame him? A super-hero’s
hero. As he turned he could hear her crying,

the same recording playing over in her head:

“His only duty was to love me.” M.J., sweet-

heart, get over yourself.

Leaving Florence

Bushful of clouds as the trainscape flashes by.
Two seats over, a well-heeled woman
cries behind dark glasses. The headlines

in her lap read: "Bush: Voglio bin Laden
Morto o Vivo." I wonder what it is
she's leaving behind, back there

in the hills of Firenze—a lover perhaps,
a sick relative—the miles hurtling
between them, distance aching to a point

the Renaissance masters called *perspective*,
the eye's last stop before resolution, before light
can finally arrive. Does it comfort her

to know space feels nothing—only cold,
inconsequential air, peppered here and there
by a few nameless stars, and bleeding outwards

the unfinished heavens? She fixes her gaze
at a point on the horizon where cypress
and poplar ring the hills passing by,

each dark form a citizen of the country
she is leaving, sentries along the border
of some pure and intractable loss.

Uninvited Guest

Mid-September. First turn of the maples
like the underside of a kiss. Brush
of an angel's whisper. *Don't wait*

a second longer. Here, in this old house,
light bends a wishbone over the threshold
of a door. Night repeats its failures—

sky punctuated with stars, the comma
of a comet splicing the perfect sentence.
It wasn't yours: reflection of a woman

walking the cathedral's sunlit floors.
Someone else is speaking—not
the beloved, for whom Rilke waited

on Prague's reflected streets,
not the sighing of a window
as you gathered him in your arms—

what, after all, were you thinking?
It comes down to this: even your own
thoughts will betray you. They

were never yours, but the memory
of a collective conscience: hooded
figures on the horizon, Holofernes'

severed head bleeding in the basket,
as Judith spins her knife to point
the question back at us, the sheath

of history smeared. You watch
the images with less horror than
dumb amazement—the bodies

of a tyrant's sons sewn back
into a question, implicit and yet
unanswerable. Now someone

in the back row clears his throat,
as a woman in Gaza clears the gravel
from a grave. Husk of memory burning.

Pockets of autumn like signposts
along the highway. And still,
that swath of light above your door,

the guest that entered your blood
uninvited. You, who refused the warm
welcome of wine, even as you poured.

What the Trees Have Lost

Now they are unremembered: I have never
seen such gesturing
before. As if the wind had lifted their orange
skirts and sequined them all over the sidewalk.
I write to you now
from a place the trees have lost, somewhere
deep in a box of winter, a shell made out
of the finest frost,
a crystallized version of story. If there
was ever a narrative, it was the icy thread
of hours I held taut
between myself and the trees, between
what I knew and what I chose to forget.
I chose to forget
that winter would end, that the stars
would melt and bright moons would appear
between boughs,
a burnishing of season. I chose to forget
their crippled branches or the way ice would
lock their helpless
figures into place, creating distance. How far
was I willing to go to be happy? It was not
a question of happiness
so much as a riff in the leaves. I listened
but did not understand their raspy tongues.
Or—I *chose* not to
understand. What did they have to teach me,
when every syllable of myself was lost?

Indelible

This morning in meditation, I thought
of what remains: my pain, for example,
as I sat in half-lotus in the flickering
light of my altar, nag champa incense
curling in the air, my feet going numb
as each breath rose and fell with the waves
on the lakeshore some thirty miles away.
Sit through it, Ben said, and it will pass.
Others had taught the same: Ellen
on her deathbed, struggling to speak
through morphine, clinging to each
word, as though the sound of her own
voice could save her; Holly at the tattoo
parlor, holding out her right wrist
in offering, eyes closed, as blood mixed
with ink that was carefully wiped away.
Pain ended for both, yet something
indelible remained. Now, when I think
of you, I remember that week in early
April, Ash Wednesday, when every tree
on our canyon-cradled street burst
into paper-white flower. All but the one
outside my office window. Plum trees,
I think. On Good Friday, they came
to cut it down. I watched as they fed
it to the woodchipper, angry beast,

the silence still angrier after it was done.
The stump left a hole no living thing
could fill. When I exhaled it took forever
to be over. Opening my eyes, I could see
the oaks on my new street, gesturing
to sky, offering their tapered branches,
black candelabras shaking out snow. Nothing
stays, I know. And yet, you are etched in me
the way silence is etched into every spoken
word, the way the unsayable looms behind
every unlocked door. *Come in*, it says, *remember
me. Winter has begun and you are ready.*

III

Winter's Offices

*What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?*

—*Robert Hayden*

1. Hopelessness

Now it sinks in: days of unwashed
gray, cracked pavement where puddles
of melted snow collect, snarled roots

exposed to the sludge of last week's
thaw. And this, you know, is only
the beginning: Saturn still in tow.

Matchstick trees behind the garden
fence, and a dog, now yours but only
for the day, asleep beside the dead

hydrangea. Take what you can
and make use of it. The rest feed
to the god of hopelessness, who never

endures for more than one season,
however long you think it's been
since a touch scalded your tongue

and passion drew the frilly curtains.
Tonight, speak to the moon in French
and break out your set of fine Czech

crystal. There's one Duraflame log
sitting in the fireplace and a host
of reasons for burning alone.

2. Matrimony

It's a marriage of convenience, though you could say
to the sky, *I'm yours for a season*, for however long

it chooses to bed you in its shag of white fleece,
its goose down of glistening powder. A weekend

now two thousand miles away, after the last vows
had been taken and the petals thrown like shrapnel

to the wind, a boy you hardly knew traced
the outline of the tattoo on your hip with the tip

of his ringless finger. Did it sing as it singed
going down? You woke the next morning married

to wonder, eating wedding cake for breakfast,
like Marie Antoinette, hungover. May the crumbs

nourish you this long and fruitless winter, even
as they fall, mute and wanting, to the ground.

3. Lake Effect

Someone has asked you to write about
angels, the quiet fractals wisping
sideways down your street, numinous

and steady, tender, unrelenting. Here,
they call it *lake effect*, though *lake*
is really a misnomer, as you've stood

on the brink of that saltless wonder,
on the dunes in September, well before
a single angel ever swelled from its vast

unsleeping shore. It is the god, and these
its minions, covering you, courting you,
burying you alive. They say death

by freezing is a most pleasant experience,
a delicious warmth spreading through
the body, the moment before consciousness

ends. *And a host of angels descended
from the heavens.* Winter won't kill you,
you know, though you may want it to,

though you may walk out one night,
numb to your life, bitten by degrees
too cold to ever succor and languish

in a open field of snow, an unbeliever,
a heathen in the midst of all that perfect
terror, benighted, yea, reborn.

4. When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd

It was early June. You walked down your future street
in a Whitmanian rapture, with your borrowed lover,

who wore Mardi Gras beads and a half-baked smile
from his Ecstasy high the night before. He may have

held your hand. The heady scent was everywhere,
everywhere too the promise of flower, a borrowed

season in a borrowed land. Filched from your future
neighbor, a sprig of lilac, sweet purple dying in a vase

of water, or carefully folded into onion-skin paper
and shipped to Toronto for a homesick poet-friend.

Oh, Walt, what's the use in waiting? It's February
here in western Michigan, and not a single sign

of your heart-shaped leaves, no green to rend this ship
asunder, winter like a ghosted freighter anchored

in the mind, or a coffin carried on the shoulders
of comrades to the grave where we lay our vernal

hopes to rest, littered by sprays of lilac. What promise
can these offices make us? *Desire, desire, desist.*

5. Persephone, Sotto Voce

The dead lilies you threw in the garbage
can't hear it, nor the streets, muffled
by March, its grey mouth filled with soot,

spewing quiet, nor the cat, curled
and dreaming of its own obsolescence,
nor the walls, windows, chimney, doors—

only your ears can draw out the faint
night scratches, the subliminal ticking,
the sense that something underground

is about to be reborn, someone once
buried is about to resurface—a child-
bride who spends half her life dying

and the other half waiting to die, though
this is your own morbid retelling. Myth
doesn't need you to hear it, it will go on

whispering in its ageless, garbled tongue
and you will go on believing in what lies
beneath it: *Listen, can you hear her crying?*

6. Graffito: Sadness Was Here

The pronoun was the problem. You didn't want
to become your own first person, looking down

on yourself drinking with friends at the bar, laughing
as if you were one of them, not this disembodied voice

struggling to find its corporeal host, its sack of nerves
and flesh, the song the body makes when it opens.

So when you left the table to relieve yourself, opening
the door to the men's room stall, and read that one line

on the wall in a hand that could have been guided
by God or by a man adrift in his own loneliness,

you became *I*, *I* became *him* and *him* became all
that I had until then relinquished. At that moment,

it was scripture, and my body, no longer yours,
opened to a song before the advent of language,

before the primordial slime of pronouns began
to separate us—you from me, me from him, him

from the god of his sadness. When I returned
to the table, awakened yet unchanged, you greeted

me, pulled up an extra chair, told me to sit right there
and recount the story of my miraculous conversion.

7. Shenpa

I decided to look at it, once and for all,
my own loneliness, without judgment,
without accusation or pity, without

longing or shame, and see the same
mirror in the landscape reflecting
what I saw. Outside, to which my back

was turned, the oaks had sprouted
tight-fisted buds and sparrows marched
across the littered garden. *It's about*

to happen, hang on. I could go on
looking at it all my life, or I could turn
and walk into it, pick up the dead branches

over which a century of ice had burned
and tend the rows I never meant to abandon.

What the Body Remembers

At Pankrác, we ascend the escalator.
My Virgil, he asks me, *Do you remember?*

I remember slow fires behind the paneláks
that September, smoke curling into a question

the body remembers. I say I remember nothing
of that water tower, straw-hatted farmer,

nothing of these streets, gasping, singed
with dirty rain. I tell him only by the turn

of my head as we pass each phantom corner.
The crosswalk a text I read with my feet.

Nine years later, my first apartment at the end
of the street, the yard still wild with overgrown

clatter—dahlias, forsythia, green pears heavy
on the young pear tree. Suddenly, I am nine years

older. He can't help me, he can only accompany
me through this dream. We walk, suspended

in shadow, through the half-life of memory,
talking of fathers, lovers, how time frays

the edges of all that we keep. I will keep
this memory in the well of my body,

let it echo there, one silver Koruna
falling like music through acres of sleep.

At the metro, we descend. He walks
in front of me. I follow, hallowed, here.

Unfinished Letter

Fuck this form. Tell the story straight:
I was the lost child. He loved me.
Nights, across this city we wandered late,
getting high on graveyard walls where he
first tried to kiss me, the moon flung up
behind the paneláks like a stage set,
the dusky screen of stars, the night a cup
of headiness. Friends, I confess, I let
my imagination run away with me. Even
memory is a lie, colored by the anthem
of distance. I wanted to believe
I was lost. I purposely tried to lose him.
I knew I would return, this time alone,
my back to the river I never called home.

Grace

The swallows know nothing of sorrow.
They stitch the air, a tapestry of light.

In Český Krumlov, I watched them,
their tiny wings clipping an invisible
music, though they twittered while
they worked, half in memory and half

in song. I have waited almost a decade
to find them. Years ago, in Paris,

in the Jardin de Tuileries, a different sky:
linden trees studded with streetlight.

A Ferris wheel, the Eiffel Tower,
gaudy in its dress of gold sequins.

What were the swallows trying to tell me?
I think it had something to do

with grace, the knowledge that hunger
is a kind of patience. I watched them

a long time. Below, the Vltava carved
its own set of secrets. A symphony

of spires, a forest so deep I could sleep
a thousand lives. Grace is the work

we were born to. And those little scissors,
engines of desire, threading their gossamer

notes into something resembling faith,
belief, weaving their hearts without

question or care.

Call and Response

Everything in the stark representation
of what is not here. My second autumn
in Michigan, your first in New York,

and somewhere between us a scarlet
maple is burning. *Where is the sea,
that once solved the whole loneliness*

of the Midwest? I say it is the lake itself
that is loneliness, though it, like you,
never asked my permission. It is another

ocean. Our broken explanation.
Beyond my office window, the last
of the clematis creeps up the fence

like a longing unrequited, though I
never mentioned it, and you, armed
in your baroque eloquence, could not

separate the words from their sense.
I blame you for framing this view
of constant departure, your slant-song

of grace, my nighthawk, comrade,
beloved, brother, tell me there is still
time, and we will not go unnamed.

Suffering

First, a crack like the splinter of lightning,
as if the sky had clapped its hands
and opened itself to the dusk. I watched
a steady stream of cars snake its way
down my horseshoe drive, a tide
like a funeral procession. Turns out,
no one had died but a tree—an oak—
ravaged by drought or parasitic
disease, sprawling like a toppled
icon across the street, redirecting
the flow of traffic. I got closer,
bending down to where it had broken
open, a gash of rotten wood like teeth,
the head of a child in its hollow.
What will they do with it, I wondered,
and where to take the poem from here,
caught as I was in my own reflection,
seeing my own face in the scars
of a tree, a grief exposed to the blind
light of streetlamps, to the gawking
of random passers-by, to the dusk
congealing like blood at my feet.
I couldn't tear myself away. Then,
it was no tree, but the felled weight
of suffering. Something had died
in me. For once, to look upon
that desiccated self—an ossuary
of broken limbs, a shattered crown
of leaves—and feel nothing but
the smooth balm of relief, a wave
of compassion rising. Meanwhile,
the oak lay ravaged on the six o'clock
street. Disgruntled drivers detoured.
I say this not to console or relieve:
There was no other way around it.

Spider-Man Converts to Buddhism

Sky-like, his mind has settled on emptiness.
Lotus-style on his Casbah rug from Pier 1,
in his studio apartment on the Lower East Side,
his third eye opens like a wound, as the mantra
of neon flickers through the blinds, car horns
and sirens, the city's grit and grime, its slush
piles and suffering. He's immune to all that now.
Stillness is his remedy, the hidden trump he deals
when he feels the weight of longing, a release
from who he is in the world, or more precisely,
from who the world wants him to be; after all,
who could blame Richard for turning his back
on the camera, shedding his shades for a hand-
shake with the Dalai Lama (good PR if ever he
decides to return), and wandering knapsacked
through the icy Himalayas? Countless times
he's considered pawning it all to the Iranian
on the corner, buying a plane ticket to Bhutan,
and finding himself alone on a wind-ravaged
peak, speaking Dzongkha, the stars etching white-
lined tracers in the sky. A lifetime ago, it seems.
Now joy, a word so small yet miraculous, a circle
through which all karma passes, like the mouth
of an infant, opens its sweet lips and swallows.

Backyard Light, Late February

This could be Backwoods Road, Virginia:
the spill of a lamp on a lawn chair
in a Sally Mann photograph, minus

the naked children, the lazy Sunday
afternoon light, minus the river,
the swollen pumpkins. Here the spirit

elevates into something entirely visual,
the crackle of summer still six months
away, and yet August is entirely present—

the framed radiance of loneliness and the stir
that knowledge awakes: that the world
has its corners, its cornices, its courtyards,

that it could be this still only in memory,
that its shards could shatter this picture
of it, that night is a blister and a whorl,

a whole dark ocean separating you
from emptiness. You want to come
back to it because somehow you know

its quiet center isn't real, that it's simply
a lawn chair in a backyard in late February,
a sole bulb spilling 120 watts of electricity

onto the question of your entire
existence, wherever you are, whatever
passion has arrived here to save you.

Epiphany

When I looked up from my reading,
it had stopped snowing. The bare arm
of an elm scraped the window. Then sun.

What had I been waiting for?
That moment when the minister
rises before the congregation,

his purple stole like a victory banner,
that moment when Christ appears
to his disciples in a cocoon of light?

What moved me was not light
in all its celestial hurry, the rush
of truth as it swells to the shore—

something darker had entered me.
I moved not because I was called to,
I moved because I was afflicted.

Reading Jack Gilbert

It is mid-March, nearly spring,
and I have wasted more than
half the day thinking of what
will not die, what will return
not as the bright opening
of winter's end, but the pain
of new bloom: crocus crowning
the lawn, first flush of pink milk-
weed, seed pods sprouting pale green,
while I fall somewhere between
wanting to be over it
and wanting it to kill me.
The old poet I loved in
my youth says he refuses
to give up his sorrow, that
day after day, what does not
kill him makes him crave death all
the more. I imagine him
sitting alone in his stone
cottage in Greece, the bleached light
falling in acres around
him, writing a poem on
the grief of watching the tide
withdraw, how nights the moon burned
raw his longing. I think I
understand what made him stay
year after year in silence,
only the blank sound of his
pail hitting the stone well or
the cry of an owl through the
black canvas of night. Returned,
he arrives like the first shoots
of spring, not as harbinger
but as witness: where language
fails only hunger remains.

Unfinished Letter

Some closets grow sacred until they become you,
until what's left unspoken runs through your veins,
erasing your every memory, until the only truth
is silence. You don't remember how you came
to see this life as the real one, not the life you left
behind, struggling to make sense of itself, the same
wordless ghosts you refused to feed, bereft
of their native language. Here they are again,
in the form of birdsong outside your window,
a melody so pure you'd forgotten the sound pain
makes when it opens, cracking like spring to show
you grief. Now the tulip tree across the street
has burst into a memory you will not repeat.

NOTES

“Night-Blooming Cereus”: The lines “its moonlike petals still unfolding / the belling of tropic perfume” are from Robert Hayden’s poem of the same title.

“Eurydice’s Lament”: The first line is from James Tate’s “Coda.”

“Unfinished Letter: Have I confessed enough”: The lines “sifting / the April sunlight for clues” are from John Ashbery’s “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror.”

“Motovun” is inspired by a poem by Spencer Reece.

“Uninvited Guest”: The poem references Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* and Caravaggio’s *Judith Beheading Holofernes*.

“Winter’s Offices: Lake Effect” is for Richard Katrovas.

“Winter’s Offices: Shenpa”: *Shenpa*, a Tibetan word, literally translates as “attachment.”

“What the Body Remembers” is for Kelly Daniels; Pankrác is a metro station in Prague.

“Call and Response”: “Where is the sea, / that once solved the whole loneliness / of the Midwest” are lines by James Wright; the poem is for Cody Todd.

“Unfinished Letter: Some closets grow sacred”: The first line references a poem by Emily Dickinson.