

Fall 9-1-2017

DEAR FRIEND, THE DARKNESS IS BEGINNING

Frances Dorris
dorris001@connect.wcsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://repository.wcsu.edu/mfatheses>



Part of the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dorris, Frances, "DEAR FRIEND, THE DARKNESS IS BEGINNING" (2017). *Master of Fine Arts in Professional Writing Theses*. 13.
<http://repository.wcsu.edu/mfatheses/13>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Writing, Linguistics & Creative Process at WestCollections: digitalcommons@wcsu. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Fine Arts in Professional Writing Theses by an authorized administrator of WestCollections: digitalcommons@wcsu. For more information, please contact ir@wcsu.edu.

WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

DEAR FRIEND, THE DARKNESS IS BEGINNING

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN CREATIVE & PROFESSIONAL WRITING
DEPARTMENT OF WRITING, LINGUISTICS, AND CREATIVE PROCESS

BY

FRANCES A. DORRIS

DANBURY, CT

FALL, 2017

Copyright © August 10, 2017 by Frances A. Dorris

All rights reserved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Ruth Danon, for convincing me that “the mess” on the page might be poetry; to Brian Clements for his guidance, example and patience; to Erik Mortenson and Lisa Seidlarz for their mentorship and support; to Sharbari Zohra Ahmed for her encouragement. Thanks also to Michael Coppola, and to those who have a shoulder to The Wheel: Andy Alexander, Carolyn Baccaro Stefanie Bothelo, Mary Ann Campell, Brian Clements, Alexis Fedorjaczenko, Melissa Gordon, Kateri Kosek, Vincent Kmetz, and Lisa Seidlarz.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
INTRODUCTION	1
SECTION ONE: HEARTBONE.....	5
SEARCHING THE SEA.....	6
ST. AUGUSTINE CAN'T MAKE UP HIS MIND.....	7
CHEATER, CHEATER.....	8
PACKING UP.....	9
BAD WORDS	10
RUNAWAY.....	11
HAPPY FUCKING CHRISTMAS	12
PAINTING LIKE THOMAS KINCADE	13
BROKEN	14
GLACIER	15
TEN CITIES AND SOME SAINTS.....	16
CLIMATE CHANGE	17
DEAR FRIEND:.....	18
AN ODE TO PHARMACEUTICALS AND WINE	19
DIVORCE	20
WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING HERE?	21
THE QUEEN MOTHER.....	22
WRONG AGAIN	23
ANY OLD IRONY	24
HIERONYMO'S MAD AGAINE REVISITED	25
SECTION TWO: THE DEADNESS OF THE DEAD.....	26
DEAR FRIEND, IT'S OCTOBER AND THE DARKNESS IS BEGINNING.....	27
CHRISTMAS 2014	28
WROUGHT IRON.....	29
WHERE THERE'S SHOOT THERE'S SHIVA.....	30
SINGIN' AND SHOOTIN' IN THE RAIN.....	31
LATE PRAYER	32
DEAR SON:.....	33
SUNDAY IN TUSCANY.....	34
REST IN PEACE.....	35
DAD	36
LESLEY	37

SECTION THREE: WE ARE NOISY (WE ARE SAILORS).....	38
LISTEN	39
RED ALBERT WANTS TO COME, TOO.....	40
TRAVEL TIPS FOR ANY FORM OF TRAVEL	41
I WAS CONSIDERING A SIGN.....	42
MY TURN.....	43
TO MEGHAN, MY LOVE	44
THE FISH SLICER.....	45
[SELECT A MOUNTAIN]	46
CHEESE AND CONTRITION.....	47
SPEAK UP OLD MAN I CAN'T HEAR YOU.....	48
THAT'S ALL, FROM ME	49
SECTION FOUR: HECUBA TO HE.....	50
HURRICANE SEASON.....	51
DROWNING THE CHILDREN	52
CONTAMINATED WATER NOTWITHSTANDING	53
FALLING ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL	54
FRUSTRATION, OR, WHEN IN DOUBT, EAT.	55
BIBLIOGRAPHY	56

INTRODUCTION

The poems in *Dear Friend, the Darkness is Beginning* surfaced when I took the poet Ruth Danon's class in the foundations of the creative process at New York University. The class was geared toward encouraging students to write without inhibition or censorship, to write "without thinking," as Ruth put it.

I had been writing since I was young, mostly short stories in the science fiction genre (at least that's what I thought they were). For a very short time I took to writing poetry, after winning a prize for a poem about a stray dog. I'd never had a pet and found all dogs terrifying, but wanted to enter the competition anyway. I found it easy to write a free-verse poem from the perspective of the poor animal, which I imagined suffered all sorts of indignities before falling asleep, exhausted and lonely. It was a very bad poem, but I never forgot the freedom of not needing to "get the story right"—my poem-dog could do whatever I imagined he would do.

It seemed suitable for a nine-year old girl to write such fantastic nonsense, but not for a sensitive and highly-opinionated teenager growing up in the early 1970s. I continued to write, but steered clear of poetry, opting instead to attempt to emulate the depressed and depressing writers of the 1960s "kitchen-sink" dramas we read at school. We also read poetry, mostly the classics, all British, so of course I was convinced that any kind of ruminations and ramblings that emerged when I attempted to write a poem could never be considered "proper" poetry.

Much later I learned that concepts, thoughts, ideas and connections found their way onto the page more easily if there was not too much input from the conscious "me." I found

that if I allowed it to, my writing, like the poem-dog, wandered freely to places more interesting than anywhere I might have consciously sent it.

I was encouraged by Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* and the notion that it is acceptable to treat the imagined and the real equally in a poem. I read *The Passionate Spectator: Essays on Art and Poetry* by John Yau, in which he says that the poet John Ashbery called "for art that cannot be explained in academic discourse." I read Robert Bly's lovely image of disappointed readers in his book "*Leaping Poetry*" where he describes how we had lost the idea of "leaps in poetry, and replaced it with something more mechanical: an emphasis on form. The 'form' was a corridor, full of opening and closing doors. The rhymed lines opened at just the right moment, [sic] and closed again behind the visitors." Here Bly is suggesting that the closing doors of form close both the poet and the reader off from possibility. In *The Art of Recklessness—Poetry as Assertive Force and Contradiction* Dean Young called for spontaneous, or "reckless," poetry. In Jack Spicer's Vancouver lectures, Spicer proposes the idea that the language, ideas, and references a poet uses are simply the "furniture" that is already a part of the poet's unconsciousness, furniture which he says the "spooks" rearrange in the room that is the poem.

All these notions of freedom, leaping, recklessness, and ghosts encouraged me to write as if no one was watching, and eventually a theme, or at least a common thread, emerged. Left to its own devices, my writing led to a number of poems that dealt with loss, death particularly, but other kinds of loss too. I worried for a time that my dismal and melancholic ruminations were awfully unhealthy, but a friend, the writer Sharbari Ahmed, told me not to worry, that I was in the good company of "melancholy consumptive English

poets who were always keeling over dead in boats on chilly lakes.” I decided to take that as a compliment.

T.S. Eliot claimed that “The Waste Land” was “the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life...just a piece of rhythmical grumbling.” The grumblings may have been personal and rhythmic, but surely could not be considered insignificant. The poem is an effective example of how leaps, and the furniture-arranging of everyday images, classical references, imaginings and personal experience, combine to create a world that is both familiar and strange. I would like to think that Spicer’s Spooks, and Bly’s Leaps have found their way into some of my poems, too. In “Glacier” a woman is observing what is happening from within the glacier, moving with it and connecting its slow-moving destruction to a slowly-dying family life and the destruction of all the trappings of domesticity. Within the poem it is perfectly possible to live comfortably inside the glacier, while it makes its changes to the earth as it moves. In “Wrought Iron” there is a leap from wrought iron to those who are wrought and formed by the loss they have suffered. Both the iron and the people are shaped by the blows and bending they experience.

An example of recklessness in my poetry (or rather diabolical liberty) might be the poem “Red Albert Wants to Come, Too.” I took the first few stanzas of Pablo Neruda’s poem “Alberto Rojas Jiménez Viene Volando” and “translated” it, by simply writing what the words looked like on the page, or what they reminded me of. The result was a surreal poem that contained hints at sacrifice, the end of the world, and a bunch of drunken sailors. I did not read the translation of the poem until after finishing this exercise, because I did not want to be influenced by my understanding of the poem’s

meaning. When I realized that it was a tribute written by Neruda upon learning of the death of his good friend Jiménez, I felt guilty, but also interested that my little nonsense poem, like others in *Dear Friend*, had its origins in the story of loss. I have always thought that Elizabeth Bishop, in the escalating list in the poem “One Art,” addresses the subject of loss succinctly. Bishop is able to demonstrate in one long list an understanding of loss that it is taking me years to articulate. I recently learned she based her poem “An Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore,” in which she asks Miss Moore to “please come flying,” on “Alberto Rojas Jiménez Viene Volando.”

I sometimes feel as if the poems in *Dear Friend* wrote themselves, and my only task was to clean them up and put them into a collective volume. Nevertheless I hope the poems express some sort of understanding of the story of loss through real and imagined examples, a story that repeats itself again and again, a story in which each of us has a part.

SECTION ONE: HEARTBONE

SEARCHING THE SEA

Last night you were on my left and something unknown was
on my right.

Then you were on my right and the unknown thing was on my left.

And I called your name, and I heard myself say your name and it
had shallow depth.

Remember when we watched the Greeks on Long Island Sound
catch herring that local fisherman used only for bait?

We found flesh and heartbone hidden in the undergrowth, a fresh
wet herring flapping in a bucket.

The evening sun was warm, and when it shifted the earth looked
different.

The sun set in the wrong place, and the earth moved on its axis.

Was it the end of the world? I think it was the end of the world.

Just sit still until the earth shifts again.

Nothing is as it seems.

With this spade
I will break the earth.

ST. AUGUSTINE CAN'T MAKE UP HIS MIND

No matter that I go by my days, lights out, days over. Look at St. Augustine, doth he not have his eyes on another?

Augustine's mother followed him to Milan and arranged a marriage, for which he abandoned his concubine. In Confessions he admitted a decreased sensitivity to pain, and uttered the prayer: "Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet."

Get up, make the bed, hope for the honey pot, clean the floors, clean the cockroaches from beneath the cabinets, bury your head in the sand.

As the head of the One betrays itself, the earth begins to crumble. The concubine is shoved down the mine shaft. Fat as she is, she's stuck, preventing their escape.

"Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying...make no provision for the flesh." (Romans 13: 13-14)

Let's face it; the contents of the entire closet are exploding. Pieces of earth fly through the air, while the swamp machine sucks up the mud, aware of a body.

CHEATER, CHEATER

This is abandoned decorum,
employing a handful of lines until
they move away.

Whatever else it does,
it will hang on to the end.

This line has its
own
peculiar tendency
to wander.

I'll leave it here for safe keeping.

PACKING UP

There's a Jacuzzi lonely of people, maybe a dead animal.
It's in our best interests to leave, the jets don't work.

Rats and cockroaches made me proud of the City
as I walked around the hospital twice,
waiting for the child to be born.

Waiting for the child to grow.
The child will never fully grow.

Will you leave for England?
I might move to Siena or Rome, and say "you would have loved this."
Or I may end up in Holland.

I will stand on my own two feet in a crooked house
with the lights turned off to save electricity.

BAD WORDS

AFTER THE RAIN COME,S THE SUN. WAS SUNNY
THIS MORNING, THEN CLOUD,S PLUS RAIN AND
WIND, NOW SUN AND WIND. THEY SAY A CHANCE
OF FROST IN SPOT,S OUR STRAWBERRY PLANT,S
ARE JUST FULL OF BLOOM,S. SURE HOPE WE DO
NOT GET FROST. MY MOM DID NOT PLANT
FLOWER,S YET, SHE WAIT,S TILL AFTER MEMORIAL
DAY THEN THEY ARE CHEAPER AT THE AUCTION

Esther Louise Smoker*, aged 21

(*A young lady with Rubinstein-Taybi Syndrome)

My Dad was a good man.
He barricaded Cable Street
with the Paddies, Micks,
Cockneys and Yids
against the blackshirts.
Later in life, he was given sensitivity training.
They asked if he understood.
He said did, but he had to go
fix the cripples' toilet.
His granddaughter isn't crippled.
He said his granddaughter was not
retarded, because her eyes
followed him wherever he went.

RUNAWAY

All that's left is a Ferris wheel, a tilt-a-whirl,
a rolling thunder, a thunderous sea,
a storm no one could foresee.

I dream of babies, worry about ghosts.
Contemplation makes me wonder
about the months and years ahead.

Shall I put the house in order?
Order somewhere for the children to live,
over the hills and down the cliff?

Or is it all just as it should be?
Should I scrub the floor I'm standing on?
Yes, the earth shifts!

HAPPY FUCKING CHRISTMAS

Now is the spring of our hope
Now is the fall of our tumble
Now is the winter of our doneness.
Now is our goose cooked.

PAINTING LIKE THOMAS KINCADE

I will paint a Christmas picture; a cat warming by the fire, a goose crackling in the oven, a moist plum pudding steaming on the stove. I'll call the children in, laughing, rubbing towels, ruddy cheeks. Stepping outside I'll see the Christmas star, notice that the church across the field is filling slowly for the early service. The smell of mulled wine will beckon me back inside. I will smile at the carolers, and pause only to kick under a bush a single, severed finger.

BROKEN

We begin by piecing together
salvageable objects:
shards of window-pane,
a broken coffee pot.
a 2001 disaster kit,
a metric tape measure,
the keys to my dead parents' house.

You can have everything.

GLACIER

What does the earth mean, with its glaciers wandering about, covering things and slowly melting away the faces of men?

Let the glacier freeze the living life out of you and kill off any of that leftover nonsense about beaches and sunsets and spades and digging and planting herbs and flowers.

Let it crush all of that, the house with its tall fence, a whole house, a whole home a whole memory a whole family, cats, dogs and garden tools.

One must move on, not forgetting the sun in the distant past.
The ice has come and the dark is permafrost,
It's hardening arteries as we speak,
It's speaking of the moments before the lights went out,
It's clearing a path for new beginnings,

Underneath there lies a small container, and in that container, with walls of blue and floors of green, is one seat, and on that one seat is one woman and she is watching the colors of the glacier as it moves her forward.

The colors along the surface of the ice show very light.
As long as she watches there is no need for doubt.
Or to try to get out.

No, the thing to do is to allow the sea to crash over the glacier,
the glacier to crash into the ocean.

Only then will there be a drowning, or a swimming away,
toward a shore we earlier said no longer existed.

TEN CITIES AND SOME SAINTS

Paul by mossy walls and graveyards,
Genevieve resting in the lovely river,
Lawrence and Philip standing on the Steps (with Peter, Paul and Martina),
John the Baptist in blue silk floating by the gaudy bridge,
Bede, a careful and venerable model for sadness, looking for light,
and all those Eriks and their girls on the beach,
meet Leonard, passing the Port, shouting: "Chrysostom of Constantinople!"

It's almost night in Charleston.
No saints to be found, though there are ghosts in this house,
rousing sleepers with shouts and slips on steps.

New York is the end of the line.
On the end of the line:
"I'm going to die, aren't I?"

At the edges of these cities are unfathomable caked-on riverbanks,
broken-biscuit factories, walled canals.

There's always water at the edges, always.

CLIMATE CHANGE

There is the tragedy of driving
to the horse-riding stable,
to find the horses have left,
the hotel cleared out,
the hope of salons gone.

It's all part of a movement
toward something:
a dead pigeon flayed
into a shop shutter in September.

There were other goodbye ceremonies,
and the recognition that no matter how deep
the water, the pool has changed.

The same people in the sun,
the same sun,
the same cocktails,
wet swimsuits, laughter.

How sad that here we were, a family,
and now we are corpses acting out scenes,
bits of our lives dropping around us, seas rising.
We can't return from the edge,
though the drop is severe.

The children found bodies and propped them up against a wall
depicting a lake or stream or some other body of water.
Sometimes I'm sure we've just mislaid us,
but the deftness of the pool-water is unbearable.

There will still be coffee in the morning,
school visits, graduations and conversations:
"We're listening to the rain."

DEAR FRIEND:

I am returning the shoes you gave me, as they do not fit me well.

They accent my polished toenails, but are too high.

As I told you, I like to be small, in a small place, not tall in the place where waves crash over whales and sea creatures play.

Give me a river, a small river, whose speed has hardly begun to make up for itself. And fish, small and edible, easily digested as the sun sets and lends long shadows to the evening.

Give me rain enough for a fertile forest floor, for animals to collect sodden leaves and clay to fashion homes.

I have a box full of memories, and the rules are:

Leave your wet clothes at the door;
Bring neither wrath, nor admiration;
Rock gently with me while this rain rants.

AN ODE TO PHARMACEUTICALS AND WINE

Albuterol and Fluticasone – you bring the breath of life.

Asprin – With saint-like modesty, you perform miracles.

Atorvastatin – what have you had to carry on your back, to rid these bodies of the devil's nourishment?

Depakote – balance is all that is ever needed.

Diazepam – you held us while your brothers attacked the vicious fantasies that abducted a loved one.

Escitalopram – over time, you brought the prospect of hope, and a future.

Levothyroxine – you wake us in the morning, and carry us through the day.

Losartan – you relieve tension, and reduce the burden

Omeprazole – because gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins.

Risperidone –you returned the loved one, saving him from the Irish, the Italians and the Israeli Defense Force.

Wine – my oldest and dearest. Our days together may be fewer, but our memories remain. How did we survive the loss of our sweet Nicotine?

DIVORCE

The race was over,
no accountability.
Then came forty days of rain,
cold and bitter tears,
seven and seven years

Fear is my best friend
when I see you again.
No rules, no reason,
just debris.

WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING HERE?

A familiar stranger, a heart beating in a box, outside a body.
damp England, clicking heels, creaky gates, "goodnight all!"
A back garden with roses and a street market,
jellied eels, cockles and the guilt of things.

There are moments that just keep coming
like we're singing a song,
right now this chorus.

The roses, the sweet organ, light on the wallpaper,
damp nights,
the smell of leaded petrol and coal dust.

We went to the market for mince pies
and thought of living there on the damp streets.
Came back to an ice storm,
blue shards of ice on trees, biting cold.
Not damp, no not at all.

We came back to baskets at Easter,
bagels on Sundays, Land Rovers and roses.
The moon over the fence,
fireworks by the bay -
a perfect millennium among those most loved

And there you are, stranger asleep on my couch,
so familiar I think it must be raining in England.

THE QUEEN MOTHER

in a hot tub,
wittering, sweatering,
awash in port, all the way
to something morn.

Dr Jelly and Mr. Mistlehide
want to poke you
with a hot iron.

It's a performance:
"Look behind you, Pantopants!"

But it's not like we're French,
waving careless hands,
quoting rosy-fingered core clichés.

WRONG AGAIN

Anything can happen in a month.
Symmetries in string theory,
you can decide why you are here,
why it's good for others and bad for some.

I want my home to be clean and I don't want strangers in it.
I want my home to be a haven for anyone who needs space.
It's a strange situation, a dream of hitting,
yet the fist never finds the face.

ANY OLD IRONY

Green is the color of my old love's hair as he turns to save me.

I come home to find the screens are bugged, the light bulbs removed
and a lithograph of Maude Adams has replaced the bathroom mirror.

The green glass on the coffee table has been disposed of,
lest it should harm the children.

Never mind the book in the living room with its coded messages.
It will show us the way to fame and fortune, the offer of a free house,
new cars and clothes.

Keys disappear and phones disappear and people cry at you because they lost something
they stole from you in the first place.

*"Dressed in style, brand new tile,
your father's old green tie on
I wouldn't give you tuppence
for your old watch and chain."*

It's written in the alphabet soup, and if you don't believe me -
wait until next Friday, when Maude Adams will make us rich.

HIERONYMO'S MAD AGAINE REVISITED

Hieronymo's mad againe
running barefoot through the rain,
frightening charwomen,
begging for safe haven.

Now he's down the rabbit-hole,
it falls to me to go
to drive him to medication.
He thinks we'll meet the President,
and tells of his plans to buy a luxury car
for his weeping mother, The Queen of Tarts.

"Why aren't we going by helicopter?"
Protocol.
"Why don't you drive faster?"
Protocol.
"Why is my mother weeping?"
She doesn't know the protocol.

And I fully understand that
"tap, tap, tap" that
repeated question, the simple fact:
it is always the wind under the door.

I wonder what will become of us,
in this wonderland of never endings and nightmare thugs.

I'll fire up a story to live – the best revenge.
Though it might feel good to intend
for once to punch for the ills brought and
the upmanship of becoming unhinged.

SECTION TWO: THE DEADNESS OF THE DEAD

DEAR FRIEND, IT'S OCTOBER AND THE DARKNESS IS BEGINNING.

To the graveyard
in all weathers
to water flowers
already succored
by the dead.

A knife to the chest
break the breast
bone, lickety split
dead on a slab.

The door slams shut
heart stopped in a box.

The dead deserve
what they get
the deadness of them.

Take flowers
from the back yard,
behead them
for the kitchen sill.

CHRISTMAS 2014

We load the luggage and start the car.
A navy blue sweater, one extra for the cold,
a Christmas cake, presents, a pillow for the journey.

With red chapped hands and cheeks, from the blizzard of it,
we cut down a tree in the woods, and watch the sap
and tree animals crawl out at night.

I've seen a yellow school bus with twenty-six white paper silhouettes,
I've seen faces on white roses,
I've seen the rainbow-colored blood of burst balloons.

Its funny how life goes on, when the branches have been cut
and the tree in the woods is dead, the children's faces all a-glow.

WROUGHT IRON

*"My garden spade can heal.
A rock-loving columbine.
Salve my worst wounds."
(Ralph Waldo Emerson)*

Iron is strong, but can be broken.
Mothers and fathers can be broken.
Both can be etched, bent, wrought

Lists of pairs ease anxiety:
old bridges and anchors,
rivets and nails,
wire and chains,
rails and bolts,
coldshear and coldshot.

All twos bring news.
The Two of Spades bad news;
more children to bury,
each life lost unbearably.

Memory is foam, or sponge.
It is difficult to pick out each drop of water,
to write the things not experienced yet known.

We are at a graveyard again.
We'll be digging all night,
we'll be digging for years,
until the handle finally snaps.

A spade can both break and move the earth simultaneously.

WHERE THERE'S SHOOT THERE'S SHIVA

Just rhyme like the man said:
Rutabaga paper scissors shoot.

Or list:
Rock, paper, shoot, shiva.

SINGIN' AND SHOOTIN' IN THE RAIN

I'm singing in the rain,
just singing in the rain,
what a glorious feeling!
A shot in a head and
I'm happy again!
I'm laughing at clouds,
So dark up above.
I shot Mary Lou,
heard others scream,
so I shot them too!
The sun's in my heart
and I'm ready for love.
I shot seven adults
and one young man
Let the stormy clouds chase
everyone from the place,
come on with the rain
there's no place you feel safe.
I shot a woman in the face,
then I walk down the lane,
with a happy refrain
Just singing, and shooting in the rain.

LATE PRAYER

Oh Sacred Heart of Jesus,
wherein all perfection lies -
could you not have conjured up a spare one,
for the child who lies under the grass
that must be mowed on Wednesdays,
straight after bowling.

DEAR SON:

Dad says to keep your powder dry.
Dad is stocking the fridge
for when you come back.

We are all doing well.
I can't wait to see you at Christmas,
though it's hard to imagine Christmas.

It's cold again, and the darkness is beginning.

SUNDAY IN TUSCANY

It was cold, and someone said “Well, it *is* Sunday.” As if it should be cold on a Sunday.

Then a hum like a washing machine brought a wind from the west, and the muted form of a small boy with big ears:

“I bambini restano qui.” The babies are here.

“Non hanno mangiato per cinque oggi.”

They haven’t eaten for five days.

Imagine that. I don’t want to imagine that.

On Sundays, we melted sugar in a half-shell, to make the children happy. I want to tell the little boy with big ears, but he doesn’t see me.

REST IN PEACE

In a photo, a bow in your hair,
a buttoned cardigan,
a beautiful child,
dead in the ground.

I planted you daffodils,
and still you didn't speak.

I stood watch in case
no one noticed that
you'd come back.

Do the dead deserve what they get,
the deadness of them?

DAD

I can't remember what he needs.
Teeth rotten in his head, crumbling.

It's a feeling, but also an image
of going into a room,
opening a cupboard holding books.
I might fall, but I don't. I keep up.

It's still dark.
To find another light,
I walk down the street.

He no longer needs me,
quiet, behind a screen of medication.

As I go to him, a double act occurs,
a thank-you note and a bunch of flowers.

I can't quite remember walking down the street,
a little girl holding his hand.

LESLEY

Her skin doesn't darken any more –
she has no skin.

She pissed herself in Sainsbury's
leaning on a shopping cart.

She has no skin left
In a jar,
on the mantelpiece.

She doesn't darken any more.
She doesn't lean on a shopping cart.

She says:
“It doesn't matter if you
lean on a shopping cart,
piss yourself,
darken your skin or burn.

Ass to ashes,
all must,
chimney sweeps etc,
turn to dust.”

SECTION THREE: WE ARE NOISY (WE ARE SAILORS)

LISTEN

I saw a hand beckoning me through the crowd,
to a white clay house, with violets.

Then I heard, from one side of the fountain,
words drop into a pool, then a stream.

“Some words for you to hold, walk quietly and listen.”

RED ALBERT WANTS TO COME, TOO

Enter the plumes of August,
enter magnolias, enter telegrams,
enter the gentlemen of the West Marina.

Play the trombones, play the castanets,
play the last song of the earth.
Play the Caracas, cold.

Below, enter the summerglide girls.
They plant cigars and fish for drinks.
Below enter the Nubian old ladies –
they wanted to come, too.

And there, in the sangria and chips
And there, in the bread and the wine
And there, in the dance
And there, in the smell of vinegar and death

Enters Viola, in her tiara.

Drunk, we dispute with the pharmacists.
We are rude, we are noisy (we are sailors).
We have dented the old red car.

TRAVEL TIPS FOR ANY FORM OF TRAVEL

Read

Prepare

Start slowly

Read your ticket

Avoid close contact

Divert and remove unnecessary baggage

Inspect baggage for unnecessary small mammals

Keep concealed any inclement weather, especially thunderstorms

Ensure that the track is set at hi-speed keeping revolutions to the minimum

Keep the minimum amount of revolutions appropriate to the tone of the vehicle

Keep the vehicle in top shape, wear out its innards as necessary, wash all leather and vinyl with the appropriate detergent.

Mind your manners.

Turn off the engine.

Keep quite still.

Keep quiet.

I WAS CONSIDERING A SIGN

I expected a road sign,
or a signpost in the mall or hotel,
or an olfactory experience, to ask:
“How do you feel about physical exercise”?
When this popped into my head, as a meditation,
(and somewhere as a more serious exercise),
stillness, interpreted metaphorically, established the image of fun.

You critique others, but what prompts,
in the café or in your head,
establish the forms you love?

MY TURN

This is just to say: turn flour and eggs into batter. It's dialectical, a recipe. A turn from meaning to punchline.

Underneath each recipe is the growth of the thing. It could be moss, down the side of the riverwall, where the body slides into water.

Now we are eerily reminiscent of Sibelius, turning poem into tone. It's just a skill, something to turn off when you no longer need it.

It's not air. It's not carbon. Not fire. It's the growth of the thing itself, like daffodils to be pensed upon much later, although you may not notice.

And who am I to say you may not notice? Spicer it up: a radio receiver. Then you will know who says "what?"

TO MEGHAN, MY LOVE

Gin interrupted your reading of
“Augustine by Autocraft.”

Kids read, high brow but lovely,
and you and he romanced.

Alone, a narrative, my despair.
Your raw moaning:
“Augustin, love *does* hurt!”

Il Libretto Spagnolo
Was unsuccessful, and afterward you slithered:
“One thinks understanding is the key to respect.”

And Adam and Eve again in drunken peace reveling.

You helped me arm myself, prepare for:
“Y valor, Espana!”

And

“My deed is publik! I have not quoth for derision!”

And you, in a whisper:
“Augustin – *prepare for arthritis!*”

THE FISH SLICER

The fish slicer fillets all day long.
White fish, cold fish, slab fish, dead fish
eyes open all the time.

To fillet a fish one requires patience.
And skill.
And a certain understanding of where the bones lie.

Take the fish,
find its backbone,
feel your way around,
discard the parts you don't require.
You'll be left with some real flesh.

[SELECT A MOUNTAIN]

Everyone hears the voice of a Mountain:
“Great things are done when conscience
and unconsciousness meet.”

At night everything is empty, swallowed up.
Unable to sleep, the affairs of men reach the Mountains.

I dreamed of a Mountain Poet.
He was striding out alone,
dividing his words equally
between a verse from the morning:
“Dear, dear. What a world indeed...
Angered and depressed with their consummate stupidity,”
and another Peak which said:
“But what if they come back now?”

The wind still comes, and sleep selects the path of its sound.

CHEESE AND CONTRITION

While sensible cheese makers keep their heads down and hope for the best,
the hard-pressed wax to reduce losses
from the breaking of something stilted, sharp,
hard enough to be "ground to pieces" (from "contritus").

Presupposing a knowledge, he asserts a real pain and bitterness,
defined by imperfect reasons other than love (such as fear).

But it should be noted that "sorry" has a twofold significance:
its essence and its effect.

As for the empress – she is forgiven because she is inflamed with Fire and Rust:
"I just want you to be happy".
By and large soft is preferred, the perfect companion.

Stored in sackcloth and ashes, or suspended from poles in skin bags
to demonstrate knowledge of husbandry,
the degree and intensity make no change to the substance.

I know my transgressions –
too much wanton use of cheese at dinner parties!

Whether or not to confess is defined explicitly by
skeletons of guests killed by cheese hidden in breadcrumbs.

The sounded note is followed by an exhortation:
"Let the bones you have crushed rejoice, miserable offender"

SPEAK UP OLD MAN I CAN'T HEAR YOU.

It's a habit of picking thorns off roses
lavender for martinis
lemons before the sun gets too high.
Maybe the hot lemon sun caused
the debilitating illness
that's robbed the blessed soul.
Let's hope for the best
curse the worst
be mindful
practice caution
avoid harmful accusations
gather abundant stock
take a good path
have companions all life long
both outer and inner.

THAT'S ALL, FROM ME

It's not obligatory
to lead the double life,
to immerse oneself in the place over water,
where one sees, observes and carries.

A short alley where small doors open up
and pour out words and images.
Those that ring true will be believed,
(if that's the intention),
the realm of fantasy, the opposite.
We walk and notice, but there is an end,
doors close and move on we must.

Between us a common understanding,
a place where, for a moment,
reader and writer meet;
the singular world of the plain word.

In flat cities and on highest peaks,
no matter where written,
we can say:
"how we came to this is of no import,
we are here, we have arrived together
and that's all."

SECTION FOUR: HECUBA TO HE

HURRICANE SEASON

The sun is going down, honey,
and so are we.
On a new city plain,
adorned with ornaments
and gasping for breath,
feeling around the edge of things.

With destruction so imminent we say:
“it can’t be real” (again).

What’s left to speak of?
30 bodies or so,
bloated as they float
music up to a balcony.

What is all this,
pencil in hand, wondering
if the title is:
“Worse Than It Seems.”

DROWNING THE CHILDREN

The storm swept five small pairs of hands and feet downriver.

That isn't one story, old or the new. It is repeated again and again.

One explanation repeats: "Neither the beginning, nor the End."

From sea-level to mountain-top, the story disappears and reappears, changing shape.

Repetitions throw themselves into streams, the story repeats itself, the words, the children downriver.

Speaking in tongues, the paraclete, the bird, alights on their heads as they pass forward or backward.

A mere girl comes along and says: "I've seen all this before. It is monstrous and predictable!"

The top opens to a school of thought. Inside, desks and persons huddle, approaching life in a rational manner. Something is spoken like: "What is he to Hecuba, and Hecuba to he?"

That bird is still there, in the background.

CONTAMINATED WATER NOTWITHSTANDING

Yeats was right, the second coming is foretold and it's going to happen.
Right by the Atlantic Ocean, on the boardwalk.

There will be people picking up pennies in desperation in desolate party spaces, no blue waves, no white gauze.

Hotel rooms and events therein,
bad behavior next to the pool thereafter.

The people have spoken the trumpet has sounded.
He has to be sent by the angels, though he speaks like a devil.

What on earth is spilling out of his nose, or his wherever?
He's older than he thinks and smells foul.

The foul smell of the return to saying it like it is:
"You're a cunt/Donald trump!"

Watching poets on waterslides and generally not knowing why.
Yeats is back again, worrying about death and the desert.

We're coming up for one, a nice big war, lot of people there, lot of money.
I like wars, I've got wars, all the best people know about me and my wars.

So who among you would follow him
on the slouch towards the Bethlehem business?

All that rhetoric about putting people in jail,
and the little white men, all the nasty little white men.

FALLING ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL

Cruel and fancy-footed dudes,
strut with shredded skin and freedom
to watch death roll up from the canyons and plains.

These fuckers need sorting out.
Here they come:

“I’ll have that,
and that and that and that.
And that’s mine too.”

Swaddling off with arms full and bloated arses,
empire-like revelers in the misfortune of others.
Spotted Dick and Tweety Bird rule the world.

You know what they want!
They want to keep saying:

“I’ll have that
and that and that.
And that’s mine too. “

Up in the back room Spotted Dick
has captured all the birds
that fled from the poems.

They are singing and shitting as we speak.
They will be let out into the light,
they are resilient, and they will persist.

FRUSTRATION, OR, WHEN IN DOUBT, EAT.

If I book a flight to Mauritius, I could miss this: the lies, the denials, the detrition of the week.

This week the water is up to the edge, people are up to their necks. Around the dock, there are seagulls, hanging on to every word.

No, literally hanging onto every word. How are you supposed to say something with these dark shapes pulling down the things you say?

The things he says! How to make the words louder without someone saying “Why are you so angry at living?”

Living means leaving pieces of yourself everywhere. We leave pieces of ourselves everywhere.

So why don't we just take over everywhere? Tears, sweat, brown water from pipes, or oceans, everywhere you go there is water.

There is the water! Ocean waves - then those fucking birds pecking away with their shadows.

In the shadows of the dunes, the protected plovers' eggs. You can't traverse the beach without stepping on them. Being cut off from the ocean for the sake of a few birds is too much.

Also too much is when Jesus visits, asks someone to hold his cigarette, wears his loincloth ironically and laughs at a secret joke.

The secret joke's not as silly as it sounds. The loin cloth is a kitchen towel, yellow and red stripes, one on each side.

Each side of the cloth folds around him, one arm out like Caesar, which reminds me of the so-called leader who speaks in salads.

I need my lunch.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmed, Sharbari Z. *The Ocean of Mrs. Nagai: Stories*. Dhaka: Daily Star Books, 2013.
- Bernstein, Charles. *My Way*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Bly, Robert. *Leaping poetry: an idea with poems and translations*. Boston, MA: Beacon P, 1975.
- Breton, André. *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1969.
- Carson, Anne. *Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse*. New York, NY: A. A. Knopf, 1998.
- . *The Beauty of the Husband: A Fictional Essay in 29 Tangos*. New York, NY. A.A. Knopf, 2001.
- . *Plainwater: Essays and Poetry*. New York, NY. A.A. Knopf, 1995.
- Catullus, Gaius V, and Charles Martin. *The Poems of Catullus*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Chrétien de Troyes. *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart*. Trans. Burton Raffel. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Clements, Brian, and Jamey Dunham. *An Introduction to the Prose Poem*. Danbury, CT: Firewheel Editions, 2009.
- Clements, Brian. *Jargon*. Williamsburg, MA: Quale Press, 2010.
- Creeley, Robert. *Life & Death*. New York, NY: New Directions, 1998.
- . *On Earth: Last Poems and an Essay*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006.
- Danon, Ruth. *Triangulation from a Known Point*. New York, NY: North Star Line, 1990.
- Eliot, T S, Ezra Pound, and Valerie Eliot. *A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*. London, UK: Faber, 1971.
- Eliot, T S. *The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980.
- Finch, Annie, and Kathrine Varnes. *An Exaltation of Forms: Contemporary Poets Celebrate the Diversity of Their Art*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

- Horace, Quintus, Trans. J.D MacClatchy and Robert Bly. *The Odes: New Translations by Contemporary Poets*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Hugo, Richard. *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing*. New York, NY: Norton, 1979.
- Lehman, David. *Great American Prose Poems: From Poe to the Present*. New York, NY: Scribner Poetry, 2003.
- . *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998.
- Meinhard, Hermine. *Bright Turquoise Umbrella*. Dorset, VT: Tupelo Press, 2004.
- Mortenson, E.K. *What Wakes Us*. Somerville, MA: Červená Barva Press, 2014.
- Munk, Linda. *The Trivial Sublime: Theology and American Poetics*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992.
- Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1994.
- Padgett, Ron. *The Teachers & Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*. New York, NY: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1987.
- Porter, Peter, and Michael Roberts. *The Faber Book of Modern Verse: 4th Edition*. London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1982
- Pound, Ezra. Ed. Thom Gunn. *Ezra Pound: Poems*. London, UK: Faber, 2000.
- Rankine, Claudia. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric*. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2004.
- Rexroth, Kenneth. *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese*. New York, NY: Published for J. Laughlin by New Directions, 1965.
- Rich, Adrienne. *The School Among the Ruins: Poems, 2000-2004*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2004.
- Sappho, and Anne Carson. *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. New York, NY: A. A. Knopf, 2002
- Sexton, Anne, and Steven E. Colburn. *No Evil Star: Selected Essays, Interviews, and Prose*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1985.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *A Defence of Poetry*. English Romantic Writers, 2nd edition. San Diego, CA: Harcourt: 1995.

- Siedlarz, Lisa L. *What We Sign Up for: War Poems*. San Antonio, TX: Pecan Grove Press, 2011.
- Spicer, Jack. and Peter Gizzi. *The House That Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998.
- Theune, Michael. *Structure & Surprise: Engaging Poetic Turns*. New York, NY: Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 2007.
- Wordsworth, William, James Butler, and Karen Green. *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992
- Yau, John. *The Passionate Spectator: Essays on Art and Poetry*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006.
- Young, Dean. *The Art of Recklessness: Poetry as Assertive Force and Contradiction*. Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2010.