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OF THE EYE, SINGING

SUMMER 2006

Pebbles

My little ego is as strong
as when it was large.

How much I have learned!

How short
my memory.

POETRY

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Driving South under the Influence, of Neruda

Quiero la poesía del corazón!
Every spring everything is just right.
Ocotillo blooms a red higher-pitched than rose.

The river gurgles, rises down the wash.
And the heart beats pure, bold in its tin cage,

its petty borders irreverent.
This long life of dying that we are –

saguaro reaches for death, its ribs imitate ocotillo's long fingers
of winter, rocking the mockingbird to sleep.

Where is your heart? Tell me it has broken,
bolting from its tiny nest.

Cat Mountain

A pair of red tails soaring, the ridge blessed and happy.
Vultures pack the air bursting with scent.
Raven not alone on his sure road of solace.

The boy fell and the girl drug the rope home.
Her hair twists in her hands to the day, his falling
never ends; his tin cross screams at the base of the cliff.

A sliver of light shines brief. In the dark,
the sun pauses, its light falls against the cross
arms, its light leaves the cross blind.

Her dark hair lifts in the wind,
his name called in the wind
climbing the cliff,

the hawks never cease; their wings wind
the hours. How many times each year
the ocotillo bloom red.

The cloud-weep white relief:
ecstasy in singing, joy
in grief.

Sandbar, at Puerto Penasco

for Leah

How I covered the darker parts
when you approached, a towel placed

limply, non-nonchalantly. You wading, waves
hot on your belly bejeweled on either side

with a new bikini, fabric of desire lined
with despair, a mist of salt across the blue cups,

a patch of powdered sand mimicking freckles
among the moles gravitated like black holes

above your breasts. How I wanted you to remove
that top or my little towel, bashful in the brassy sun.

How you gazed anyway, your shades unable to obscure
your mouth's contemplation too squeezed to speak.

We wanted your leaving the continent to take away
our awkward wonderings. How we never touched –

your parents and brother and aunt and uncle too close
for everyone's comfort, your separation just beginning –

how exciting the lure of something I could not keep at bay,
exciting this something you could have your way.

When the pelicans cruised at sunset – glide
inches over surface – I burrowed into the low tide,

my head floating like a seal, the line passing
just above us, I dove upward and touched a wing.

Ecstatic, I crouched down, waited for the next batch,
touched again, and again, with each passing touch

growing more delighted with flight.

String Theory

I am the LORD,
a fat mosquito smiling
on the white wall: strike me down

and I reappear, thin and hungry
across the dark room.
A bellyful of pancake,

the sunrise quickening.
You cannot stop desire:
the Word tingling the tip of the tongue.

The body never sleeps: the mind
drifts through the night, the sand
shifts in desert wind,

and the moon lifts the tin sky.
Someone – or some thing –
is always chanting.

Periphery Vision

In the corner of my eye, wisping by.
Dark hair and flashing eyes of suspicion.

Hear her coming up the stairs,
though there are no stairs

in this house.
I keep thinking she's come back.

I keep thinking of her homework
of her yellow days in the backyard
with her friend Theresa,
her sister Veronica inside this house

with their father.
I keep thinking she wants me to enter this house,
down this hall, hammer in hand, this
my strong hand, and open the door
to her sister's room.

I keep thinking I'm thinking of her.

Crying Uncle

The little girl I married crumbles on the couch.
Voracious uncle hands, the hummingbird hungry
grew talons: what song was he sung in his childhood?

The little girl who birthed me: farmhouse, attic-terror.
Her father drew Reverend by lot. Congregant
eyes shred the host, poison the wine,

false words forced – my uncle regurgitates –
shows little me how to etch a living from death.
Does one confess, still cold, wombed in earthworm?

Create bait. Make temples of creosote.
Steel the stone, breathe in the tomb,
deny the world under sullied shroud.

Darkness is not absence of light.
Darkness is presence of light, waiting to happen.

Making the Bed

Black sheets clean. The snap and tight of cricket wings.
Memory as moth. Centipede serrates into nightmare –
snake-nest tongues watch the boy waver.

So black bear approaches, tears the field at night,
the boy lies in a converted chicken-shack.
Crocodile rises – one lover weaves the years.

Still beaten, concrete feet dry dockside,
her frenzied hands, uncle fingers like blue crab
pick pristine her retina's red gulf. Scrub

oak scratch the eye, cornea scarred deep in the bayou,
the blood cannot clot, the dock extends
a decade into ocean.

Barnacles never tire.
Plankton nibble on a herd of whale, bellies
white, pocked and striated. Glisten. Bloat, as moons.

On Form

for the resisters

You are an animal writing poetry.
Not a tree writing poetry
not a rock writing poetry
not a Toyota.

You are a human being writing poetry.
A human *being* poetry. Sorry.
Not an amoeba writing poetry
not a raccoon writing poetry
though you wear a mask
not a gator
though you have teeth
not an ant.

This is white paper boarding poetry.
Not green
though you are a nature poet
not pink
though we were all girls once,
in the womb – just a reminder. Sorry.
Not black.
How would we see the ink?
Brilliant idea! Don't steal it.

This is a pen blotting poetry or a laser printing poetry
not a log of dung.
Brilliant! Steal it.
Not blood.

This is the word, the breath made flesh
not a thought
though you think, occasionally
not a feeling
though you think you have empathy, on occasion
not an orgasm.

This is English
the language of the no-longer-great British empire
the iambs tiptoe in our dreams
not French
not yet though I am a Frey sorry
not the language of flowers not the language of the stars
no longer not yet.

This is a phrase. This is a [.]
not a pebble
this is a word in four parts
not harmony sorry
this is *his* 't'
sorry
this is the letter 'y'
not a question.

This is the end of the poem: watch it click shut.

Did you hear it?

Sorry.

First Trip

for Mary Jo

I remember the floor tilting.
A demon dances fever in my cat's left eye.
Nails bounce off brain. Screech goes skull. Walls tinting
yellow. Yellow surround sound. Seems a lie

gets whispered. Someone whispers, a light beams
codes through the board grain, vein the heat
of everything. "*It's all a part of you.*" No dream
this real: I alive electric. The feet

of the stove a part of me I cannot lift.
The toaster flying across the yellow room
pleads, the crumbs inside anti-Christ infants.
This kitchen his body that toaster no womb

the crumbs climb I pack fast, we flicker, sting,
even yellow speaks – "*We're all you, blurring.*"

Beg Your Pardon

for TC Tolbert, after same

Praise TC, the fucking poet.
Because her words ring true,
and when they don't,
they truly ring.

Praise her fingers,
her fist,
and her mouth.
Because it has a voice.

Because it says something.
Because her mouth
feels good
on your knees.

Praise your knees,
and their buckling.

Find what: her

Replace with: his

Replace All

On a Few Parts of Speech

1

noun is verbed. scratch as snuffle and sin. noun neververb unless it snuffle scratches
and sin is singing out of tune by night. your verb, my noun – under preposition.
right now, my verb nouns without adjective.

2

particle particle partide; oof.

particle adjective noun verbed; oof-bam!

pronoun, verb preposition noun plural, adverb verbed particle noun; oof-bam-boo!

(post-noun; verb prepositioned particle,

imperative adjective, infinite.

adverb verbles? noun is pro-verb, Pronoun.)

Teasing Tongues Out of Bees

for Charles Alexander

Language as hive, as honey
of words. From the inside out
meaning disperses
the entropy of kumquat
the mind closed to perfection
the perfect opening left
by extraction, meaning
and text shattered
the pond skimmed with first ice
a bottle broken belies
fragments becoming one
in the shape, and sound,
of poem.

*After a Night of Drinking,
Kristi & Michael Make Some Sort of Love in My Bed*

Perhaps it was the porn conversation
at the Red Garter Saloon

or the alcohol and cigarettes

or the poetry reading earlier

or the lack of it.

The Last Supper

So now
we're finishing
dinner for twenty
on a backyard lawn in Tucson,
stripped naked, part of me cringes
under social pressure, so I remove each item

of clothing –
adults and terrified
children shriek with delight, yes,
yes – I'm nude. White skin bones
standing on top the square pool's wall:
My friends, do not be alarmed, this'll be over

soon,
it's something
I need to do. My good
doctor of the cross, one of many,
is naked, too. I fall backward into his bloodied
embrace. The water cold, and a part of me,
shrinking.

Uniform

The blue and white children flit along the fence.
Not quite single-file, linked more like titmice,
their hippity-hoppity joyz.

Ahead of their chitchats a teacher falters,
his eyes as brood-wings
scan the sidewalk for cracks.

Hovering and skipping as they gaggle-
trip around the school's perimeter,
they invent and drop games

quick as a lit fuse.
Good is as good does.
As is evil.

Sea Festival Legs

So this is what it is like walking the straight line home,
drunk in Klaipėda.

It is the same in Tucson,

the same in the Shenandoah Valley

and Beijing –

left, right,
left, right,

right

right

right

right

Fresh Brick

for Klaipėda, Lithuania

The young man's hands with gloves feed two middle-aged men
laying brick into a sidewalk. He is not tired of wheeling the barrow
full of cement rectangles to the unglved fingers
laying brick into sidewalk. He is not soft,
but his girlfriend is.

A hammer-drill pecks off granules from around a manhole –
two other men lay the border with beveled cement blocks in meter-long sections –
the man hammer drilling frazzles at the pace, removes the glove
from his trigger finger, tries something different. The manhole
stays in place, not tired, unglved, waiting to be opened.

Two other men gray as the day above them, endeavor to use a Cat
of Lithuanian lineage to excise a pile of old brick, aggregate and lumber.
Their pace as slow as those laying new sidewalk. The young tree, beaten
for years, will stay.

And an old woman watches closely.
She is the old Russia, stern as a ship rusting in harbor,
she is almost as large, eyes the two chipping around the manhole,
belittles the two laying brick, cuddles the one with the soft girlfriend.
From her slow circle in the middle of it all she watches everyone
including her neighbors

who lean from new windows, stand across the street, stand
in the street, all of us watching the old way
new bricks get laid.

Sidewalking

Lithuania, after the century turned,
it now takes a crew of eight men to place a string straight.

But, as in America, it only takes one idiot
to back over the end-post, driving the backhoe

backward full of pea gravel. His mind on other
things, his eyes filled with blue water, cigarette still lit

from the night before, snooze button on permanent hold.
His wife married cancer, surrendered her spirit.

A meteor enters the stratosphere, dogs chase all
things that run, shadow on the desert floor glides under

a moth, questions lie under beds, there is food
in the dumpster behind first lives, scratched sunglasses

see the same child, her bright eyes her head wrap red
bundled like a bowl of fruit her dress flippant floats a-

bout her socks white her eyes dance a straight line purple
her precious shoes tangling in string

Duet

Her red is like winded –

Your blond was like soothe –

laugh at sunset like seagulls

your laugh, that sunrise remembered;

that whip above deck, dive, snip

still winces my face,

at flecks of cracker above the water.

grimace-fleck of cracker

Crossing the Baltic her room

lakebed in desert

two doors down. Sand on her lips,

sand flipped by desert wind –

sand in the wine. Too much wine!

I have had too much wine,

Lorry drivers lounge late, play cards,

while your father the artist carves

teach me, drunk, their language.

birds of prey from gnarled mesquite.

Stalas is table, kede

Your family table, one

is chair, bar barostalos,

long love of wood,

no word for stool.

its chairs already full.

There are always new words

What was it we didn't say?

for desire. Tremulous these new terms:

The desire of day

Uz redzēšanas, goodbye.

decays into night.

The Church of Open Mouths

It was the church of open mouths. Red letter on the wall, no, green. Bleating goat among cattle. Change hands. Strum leavenings – what’s left after the storm. After

storm of nothing changes hands. Wife leaves city, city cries and sells off its daughters buys the man with darkness enters laughing, the books toss their hair,
body wets the walls,

body-wet the walls. Roads like geysers building pressure the trees lie about syrup happy in green. No, red. Happy in tubs of tapioca the boy substituted for egg.

Pleasure solitary, pleasure loud like static. Like aspens twittering in wind.

Like carpet of corduroy, like yard sales early, no rain like a man without a wife crying “happiness is a desert!” Like woman scat in cafés, like the blond at the end
of the bar

like dunes hot between toes. Leaving bed in the night before first light.
The fall of open mouths a church of no doors.

A church, carpet of corduroy, wood tongue
and groove floor, no roof

Photon

for Dana Levin and Kate Hodges

At dawn, how the coming light makes things
seem to move.

Before the first bird.
The first bird. The first song –

how long from waking to its first song?
She used to get up in the morning

put on her slippers and robe
her auburn hair out to here,
to here,

and look at the flowers. Her way
of waking the morning.

And then exclaiming something. Her head a nest of hair.
Morning glory climbs the white porch.

Three Pillows

after Yehuda Amichai

One tucks under my knees,
a corner of one for my head,
which turns occasionally
toward the one not used by you for years.

Julie Kauffman

(not the one you know)

How soon I'm making love with the woman just met!
How like a swift she comes. I am the world's greatest
comedian.

My chest open, smile of clover flower,
light as virga.

And then what seems a decade passes.

Pelican skull bleaches among high tide lines.
Tendons clasp a socket, smell of sand.

Rendezvous of eyes on Mexican pavement.
Falling cry of canyon wren.

Cave and crevice. Pebbled glass.
Infatuated with the memory of my projection.

Of the eye, singing.

NOTES

Cat Mountain owes a debt of gratitude to Punch Woods for retelling the story, and to Rafael Routson, for the hike.

String Theory borrows heavily from the Old Testament, apocryphal and otherwise.

Cat Mountain and *String Theory* originally appeared in the Autumn 2004 issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine*.

The middle phrase of *First Trip*'s line 8 is a nod to the opening line of Walt Whitman's "I Sing The Body Electric."

Teasing Tongues Out of Bees is inspired by Charles Alexander's presentation at the Poetry Center, Tucson, Arizona, on April 25, 2005. Beyond the title, I can't recall exactly what I stole.

The Last Supper originally appeared in the December 2004 issue of *Mennonite Life*, under the title "The Last Supper: Acting Out."

Fresh Brick is titled after Justin DeGarmo's painting of the same name, which he created in response to an earlier version of this then-untitled poem, as part of Platform Gallery's Winter 2006 collaborative installation, "Show & Tell."

Duet and the essay *Outside Camp: The Wanderer as Scapegoat-Keeper* (under the title "Naming") originally appeared in the Summer 2005 issue of *you are here: the journal of creative geography*.

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