This thesis is a collection of poems prefaced by an aesthetic statement. The manuscript is organized in five sections: an introductory poem; poems pertaining to the phenomena of experience; poems pertaining to the question of being; poems pertaining to the problem of knowing; and a postscript poem. Though each section operates with reference to these problems, these problems are present, in one way or another, in all the poems.

In fact, this thesis argues categorical distinctions, such as those above, are faulty constructions of reality. The aesthetic statement begins with a conceptualization of language as a river of multiple utterances. We think in this river, that is, we think in language, by use of language. Poetry, too, is a matter of thinking. It is a way of negotiating between complexities of language and experience to find meaningful patterns and connect us to the world.

The poems in this manuscript are lyrical and narrative, often both at once. Formally, they are free verse, taking as their primary means of measurement turns in the
progression of thought. Most of these thoughts are expressed in the matter of a few lines; in other poems, more lengthy meditation occurs.
BLIND HANDS

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A Thesis
Presented to
The Division of English
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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by
Thomas Christopher Dvorske

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I. A Matter of Thinking

I had a dream one night in which I was parachuting from an airplane over a Kansas field. (It was either early spring, or late fall, I'm not sure.) The peculiar thing about this dream was not that I was parachuting without one (the scripted fear); rather, I was clinging to a purple bookbag, ostensibly a parachute, strapped to the chest of Polish novelist Jerzy Kosinski. I might add that this is a comparatively shocking sight, for in some photographs he looks quite menacing. As we approached a certain and painful impact, I grew nervous, unable to decide whether to unzip the bag and let the parachute open, or wait and hope he would open it--he who seemed not to notice me, for only as we approached earth did I become aware I was more than my arms (which at first were not apparent). Gradually, I came into view, that is I began to sense the physicality of my body. I unzipped the bag, and, in the instant the parachute opened full, I hit the earth. It was soft. A recently tilled field. I lay there a moment, smelling the cool soil before waking up. I have no interest in explicating this dream, at least not directly. The beauty of poetry, like the beauty of dream, is that it can be taken at face value. However, if we persist in discussing it, comparing it, explicating it, deconstructing it, stating and restating its themes, one fundamental thing persists: the poem itself--a phenomenon of language, and language, as Jorge Luis Borges tells us "is an aesthetic creation" (79). This does not mean that nothing can or should be said about poetry, only that discussing it
outside the context of experiencing a poem generates abstraction and mis-statement. Poetry is by nature paradoxical. As such, when we speak of the nature of poetry we either fall into generality, or adhere closely enough to models as to miss our mark entirely. Any notion of poetry or aesthetics must begin with a conceptualization of language, also a problematic notion, for we are using the medium to discuss the medium.

The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin tells us that language is an endless series of utterances. Everything from single words, to novels, to the whole of Victorian literature, for example, may be conceived of as an "utterance." Moreover, Bakhtin's theory advances the idea that no speech act (textual acts included) is entirely independent; rather "any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (951). Whenever we have a change of speakers we have determined the boundaries of an utterance. This notion of utterances provides a useful conceptual framework for language acts. The experience of a poem, of a single word, is an immediate experience, but not an isolated one. It is part of, not apart from, all other language acts the poet, the reader, or the listener has experienced. By this measure, no act of language is entirely temporal; it is as atemporal as it is immediate. The particular business of poetry is to, in the immediate experience of the word, invoke the whole of utterances unnamed: what one might call "resonances."

We find poetic language best demonstrates this theory. Consider the last line from James Grabill poem "Suddenly Tonight I Am Listening": "as all words form again when
any is said" (26). In Grabill's poem we have the grammatical and syntactical completion of
a sentence, but the poem is not closed; rather, it opens into the whole of utterances,
indeed, into the realm of "possibility." William Stafford tells us that "writing is the
reckless encounter with whatever comes along" (67). Wallace Stevens tells us
"description is revelation," and, in Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction, "it must change"
(344, 389). These are important statements in that they characterize poetry, the poetic
act, as an experience of phenomenon and the making of phenomena. But, underlying our
experience and our making of phenomena are some assumptions, first about the nature of
poetic language, already here addressed, and second about the making of poetry.

In Poetry, Language, Thought, Martin Heidegger tells us "the making of poetry,
too, is a matter of thinking" (99-100). What form of thinking is this? Moreover, to
borrow Heidegger's own peculiar question, "what is called thinking?" For Heidegger, this
is a priori to the question of poesy. To answer this we may borrow Heidegger's own
recursive logic. Heidegger tells us the question "'what is called thinking?' can never be
answered by proposing a definition of the concept thinking, and then diligently explaining
what is contained in that definition" (Lecture II, 21; italics mine). This is because for
Heidegger, and ostensibly for us all, "the thing itself that must be thought about turns
away from man, has turned away long ago" (Lecture I, 7). For Heidegger, then, what is
called thinking is a "most thought-provoking" question and what is "most
thought-provoking in our thought provoking time is that we are still not thinking"
(Lecture I, 6). It might be worthwhile at this point to ascertain what is occurring in Heidegger's almost comical roundabout inquiry. The nature of his inquiry is that of a perpetual motion machine, returning us always to the question. No matter how hard we try to do so, we never arrive at a definite answer until we realize no definite answer is possible. For Heidegger, thinking is the act of thinking, even so far as to say that thinking is action. As language is both temporal and timeless, so, too, is thinking simultaneous with action, or the act of itself. There is another way of expressing this that we've already encountered: "as all words form again when any is said" (Grabill 26). Or following Heidegger, "the making of poetry, too, is a matter of thinking" (99-100).

II. The River of Poetry

Poetry is the negotiation between words as ideas, and words as physical sensations--the manipulation of the mouth and the affect of hard consonants or soft rounded vowels on the ear all operate toward the direct experience of the poem. This negotiation forges a presence that is not readily perceived in exposition by function of the discursive nature of exposition. "Poetry is words," says Wallace Stevens, "and . . . words, above everything else, are, in poetry, sounds" (32). The manipulation of sound and silence is what we call music. Presumably, the first order of Stevens' Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction is in its title: "notes" can be read as referring to musical notation. Poetry, whether of narrative or lyrical expression, must give itself over to the sounds and meanings of x
words to even be considered poetry. At this level, poetry is an act of dispensing with preconceptions in favor of what comes along. It is not an act of imposition (exposition), but of position. In this way, it differs from other forms of discourse where language is a means of persuasion. This is not to say that persuasion is not present in poetry, only that its presence is an effect, not a project.

Poetry is negotiation in another way, too. It unifies sensorial experience and thought by breaking the smooth, linear progression of words along the page. By definition, the making of lines is the breaking of lines. It is this break we call verse (to turn), and the turn suggests a change in direction, or a change in thought. Free verse makes use of change in thought as a means of measurement. Each line bespeaks its own world, its own autonomous experience, but each line exists in relation to other lines, often, in seemingly contradictory positions: this line verses the next. Lines possess a synecdochical relationship to the river of the poem's thoughts. Like Heraclitus' river, each encounter with a line changes, which in turn changes the poem. But the river, the poem, remains.

Poetry implicitly critiques linear and categorical thinking. The mimesis of poetry is of the simultaneity of experience. Poetry relies on the power of suggestion, believing finally that suggestion is a more accurate rendering of experience than explanation. Heather McHugh says poetry "is language's way of being of two minds" (3). It puts forth an idea or sensation, and, in the turn of a line, or even through the course of a line, it may
take away those ideas and sensations, but both (and more) are present. The poet Jorie Graham discusses how the refinement of language through poetry ensures for us that this mimesis engenders a responsibility for experience and for the world around us:

Each poem is, in the end, an act of the mind that tries--via precision of seeing, feeling, and thinking--to clean the language of its current lies, to make it capable of connecting us to the world, to the *there*, to insure that there be a *there* there. For it is when we convince ourselves that it is not wholly there--the world, the text, the author's text, the intention--that we are free, by the mere blinking of a deconstructing eye, to permit its destruction. It can't be *taken* from us if it's not there. It's up to language to make sure that it *is* there, and so much there, that its loss would not be an act of interpretation--a sleight of hand--but an act of murder. (xxviii-xxix; italics mine)

Poetic language is a performative act: it does what it says. It insures that what is there is there by speaking it into being. In this way, poetry makes a direct appeal, a gesture, to the audience to share in the making of meaning. Moreover, poetry insures that what is there, by being there, is also what is not there. The remains of the page, the margins the line does not extend to, the silence, where space is made for other utterances invites us to
interact with that world as well, and with the worlds of our own making.

III. Blind Hands

I neglected to mention that the point in the dream where I begin to sense the physicality of my body is the point where my doppelganger disappears. I recognize myself and another recedes, I recognize others and I recede, or the other way around (they recognize me), equally true. The poems in "Blind Hands" dramatize the difficulty of connecting to the world with which we are unutterably connected. The often confused, fragile, or even confident voices of these poems seek a way out of isolation via language that will connect them to the world in a meaningful way. The problem occurs in another way, too. When the weight of the world's connections threaten to devour us, it may be that all we have to offer one another are blind hands, with the hope that, when we hit that field, it is soft. And that we may rise transformed.
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The Gesture

So what are the words we put to stone
in this dream all too
unclear to be named? If I find
you may I say

honestly who I am? will you accept
what fears and convictions
I place, cautiously, in front
of you? and will I,

knowing as I do my own methods,
tend toward the desperate,
stem from anxiety, from fear
of not having anything hook,

or catch or stay (and if it does
decay) for even a
moment . . . . will I accept you? To linger
as I linger now

anticipating your word . . . wanting to breath it
in my mouth . . . tear down
the scaffold of days to walk, unencumbered
in the certain light of familiar

speech. Say to you without the customary
doubts . . . I love . . . dream
the pulsing dream of our life tragic,
beautiful, and mundane, and stand

in the field where shadows and sunlight
do not, for once, trade fear
with pride and exaggeration.
I'm claiming this territory,

cautiously, for us . . . that we may meet
for a time, put away our doubts and
misunderstandings, for something familiar, to touch... now, please speak.
Flow

Upon the spire
the woodcock sings
the nature of the arrow,
a singular force.

The secret way
he slides from the bed
follows a line unsteady--
not his own--

but a crutch that carries
a limp mind from one
idea to one more
in short
ejaculations.

Tina floats off the edge of a circus. This is not my tent, says Tina, these are not my hands.

The lions roar, the lion's roar.

Tina hears the lions roar and comments about volume:

*The tent holds a great volume.*
*Volume is loud.*
*Loud implies heavy.*

Half-dressed, center-ring, Tina prepares to jump from a tower of bottles.

Life is so unkind, she says, my worst nightmares are always about clowns in the circus.

The lion's roar, the lions roar.

Tina likes the circus but hates clowns, their big floppy shoes, round-red noses and pithy hats.

Clowns wear gloves, says Tina. Gloves protect the hands, says Mort, the clown.

Tina likes Mort's hands. They suggest reach,
but Tina is afraid to reach.

The lions roar, the lion's roar.
Closed

Tiny hands clutter the streets.

He thinks of Alaska
and fire engines.

Smoke pours from the desolate angel's
eyes (picking rhubarb)
the chrysanthemums have wilted.

I only wish this rain
were harder (birds, time)
would beat my body
into the ground. Orange

buoys bob on a gray
sea. A fingerprint
falls, followed by aces
and knees.

May it rise with the mud,
a fanning of veins, orange peels
and flesh spill on the brick
streets, there, into the hands
that float, unaware.
Witness

1. Short epode for a beginning

It is the beginning of November. But
that does not matter. Except. Except as a place
to start. Begin. To start anew. Roll out of
fire into soft, cool, afterbeing. The addictions
of memory, how once a smoker always
a smoker. As time spreads thin, swells
turns and begins again. The victim drowns
the lifeguard. The crowd-hypnotic: "oh
the wonder." Right now, the subject
of this poem sits downstairs playing cards,
alive, five months after he drank himself
to a downtown apartment above a hobby
store and devoured ferns, azaleas, chrysanthemums and dew
before turning blade to flesh; five months,
five fingers--grip the handle like a pen,
get a handle on things, one's own
diminution, forcing a tenuous conclusion. Tenuous--
I believe--out of what? out of fear--Fear is a good place
to start.
2. Drifting

It must end. It must end
It must... the wheel the bone
the novel the poem the voice
inside my head Wallace Stevens
is dead is dead--it must end.

He chants his addendum, fourth
note, left out; it can't keep going, writhing
turning the worm (the apple)... growing
inevitable, desire: turn free from time.
"It must end" he cried, rhyming to die.

And I, an attendant caretaker (the tequila
shot, the kiss?) blur in glorious
abstractions that make a meta of the story
that has no end. In which the end
is what is desired. In which desire is dying.

Had I too killed myself, a long time ago
in a city of emerald, city of rain
exposing veins to the concrete below
where the one tree on the block
hangs over the street, where the bough breaks

the cradle falls--but I'm a lullaby, singing tales
of cows and moons,--empty vessels tied to a dry
dock corroding--it must
end taking the knife the robes cut free
the long wait begun, in the distance

dark clouds like ideas, a clearing the throat
then proceed--the waiting, the nailing, the mother
at the foot crying, and the one whom he
loved there watching the day filter to dark and away
the way herds seen from above

become small and wisp away, the way smoke wisps
away through the chimney, through the teepee
the warm fire dying, smoke drifting away
when asking how to fish these waters
this time of year, morning or night

some tip or hint, like chartreuse or streamer
or the one in the back of the box you don't
remember, the mayfly the jitterbug, some hook
into the moment before
the dory cut free and drifting away.
Swans

The moon, a half-thought passes like a brain.

I'll never see your face again.

Words gather in dark pools; only the sense of summer is on my lip, the orange bowl sits on the table the azure light bathes the room the room in which we've never kissed. The room that does not exist.

How in the night can you be found?

How in the way you move loves music?

How in the way you love moves music?

How music in the way you love moves, moreover,

rests

in that room?

Swans of memory of what occurs when no more memory will occur.
Borrowed Tune

"I'm climbing this ladder,  
my head in the clouds,  
I hope that it matters."
--Neil Young

"The characteristic feature of the age in which we live  
is its separateness."

Now look who's pointing fingers.  
My best friend's wife tells me, "find him a woman." A time  
of burning; lightning heats the air in alleys--every one turns  
away. The bartender saying "call the cops, tell  
'em a Mexican stole my bronco, he's headin'  
north." The Mexican at the bar says, "hell, we're all going  
that way;" a leader stroke, the alleys glow, ash trays,  
beer like breath and a little Patsy Cline. The woman  
in tight white jeans bends over the pool table, knows  
we're watching. She takes her partner's cue,  
tousles his ducktail and deposits a quarter  
in the juke-box. The restroom machine sells prophylactics  
in four exciting colors, Swedish lubricant  
and a guidebook to "Fishing Scandinavia."

Lightning strikes  
the courthouse: law and physics tempt the blushing  
man, his synthesized blood, acidic thoughts  
of fractions and magnolias  
blossoming in shafts of green light. Along the woman  
in black rises "Unchained Melody," her sad-eyed face  
turning from the form of a question. She lowers her top  
to the Mexican, . . . in any case, she hopes the storm  
will end.

The sign above the bar reads,  
"Beer is good for breakfast;" the woman in white gyrates  
to Elvis' "Don't be Cruel." My friend says,  
"It's not that I really want to sleep with her; hell, I'd  
rather masturbate."

"After the wounds are cleaned of their  
infectant pathogens . . . the mind still  
swells." And any way the woman in black rolls the dice,
they still turn up snake eyes. She pushes the Mexican, he moves to kiss, "don't be cruel" she says; there's more to the song than what's written.

The mystic Spanish

night: thunder, lightning and Lorca parade
the room on white Stallions. In the corner
the bartender says, "I need a million friends."
Another lead stroke sends all earthly simpathico

up in electric Spanish dance, followed by the return stroke of tequila, shot down our throats.
We walk out in the rain, the alley seems to call another city: sharp black lines of buildings, Stuart Davis and Jazz along a mist of moods.
We piss by a dumpster, light cigarettes and kick rocks against cans that line the backs of stores.

The night has its own devices, needles in trash bags, the wind moans old songs: the wind who listens, to our footsteps down the luminous alley. The woman in white mouths me a kiss through the bar's tinted window. Robert Johnson sings "hellhound on my trail," and city train dirge rumbles underneath the pulse of what really matters inside us, the steady moon finds a break in the sky.
Rain

Suzanne likes to sit on the porch when it rains. She thinks of a deep sorrow that longs to bloom.

When Bob comes home. He takes off his hat says, oh shit, sits down.

Suzanne likes the rain. It reminds her of birds crying, and a sadness-filling loss that expands.

Bob has a face like a doorknob that turns and turns but doesn't click (no matter how much you kick and scream open up you goddamn son-of-a-bitch)

e except to say Suzanne--

speak softly of the rain.
Before the Dawn
   --after Garcia-Lorca

Nowhere tonight may the wind
be heard. Everywhere, I think, the world
is silent. In the clean light
of my room, goldfish! Water trickles
as though from an ancient spring. Nets
hang from the ceiling.

I settle down, in the comfort of my nest

suddenly,

        oh wounded guitar
        your red song

       grieves.
Night is (it seems)

(for Kate)

Light trickles through
the open window like
slow speech.

Her body bathed
in seeming light lay
in body dreaming

of colors of chaos
of ocean overripe
the pale flight of
her paramour.
To My Sweet Giver of Palms

The earth beneath us folds:

from our mouths spring
    perfect doves.
Wish

Just once
would I like to rise early
during the last dark hour
before dawn, and visit upon
the dreams of the sleeping.

Immeasurable worlds, blue-edged
cantata, a murder in the alley.
See the white rose dropped
on the street, the lovers
waking up, only dimly aware

of who they might be.
The Red Kite

Perfect
in the air. The red
kite suspended
above trees

pulled taut his line
then retracted
into blue.

It held
there, like a breath
urging him toward heaven.
A cloud moved in the way
the kite desired. Each step
forward and every gust
defined air as the air:

red, blue, red
kite like a star
longing to be
wished upon. And so he

wished, as the kite
broke free, the duologue
disappearing, curved tail
like a question mark
slipped into a seam of light,

the wind over children,
Sunday picnics,
panting dogs.

He dreamed this
moment of miraculous flight,
air warming, his slow
wavering an incantation.
Would he be a prayer
coming true to one
clothed in grief
wandering the world
below?

    Across the small town
a boy bolted from his home
to where the red kite
fell.

    He watched it land
softly (inside him) then
he reached up
to catch the wind.
Innermost Desire

To work my way
   along your thighs climb
in and stand
   up inside you arms out-
stretched my love
   we are beautiful
devouring skins.
Argument

O I don't care about sadness,  
the way a tear stains the cream  
silk of a coffin, for outside  
my window, young finches of Haddam  
sing to seven emerald moons.
Bipolarity

So now you're gone
and I'm left here watching the sun
slip down the sky's throat like a pill
beyond the hills, beyond the city
and beyond the ocean beyond the hills
and the hills and cities and oceans
beyond those, it keeps going
like a globe.

I came here to find a voice.
A woman. Anyone, I
don't know. Outside my window someone calls
my name. I do not think they're calling
me, but sure enough it rises
above my window, the buildings,
then evaporates. I've heard
when you microwave black coffee
it changes chemical composition and becomes
something else.

Rocco's pizza sign squeaks on every
rotation, something to count on, at least
as long as there's Rocco, and the things
you own, though barely enough to fill a coffee
spoon, so much for measurement--
the distance to the hills beyond the city,
the geese turning West then paring off,
colors to dots, then to mist,
then to nothing. They're closer to hills
than you. Extending. There's a point
where invisible becomes tangible,
you know this because you feel yourself.
There's a point where this
doesn't matter to you, then it does,
them it doesn't. That's what tides
are, a reminder things come and go,
but ocean is constant. I rub
a bottle of cheap wine as if
it were a lamp and I had three
wishes. I'd sow them all for amber
fields of wheat, soft and bending
in August breeze. But it's not
a lamp and I have no wishes, or
I do, in either case
the bottle's empty.

There are other
things you can count on alone:
your footsteps scrape the rainy pavement,
the way all voices are foreign, the sound of
breaking glass, ambulance's revelatory blast
in your gut, blood, the simple
wisdom.

In the park
an orchestra plays *Rhapsody in Blue.*
They say ocean makes sky look blue,
or is it sky makes ocean look blue?
I don't know, does grass
make trees green, or trees
gass?--either way, it's bark
in the middle and you can't be
upsi downs, or you can--it's
an important distinction.
Much of what we've forgotten
comes back when there's nothing
to do but think. I dream
of snowed-in passes in Utah,
trains idle like dinosaurs
in tar. If you died,
your body may not be
found for weeks. At night
I count the dots of light
that cover the city, signs
of life, smile, electric-shock therapy,
tongue depressor from ballpark
ice-cream, white ball sailing toward the hills,
rejected. But that's its job: to be
wanted, then hit, then wanted again,
like a battered wife. The empty bottle.

When they say it's never any better than it is now, or it's never any worse or it'll get better--when they give advice--they're really dealing it for themselves. But there's a point. I understand why my mother plays solitaire every night--at fifty-five, after breast cancer and a colostomy, masturbation takes new form. I'm really talking about myself.

Below my window a beautiful woman loads a box in her blue car. The simple act. I yell her name, but names don't fall, they expand, then contract like lungs, balloons sailing over the hills, bloated intestines, the penis and love. I'm wondering if this will stop, or keep going like a globe.
Or

It may have been the sweet
rancor of his blood that made him
on that first day of summer
lick the earth.

He dug a hole, buried
himself to his knees
in a narrow plot
where roses grew. He hoped
they would grow
through his crotch, thorns
tangled in pubic hair.

The stems curled around his waist,
up the sternum, circled the throat,
through the jaw and finally punctured
the place where words become music
growing through the body
from the earth.

A little ways off,
in the shadows between streetlights,
his tongue dances, a single flame expiring,
in ritual of the body that's dying
for its soul.
A Theory

(for A.H.)

Tonight as your hair chimes in the wind
mighty fleas circulate
routlessly about
the multi-panelled sky. I shudder
to see you lying there.

The tropical air is raspberry syrup.

The parking lot two blocks away
is a mask, or else
a sea. O but I am not looking at you

through the front window
to where these words pass the voyeur
on the sidewalk
who's looking at your chimes, ornamented
curls relax in vibrant air.

Perhaps he too sees me, my feathered speech
dangles impromptu, like a cockatoo
of ineffable fire.

He passes crystal trees, stands
transfixed in matters of fact
which drop, one by one,
a riot of bees, her falling hair,
whatever he sees splits the railway
sky, is thrown onto the earth.
City of Flies

He wondered about the blue spire, radiating in the night's folded arms. At cross-purpose, a number of windows line the street all housing animals aware of other windows. I wonder where this town might be, and if this town is not where I would be when I am visiting the arms of the spire, what town then would it be?--faces green and beaded with sweat in the morning dew condensed against glass (from which) he wipes himself only to find more eyes.
Some Last Thoughts

Maybe the last time
you were alone thinking
nothing is yours without

killing yourself, it occurred
to you that you never sent
that Thank-you

letter to your Aunt for
the plaid Christmas
socks with trees stitched

on each toe, an angel
on the little one, and
how you hated

those embarrassing socks,
but had to admit
they kept your feet

warm and when your girlfriend
said you were cute
for wearing them you felt

strangely proud
as your hand slipped
between her smooth white belly

and spandex pants--you really do
think about sex most of the time,
don't you? But now

you tear your sock on a loose
nail, your toe peeks through,
like the eye of an angel

parading the heavens
in golden gown draped down
long over the charged

and violent night surging
the synapses of God's brain
in which you sit, biting

your lip, hands propped
under foot, delaying, like
the prince of Denmark, sewing

his socks, a gift from Ophelia,
why did you fall in love with her?
She really isn't very smart.

Still, there's something tragic
about her, and you're a sucker
for a tragic face. The actor

watches a brook cut through green
hills of Denmark, fog and mist roll
over the castle four hours after

Fortinbras has come
to reign. The actor's play
gave proof, testimony to twisted

offerings of parenthood, and where
was Ophelia?--drowning in the symbol
for the unconscious--that's it!

That's why you love her,
the symbology of her death, nothing
in life so much except

the mind to conceive
of that death (nothing she said
made sense anyway) this could

go on forever--
sometimes you think it will
but you want to sleep.
It all makes sense now,  
why your dad's friend  
the cantankerous old bombardier  

dying of colon cancer, pulled  
on his patched hunting socks  
and walked out, alone  

in the chill December air  
to put a bullet  
through his head.
White

Midnight on the porch: our talk is of sailboats and wisecracks, the way we all have moved, and toward what we are moving.

A friend, tipping her glass says the pear trees are fists solid, punching holes in the sky. Another agrees, but feels only what falls.

Of all the weather between us, we share the wind. Before this night will end, someone, floating on a stem of moonlight, will stumble—laugh with the sea.
Lunch

Not the sound of her voice, but the shape of her lips pressed full around the bread soaked with butter borscht. Bikaver drips from both sides of her luscious mouth.
Self-Portrait in Winter

Across the table, her face turned toward the window, watching

the last word spoken dangles from meaning like a blown tire, 
the face turned away, the face the window's reflection, the parking
lot light and the white asterisks falling:

a condition cold imposes on the viewer (the viewed) 
that neither should be seen in light 
of winter,

that a clear and concave lens pushes away the immediate person
in pure aesthetic robes.

It is afternoon, the brightest time of day when the northern
earth in all its whiteness, I desire
the southerly slipping
sun

and all that was green and lethean waits (with bitter history
of self-reproach) the unseen her profile shows: the window
through which night becomes known, the space inside--

sugar in black coffee; it's 4:32 a.m., the hour some believe
is always death's
quiet hour;

the couple now asking for their check.

Later they will inhabit their ordinary spaces
which later still daylight diminishes
I'm stricken with silence

and the absence old friends bring with them

the time in which your life alone is secret
and exposed: the Mona Lisa: DaVinci's, Nat Cole's,

Bob Dylan's "must've had the highway blues," but her,
the one I've just met demurs the coy
smile of a hidden life

of the object "cold and lonely
work of art." In the madness of blind storm
the room turns to snow--formless desire

in the restroom of Flo's
Polka-dot lounge
I write her a note
on the back of a quote
from Diary for Myself Alone

ask her out for coffee, leave
her my number,
she's 23, divorced, has a son
I'm delighted with

an irony blinding hunger. The quote reads something about birds
and bicycles and living a loving life, hearing
in weeks that follow, the dumb-blind laughter of the ill-content
and morose

a worm in the making of a spring rain
a bird eats the worm in the making of spring rain (the worm
like an illness exposed, like greetings) the warm rain
the change in season when nothing else will--the wished for

open to blossom in full pleasure of sun, complacent
afternoon, southerly breeze, the cottonwood trees
 mingle in the bluebird air around them, the escape

a disturbance, a rustling in the hedge row in front of the house between
Union and Exchange, some sinister angel, some last remark torn
from the collar, some phantom self believing winter the season
of clenched teeth, comes to procure

out of the blind window that looks on the night
out of the reflection that stares back into the dim-lit room
of closures, out of the day-long glare of snow and sun and chrome
fenders gleaming on Commercial, out of the image of myself
reflected in the window, the white room, the laughing in the night of a
winter that won't disappear

some simple pleasure, in the subject as object

a cogent statement or thesis: the marriage of hammer
and nail, something hung on the wall

that can be forgiven or forgot
I was Rejected like an Unlike Thing

I recognized that the what that was before me bore my same skinny frame, and so was particularly shocked to see it rise and tear through the virginal dawn in an all-out sprint. The naked runner ascending the hills with the speed of an electric knife. I could see him no more from the vantage of the well-tower, preferring at last to believe the wiry bugger had fled for good.
Challenge

Caught on a hook, the Autumn
breeze smells of death, and apple
carts. I was saying, before
time's gloved hand worked the brush
and day succeeded day, tickertape
and heavy chains dragged down
the brick path.

Never you mind, moon, face of an old
man peering, bearded and sullen, I should
see you go down yet,

        go down

and rise again.
I've Not Yet Begun

In spite of how it appears
a mild influenza has wrapped my head
like a scarf, several orange banners
rip in the fast wind. The sky splits
an eggshell, or machine. Take it
from the freezer, the head, the one
with so many eyes for seeing all
that should not be seen; each day
our lives go rolling by with tiny
fortune cookie messages pinned
to our lapels. I've not yet begun
to swallow the truth of them.
After the seventh glass of wine
I live inside an oyster, dark
pearled mouth closed round,
the sweet drops, the taste of your
tongue--I've not yet begun.
Oblation

The moon has descended through us and we are left here on the script of this ocean floor, in a darkness no one dare speak of.

It is as if the blind hands we hold each other with have found a sight so terrifying even the wind--waves of the prairie--has given over its names.

Friend, you crossed a continent to save my life, and tonight I'm paralyzed in the center of something receding, waiting for words to cut the bowels and spill this agony in change.

I'd like to pray, send the dove from my ark to find tropical land and Carib wind, but around here Key West is a cemetery and you are alive, wrestling in thick foliage and longing for a light to rise through your body, a womb to contain you.

I want to spread my arms across a wooded bough, take every stone thrown, bleed for those who have nothing left to bleed, but as blood turns stone and each piece of silver that surrounds it bears the marks of grief--I hold
to your lips water, with the faith
you will rise again.
At 3 a.m., I Begin to Doubt

I was thinking
of your fishnet
shawl, how fortunate
are Salmon, their
certainty of return.
Considering Glenn Gould, #1

Lake Simco. It is Autumn. A silver sheen runs the scales of things. Something like twilight invokes itself and all its delicate wanting deep in the solid idea of ice. Above the surface of things, fragile tinkling of frozen air in itself a surface, ever thinning to a glorious display of colors. Rising from the surface of scales and time. The pale precision of time the idea of North on a pure white plain, waters deep and dark.
A Dying Quail, or How to Kill a Poem

From the fern thicket
the gray cat emerges, claws
click on brown linoleum
flora. He licks his
whiskers, cleans his claws
of feathers and flesh, a speck
on the mirror. Hind legs
stretching, he makes his way
to the living-room, sun
bakes the cream colored carpet
warm, lazy in the fading
afternoon.

He lies there
gently purring, I roll
him over, wanna fight?--

I love my cat

(said with a groan).
and nothing will probably happen.

Walk through the narrow door
announce "I am here"
to the mother nursing her child
and thinking of green Sunday
for no other reason than there is

one. And another thought
does not pass like a football, hail mary'd
in sudden-death overtime. We come to
expect nothing, like this sand--
which is an example,
though of what, only time will tell,
and he's outside whirling above the city
delivering the traffic report
like a litany of boredom, circumscribed
by self-doubt and the ironic feeling
he's above it all. And other things ironic

square off for another round
of important distinctions
between points of language
drop-kicked the whole nine yards
like a statement of purpose
or a letter
of intent.
Four Notes

1)

It all looks like this, these cans, this mess, that shit, the flagellant quartet sounding off tenor the city street corner.

2)

Beneath the bridge a band plays liquid sevens and asphalt screeches--the tires on the street laugh in the dark alleys of an overburdened night.

3)

tee hee, too who, what'll we do? the river is a speedboat stew, a massing, a passing the red crow's missing, even the hood's pulled over the eyes.

4)

Walk it yourself. The milky indifference of metaphor, really just all wax. Take care of the engine, transmission and headlights. Sound your horn when happy or sad. Consume consume, zoom zoom, zoom.
Eyelashes

I waded through your thick gesture
for about an hour before I figured
you'd left. Silly me,

I'm not much used to paying
attention. The doorman
said you'd gone to Sicily.

I sighed. And congratulated him
on the weather, then asked if
you planned to return soon, a question

for which he did not possess
an answer, as I do, often, in the
Mediterranean downpour of your departures.
Dissatisfaction with Metaphor

Quietly, September flakes peel and fall from their insufficient walls. Oh what a pity you could not be here with chains and lenses wording the liquid tapestry. I've bought you time, you crone, to lift yourself from the mire. Still, it would be unkind of me to think you silly and wrong, not to mention just plain stupid.
Writing Workshop

Today is a day of doing things by the book,
long lists, busy lunch, quick break back
to the office, I eat voraciously, read
Longinus.

At the writing workshop
someone asks "is language dead?"
Contours, tourniquet, fields of brass
howl discordant, a fragile leaf falls.

Growing impatient and abstruse
I watch a bee
saw through the ceasefire silence, the downward
glowering of us all. The conference room
walls: mauve.
Poem

The moon is ratcheting violently upward. I thought I left the coffee pot on and turned to see the house ignite. Needless to say, I walked on--passed your frozen door, the tiny staircase that mocks big feet. The shortest step between two points is the first. Time I went on to something radiant and suspicious, like lions in the cafeteria, jewels in the mouth of a dead man, the backstage that is all over the front page where, it is said, the ingenue can be seen making out with her many white white moons.
Sea Spring

A white gull spirals
ocean surf, black tipped wings,
ellipses,
a branch budding toward flight.
After the Beach Washed Away

Winston maintained the fish inside his head had become lovers of a sort, tickling with soft fins his innermost desire and outermost gesture. Scaly and mythical, Winston in the desert, testifies the rite of goldfish. The sun beat spectacular incisions, the sky wept fire. Winston could only think of fish, till the fish became that which they touched, deep fish of thought, celebratory, inspired scribbling, vericose veins, the one and the many, diploid, haploid, paranoid Winston the scholar of beaches pale as these many strange seas.
Outerleast Gesture

Simple instructions:
  the foot goes in
  toes first passed the
  lips, knee now, both
  feet if you like (you
  must) careful at the
  waist, continue on
    the belly, breast
  shoulders and yes
    even head itself
  poof! This too
    is a form
  of pride.
Irene in Thought

Incessant blue, the marshes the grasslands, endless horizon running along the background of a painting, inveterate thickets, poplars, a swath of clouds floating thoughts, no, not that, this:

a huge screen peopled with eyes, eyes of the deep sad image of despair, the feeling of your body so totally your own . . . someone else's something

like this: money, several large containers containing the living room, in thought, patches of light along the back wall, two windows in front, an apple tree, not that, this:

your warm eyes wet from crying, hands like pulp, no definitely not this, an old photograph marking the leaves of a book, of you of me in the park that late summer evening reading under the cherry trees,--you character you, always joking

eyes like movie stars', batting brows the long kiss goodnight, Irene. No, not this at all . . . something

like floating thoughts, a swath of clouds, poplars, thickets, the autumn sky, how in time your room, its windows roped green with summer vines, will tell the color for the sky and you will choose to make a thing of it, or say it is not.
Comfort

A clock ticks by the ashtray.

No one is heard crying.

From the well spring long shafts of green light
layer upon layer
green jay bird across a cerulean sky.

Every time I think I die,
simple things demand more notice--

the pine tree, the wish, her belly
brown in mid-summer light.

The old limestone wall.

Every time I think I know

Vastness!
14 Floors above 6th Street: A Pastoral

We the chattering blackbirds who dwell
in your anterooms of thought, now speak
to you perched upon the roof of yourself.

You know the trees will not break
your fall. We've heard you,
but to us, you do not listen.

The sky is no place for humans.
Though you were born of infinite blue
you wear a measured hat, turn

right or left, hail a taxi,
avoid the rain and all the rest
ends a line. Beneath your last breath's

brass instrument turns
a steady wheel of blue light.
Do you see it now? Gaining speed?

Ever in a dizzy wonder will there be
time. Friend, there is time.
Time enough to know about time.
Watkins Glen State Park, 1997

(for John)

Walking up "indian trail" we happen
upon a statue, the madonna
illumined, an afternoon
so grey the flood
of remembrance cannot

find its sun. "Burial ground"
we joke, climbing the stone steps, the caretaker's tower
the one supply remaining,
an old glove, like some fallen gesture, or pathetic

recolletion suggests nothing
but tearing off the hand to walk defenseless and
without obligation. Free in inability from inability.
This is the dance in which

no movement occurs, the hymn's silent echo, the mausoleum, loaded chamber of incense and prayer.
The rain falls cold
on this field, high above the gorge cut through time

the lake a glacier has made.
I'm here with my life, at this edge of the world, watching it blur into memory (ice breaks, falls to the rushing water)

wanting to tell you something tell us something, brother

59
in this world it is not the hook
but the opening
a hook makes we must
respect.
We are concerned now with convergence
and rising take hold the ephemeral tongue
dressed in keys to be fingered.

Even when dining alone
we are of two minds. So then
what is the relationship between self

and ice? Perhaps why love is described
with red terms, or the moth extinguished
by candlelight? In the dark room

we tip burgundy waters to our plump
and ready lips, an invocation, a prayer, that
when meeting, finally, we may not dissolve.
Works Cited


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