

MARK WEISS

A SUITE OF DANCES XI: HAND GAMES

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First and last gardens.

A gray day
and I cast no shadow.

Doubt this, doubt that,
and doubt the other.

What did I say and what forgot to say?

Dark form on the water
skimming the surface.
Each hollow space a habitat.

Brief life, eternal this-or-that.

A dull brown down the trunk of a gray tree.

The “is” of isness.
“Am” of amness.
Amless, am
lessness.

“Let’s chatter about the cat, chatter, clatter, and the cha cha cha.”

GRAVESEND BAY 1945

Sea-bleached, a house by the bay and a yard
full of weeds and the junk of sailors.
Hark! I say, as if the bark of grief
across the continent.

“Different place,”
he said,
“dead wench.”

Here failed
the body’s symmetry.

Each writes in an alphabet
fashioned to hoof or hand.

A is for Aurochs
B for Behemoth
M for Mammoth.

I am whatever beast.
This the mother
this the daughter
sorting bones.

Who from among
would hear of angels?
Have been
was
will be
won't.

The tattooed lady dreams of her newborn adorned
with pictures—a rose grows
from its navel and its vulva
a pair of lips.

HALLOWE'EN

Dogs are dressed as dogs
asters asters
and the wind says
farewell to wind.

The dog is aware of its master's freedom.

The mouth of the gifted horse
the horse with the gifted mouth
the gift of the mouths of horses.

One sees a hand
in a mirrorless place.

CONTEXT

It's a matter of scale. From the point of view
of gods and the dead, Troilus
looks down and laughs. On the scale of
feeding the kids it's a question
of who gets fed
who starves.

Sniff the air—there's something
that wants you.

In the rhythm of things
we eat the young.

Lebensraum lebensraum no easy answers.

Imagine a pathogen
at the base of the food chain.

A scale of values:
there are microbes
kept in storage
in case there are more to kill.

Put otherwise,
lords of creation: we decide
what lives, what dies.

A casual triage:
Let us impose a limit
on biomass per species.
Let us include ourselves.
In the hunt for this,
kill that.

The cut worm
forgives the plow?
Poor beastie.

Nice to pray for the souls of the dead
as a cow prays for grass.

Do we imagine
an end
to be wished for?

Not or, but and
be eaten.

In the war between those above and those below
the river killed everything.

I am the master of grass
the master of cattle
the master of men. Eat, then,
until there's nothing.
Store up corn against the morrow.

Come, I shall give you fat and meat.

The tree came down, and the mocking birds
shouted their panic in all their languages.

“There is a war
of all against all
of which I'm not a part. I'm not! I'm not!”
he said.

I killed the woodchucks
that ate the lettuce

trapped the skunk
that dug the garden
and the fat green things on the tomatoes
I squeezed until they popped!

Catastrophe, he wrote, rides in on pretty horses.

PARADISE LOST: SHORT FORM

Oops,
lost garden.
Was lovely.

Here at the shore border edge
a child made much of.
A leaf
a twig
a furry thing.

Great sigh of the sea.

HELEN

Here's a girl who bears a warning.
Makes much of an ordinary self,
a face reconfigured as the launch
of a thousand ships. "I deal
in death," she seems
to say, "and sell it
wholesale." Dressed, as she was,
to kill.

Replaced the laying-on of hands,
body-to-body a transmission line. Let us.
The mad salad of intent.

The day the daze the test.

To make of brother "other"
and set him wandering.

Sometimes it seems a bad bargain.

Noise of dogs.
Strangers.

For a' that.

Ah weel.

This brittle desert morning
a rough cabinet beside the irises.
Pattern of rust and aquamarine.

Must be mountains,
these clouds with rocks.

Clouds rocks mountains.

How do we see.
How do we know.

For instance, a slow
arrival, or a dawn
advancing across meadows. The shadow creatures
retreat before it and those of daylight
emerge in the clearing.

Where is that school to say nothing?

A song
marks the hour.

Up from sleep,
tapping the surface.

Just a bone of contentment
in the house of the king of teeth.

Let's remember the built environment.

Mother and daughter in jeans.
What the one
what the other.

"You're the daughter
I never had," he tells the boy.

Faster than the bird the shadow falls.

Charting storms in the age of saplings.

The tree rots, become prey to stray breezes.

So the dog's death
kills the marriage.
Do I have to tell you it's a jungle here,
that he she it walk past and he she it,
aware,
his hers its theirs.

A pendulum. Like a dance.

Now clouds move in and a wind from the south catches the torn pennant at the station
across the street, where, as here, if the man was right who struggled to tell me "rain is
coming," there'll be no sun
in sunoco.
Finished. A boundary found,
foundered, become one
with "the destructive element."

Springtime, and a new life.
Today the sun shines on the woman shoveling it in
at the table by the window and on the space
between the infant's toes, visible
above the pram.

Am he who sees
and listens.

As if the light
were tide-swept.

TYPO

On the back of her shorts:
"Peace."
Offered to all who seek to see.
But noli mi tangere,
as it's always been.

ANNOINTED

Oil for food or light.
So, marinate the king and bring the
fire
for the people's feast.
So much did he love them.

The pulse in im
pulse passeth
one to another, body
to bodyness.

A matter of much sweat
blisters infections insect bites
the random itching
that troubles sleep. To wake
to renewed exhaustion and another slog.

Accident acting on a multitude of compounds that,
when the mix proved optimal, quickened.

The ancient costumes of humility.

The act
of tunnel and slither.

It seemed at the time worthwhile
to allow their self-deception.

Appetite seemed sufficient, asked no apology.

Try to decode the songs of birds.
In the interim the tide rushed in.

There might have been other continents no less improbable.

The man of beautiful business the beauty business man the beautiful man the man of
beauty.

Occasional stops at the mirror, and the moments when distracted by a hungry stare.

Somewhere there's a clue to this,
the day for the moment
broken, instinct
as sure as rain or river.
What lingo you slingin,
hombre?
Restless/reckless/reckoning.

And saw in him a kind of gentleness.

A daily ritual.

The plea involved in tooth paste
hair brush
soap
as if the order of things. So,
a man in shirt and tie strides down the street
and another in shorts and sandals
and another in sweats
and the girl in slacks
looks at the window and smooths her hair.

To extract the pattern from.

The sweet boy become a father
the sweet girl a mother.

A bird alights.

An end of time.

Beyond is the true forest, and a squirrel
attentive to my presence
foregoes an itch till it finds me harmless.

It's the cleft that counts.

In mind

or mindful of.

The lost America of porches.

Never replicates
but replaces.

Meanwhile,

back at the ranch,
a world of concerns.

On the subway sings a Mexican love song and plays the accordion.
Does what he can. His worker's hand held forth.

Two little girls play hand games. They alone
know the rules, and will never tell.

Of the clapping of hands and the different manners
of the clapping of hands.

THE PASSING SHOW

The show keeps passing.

Think of the pointy parts.

A catalogue of clouds.
Loves of the sun god.

Will end
unctuous.

No one before had asked of us such restless perception.

Rattle of coaches on cobbled roads,
the noise of chariots on stone, the jolt of wagons.

The present clangor.

There where the stained light strikes.

No one has told these children about winged things.

Raised in an aerie and learned their strategies.
Inhabited fantasies.

Convinced of insects
crawling beneath his clothes.
Sloughed off the deaths of friends.

I am become what I see and hear.

A gathering of consensus too slow
to save the farm.
Destruction in the service of distant masters. Borne
across rivers and mountains to sustain
a set of lives. Something
we thought
to sing about and still
to sing about despite
the consequence.

Time was.
Chasing wind.
Straining to make static this constant motion.

How many have been at home there?

Eat if possible the less
familiar. Incorporate
cows, pigs, ducks.

Blasé cat shuns the finger.
“Hidden, in the dark days that followed..”

As if youth were a catalogue
of expected behaviors,
or a set of textures.
Paths through the mind-field.

To have learned the languages of power at an early age
like lord or servant.

The bleat of a desolate cow.

Was a time when winter's rasp
was breath of life and an uphill run
was life itself.

“Who would you be if you were she?”
As she sat collapsing downwards.

You were talking about
you were talking about
you were talking about

Long strides. She binds
her yellow tresses, oh.

At the back of it all the awareness of slaughter.

HIS FANTASY

So this guy gets on—
rumpled suit, bad day
at the office—fumbles
for a moment at the closing door
as if to hold it for the redhead
 juggling her metro card
 at the turnstile, the sum
of all his longing, but it's too late,
 and his face
follows her
as the train pulls away.

How do I tell this story?
Worn feet
in sad sandals.

NIGHTLY NEWS

To place her in the frame with the
 building
behind her she's posed
on a platform, and to be just right
 she's
barefoot, perfect,
what the frame contains, but her feet
are cracked and uncared-for.