

ARE YOU AFRAID?



BRIAN STRANG

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for James Edward Strang

1. BIDDING THEM ALL FORGET

THE HUMAN EGG

waves in the waking world
their own blood walking free
the human egg
mouthing zeroes
in illuminated footprints

you ask for tea
are allowed
alkaloid kindness

a ghost mouth mourns
before the taking of your arms

your palm a mirror askew
a hospital floor harried
a spot to spend the night
multiple limbs for trade or hire
everyone's a gunslinger, you think

the orange light, the suffocation
perforated by fire dripping away
mote by mote and note by note
its prey in steam and surrender

your skin is an illusion
asking Mary why she's waking
in your dream why she's walking
a dog in your dream
for protection
she says then jokes
that she's dead now

the way is where an egg splits
from its shell wild as winter
splatters the selfsame arrogance
the suckling spawn

withers and wilts when its proper name
opens its continental skin for scratch
sacrifice and surgery to remove
intact and on display as a bloody
relic of the storm
in the red night
light red
unknowable forest

coral in air

every summer is the same:
your radio box my tin fingers

a pilot is porcupined
pink Chinese wings

shedding leaves she arrives
an air-conditioned nunnery

the revolution was a riot
a condensation of coral in air

little howls from beaked mouths
adornment of good wishes

supplicants on the roads
watched by the sky

you will be pursued
across the pages

SLEEPER

show me your filtered terrifiers
that click through heaven
your last lotus

your mouth winds
itself round
diction so soft

summer never comes
and knows
no end

YOUR EMINENCE

in a salt arabesque
a delicate city
scared to death

a holy relic is
death-blooming
into stone

tear up weathervanes
scratch off fingerprints
smoke-stained teeth

put me out with your
eminence in shackles
on silver legs

it's like love
it's like sleep

a burnt offering

it's like love

it's like sleep

forever watched

it's like love

it's like sleep

above ground

MOMENTARY LAPSE

spare me your magnificent rex
your speed marrow and metal

yield at a clink of ice cubes
of rising smoke on psyche's filibuster

your name is amnesia your heart
peppered and sometimes sybaritic

these broken beasts can bend
the sky and self-incinerate

so sit astride shallow sinew
visitors are salamanders

and on your split tongue
you know that your name

wears away

like skin

RAT

into the center of crenellated ferns
harbinger of the high curl of timbre
aboard the sinking juneberry

hold what's left of your kiddie pool
in the airtight logic of the anodyne
a contagion of microdots

soporific fingers twine
in the middle distance
lifelike yet mercenary

your eyes are purple pinwheels
this will be a yearlong dream
a child on a sinking continent

come home to the wreckage
the misnomer of air where sirens

fail to hypnotize the fliers

shadows of surveillance

in the wall-eyed wallflowers

suckle of the black rainbow's kiss

in the welter of a rainforest retreat

come undone and build a new undead

in a delinquent daze of entropy

so surrender among the remains

in a skein of lycanthropic vines

summer is wanton where it lives

THEIR OWN TOWN

taunt tarantula begs to differ
on a cellphone sunless morning
reciting “hereafter, hereafter, hereafter”
people in rows: each their own epitome

FORESTRY

wishing wells and killing bells
echo as a hawk sprawls
through air
to open a deer's
blue black belly

scythe shimmer
dissever
an ornamental fawn
mouth full of eyes
speaks in a lost way

awake in a pool of sun
lives on light alone
on acid on arrogance
ragged wings close
around sight

do you forgo sunlight's intrusion?

a moth flames

in light by the light

of the eye:

a world under winter

5 A.M.

night has its share
of barbarous décor
galleons sail freeways

a beautiful bromide
spell under ungodly
strawberry moon

the veins piercing
the sun's knell
is wrong about
everyone

2. IN THE WOODLAND WET

THE WASP

what kind of seventh son
crumbles in the morning air
makes a fire by his bedside
feathers his skull with the sweet
carcass of artificial memory?

touch the tip of the tongue
to fulminating fevers
the secret serpent of night
of entwined skins tracing
the seven marbled eyes
stitched beneath the surface
sizzling stones in the river
of your veins

a canine pack arches toward town
claiming its rewritten history
bushwhackers worshipping Baal

crusaders on the wall of death
with the detritus of their entitlement:

the walking time bomb
leopard seals cry “give me the world”
run for office on foam and fish bones
yell “we are your overlords”
like a Zeppelin banshee from
the stoned wound of Wonder

the society for unknowing writes hard like a moth
on hate-hardened teeth
these rubber-masked intruders
look for causation
spread chancres of collapse
stilled sparrows in a woolen hell
beneath a chandelier bejeweled with beetles
they are combustible and just next door

the unkind dark
somatic natural night
used end of a bitter tongue
in broad open eyes
over a bed of coals
you rise in the room
view the small collection
of detachable handshakes

even the most generous critics
of flickering trees gasp
at this airborne city
among the dried stars
undercut by bailout deals
lunch-time betrayals in private cars
from your insides to their cargo bays

a metronome counting backwards
the god that returns knows
what matters above all else
the insect ethos
sprouting new receptors
that go hungry
impel you to hit the sunshine switch
every day all day until you hit
the darkest light of summer
wracked and bedridden

what matters above all else
is the cannibal code
living with the obdurate
push of a stinger
something you never agreed to
saturated indigo and saffron
the very garlands of your dream
that filter through and perfume

your unfortunate treehouse draped and doped
in swelling compulsion
the knife parade
in absolute indifference
what is this ephemeral flash?
what is a dot on a dot on a dot?
what does it matter to anyone concerned?

you live among the fever swamps
and tarantula hunger
you have been left behind, beached
and it's true you say to nobody
but an invertebrate seagull
leaving a chemical trail along the river's reach
you give up everything to live in a paper cocoon
with a body segmented by warring desires

lay me in the dirt and turn me to flowers
lay me in my anonymous galaxy
lay me infinitely
androgynously
the universe is a salty tear
in an ocean where every seal has the same name
the emptiest eyes are earthbound
an existential entity of the nth degree
lay me in the secret shape of the Milky Way

TWINS

fall at the feet of the mother of twins
in any tongue foreign
rivulet hair birds for lips
encased in their own gypsum
a slipknot, a snake skeleton
unable to speak her name
you wander with the nomads
a sparrow with nothing
but malice in its heart

CHARM OFFENSIVE

the sable eel of fear
slides through your ribs
before you submerge
into the dual world

where there is only before and after
where there is only black and its shadow of white
where your call is your response

where you fall forward and fall apart
eroding the hypothesis of your divinity
leaving a band of blisters
embellishing salted flesh
along the ten thousand roads
of the final days of empire

summer shouldn't be so Byzantine
with its background checks

terra cotta investigations and
engineered choke points

nothing will make you happy
at the pancake breakfast
on the morning of transistors
among loudbox human moths
and transient freedoms
where the next ball of smoke
will rise from the paper plates
some very decent people sit here
unable to come clean
somewhere between continental and addled
where the sundowns brim with violations
and stowaways fill the universal forest

I am scared and dumb
when perfect predators
encircle my campfire

reasoned appeals
for roads and bridges
are washed into gun fire
and filtered sunlight

the grand demigod
is crying a black tear

at the equine latitudes
tomorrow will jackknife
throw your life into the after
the only hallelujahs will be
from gravediggers
who know the clouds
were never moored
nor obsessed with metrics

Medusa's network
of wriggling emissions
stores itself in the walls of cells
that migrate from host to host

a charm offensive
and doubling of the sphere
the eel is your genderless lover

who blinds with rage
who has become a part of you
who whiplashes as it bites
the sense from your fingers
drenches your fist in red ribbons
asks what you have been up to
in the intervening decades tells you
“one has to have rules to live by”

as it sinks its needled bite
through your palm
straight to your heart

OUT OF SIGHT

from emptiest space
full as a tongue grown
wild with silverfish

an overlooking empire
gone liquid gone soft
into pantheistic pools

among the Ottoman
undulating uniforms
whisked to wonder

calyx cups the spinal
pricks of black purls
punctured politesse

a nest of the neatest
tactical errors kneels

on the apex of sight

in a pond fondling
it peels a precious eye
palpates the clean thigh

sybaritic spider of pearl
says this will surely rot by
my tooth's ancient potion

ashes in jeweled claws
you are besotted are nothing
but diamonds in the air

MOLE

the insurrection and medication
wait amid the grey drool
with a bad case of California shoes

a melting coin and the eyeless wasp
there are petals to share the blame
in a garden of unspoiled pinafores

rain from a cannibal sky
the rebel in his firefly freedom:
hunting haunted

the king is the land
only as long as the season
he is a dandelion blot in the sky

bludgeons and blisters
is murdered and buried

so wed to the lance once
now timeless in a puddle

an owl loses its name
every time a star sign

searches the streets
in air an egret alone

come now this cannot be done
leave your stirrups
and your platform shoes
leave your dictator limp
in an ocean nest of frozen waves

and sing me into sabotage
the dripping walls
and orbital eyelight
in its textual magnificence

an emblazoned companion
bursts into semaphores
he is leached theistic
pierced with thorn
the telltale sign is this:

a mole in the air
sulks under its own
skull shadow

THE HEART

hear how she holds
a lead glass a head
in a glass a hatless
hateful thing free
floating and hollow
it forms her heart

3. THIS IS THE PLACE OF MY SONG-DREAM

A CIRCLE OF OAKS

born of two trees: sun scions
sprout in circles sown scarred
filaments are moon-flowering
for apostles underfoot forever

one is the ashen daughter
a lone and low howl cast afar
the other in resounding stars
westward with daylight wind

snatched under a dome of bees
unearthed an entrance encircled
enchanted or in a trance repeated
the world spins by a singing spell

an elm for an elm an alder for ash
in chant an alder and chant of ash
the elder of elm in trance encircled

in light of leaves all alight with light

sight beyond sound, life beyond life
oaken eyes winter away and open
the supple spell of song skyward
sifting through soil to a circling sun

the profane twin on feral roads
a snowfall of embers cascading
unmade clay, awash in twilight
a widow whiles away the nights

from this tree, one god hangs
to this tree, another is nailed
from this tree, life drips eternal
from this god's belly it blooms

the stories swirl in silver grain
memory again through its roots
through limbs upward enraptured
dawn steaming from its needles

the oceans unshored in a fervor
an otherworld amiss evaporates
and wild dripping heavens erupt
an oncoming past springs midair

arborescent songs canter in circles
amassed of air drifting among us
the disenchanted are without eyes
for the boiling web of their belonging

THE INFINITE INFANT

1. horsemen

"Now hear the fourfold roots of everything: enlivening Hera, Hades, shining Zeus. And Nestis, moistening mortal springs with tears." —Empedocles

the four cardinals are flat relics
sacred bones like all bones
anonymous prone
the points of a compass:
ashen ravens of rain
milky land of winds
carmine lips of Lucifer
golden faces in soil
crux of poppies worms
become swollen scarlet
through skulls trees bud
scatter of petals four rivers

from this osseous cross
clouds crowd the sphere
to the roots of creation
deep in the other world
where antecedents
form a council
stream bright as flame
loam like the aether
between elders who know
this world is a shadow of their own
of stillness of waves
it multiplies and re-creates
as golden poppies
from the bones
of cardinals

*

the horsemen are consecrated
are merciful
exactly as pictured by that mind
that wanders amidst faces
waking or sleeping or liminal
senses into the kingdom
a newborn to be gathered
a cradle of breeze into
the unknowable eye

into the remembered kingdom
land of garlands and candles still
eternal is rest is nothing is blessed
in linen laid into the earth
by murmurs breathed by beloved
on skin then sinew then shining bone
horses undulating across the land
the wind through their ribs
sings a different song for every soil
breaks branches overextended
into the land rattles the bones of trees
the blood-filled limbs of every animal
shadowed by furies across the plains
medusas shred and scatter
carve their song across the land
their ashen eyes see nothing
but impermanence

*

the elements are not four but infinite
time relived eternally
caressed from itself infinitely multiple
lotus upon navel upon lotus upon navel
so that in the over and over of worlds
in their arrival and destruction
distances dissolve bend toward

aching equilibrium without gravity
governing earthbound days
grind with gravitas straining us
til we tick through the gate
and into depth of nubile night
where cells whirl and fires wake
into the warm crust of earth
in waters of the womb
deafening drumbeat
systole and diastole of devotion
waxes and wanes rises and falls
in the long slow universal rhythm

*

the kingdom within is sacred is profane
every breath every hand every one
every blood-dripping newborn beats
with a red-black heart unforgettable
the gift and curse of unforgettable
the kingdom within the very wind
fills the lungs of the furrowed wail
chant in a circle of shimmering souls
the kingdom is within and within it
the sacrosanct other kingdoms
creatures two legged and four
feather and fin and nothing at all

on the head of a pin every one
within every star every star
within a kingdom inside another
lotus from navel and lotus from navel
inside another inside another
all of it a land once thought mythical
but all the more real for it

2. falling forward into the future

“Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man.” —Martin Heidegger

You write as you look at the flat Italian skies. “Flat Italian skies.” You wonder what the phrase could possibly mean. What is a flat sky? What is an Italian sky? What is a flat Italian? What is a sky?

You sit as a young person, the one you once were, at a kiosk café. What is a kiosk? A café? In a part of Spain, not Italy, you write the phrase that comes to you as a young person, seemingly from the air, from the sky, from the Spanish sky. The sky suspended over the café table, the one with the notebook and pen, the one with the coffee and spilled sugar and later that day with the red wine spilled from the nearby vineyards. Grapes grown and picked by people you know, by families who are not wealthy but prosper archaically, families that operate by land, by sun, by rain, by wind, while you struggle in an air-conditioned glass hallway over the ocean.

At this moment you are here, every age, every possible self: infinite worlds. But the infant appears to you in the middle of the air. A newborn is suddenly present, in the middle of the air, right in front of you, slowly twirling, its umbilical cord twisting away into the distance. To where? The sun? The soil? You look at your surroundings to assure yourself you are actually here, not dreaming.

Yes, you are here. Very much so. Yet the infant is also here, not a projection

or a dream, but actually in front of you, very much so, just across the table and slightly above your head. It even casts a shadow. And so you write it down. You write words which approximate, which fail the experience. You leave symbols and marks, draw a picture, in your notebook. Each effort is a single experience, each a beautiful failure, each multiplies its presence. Each becomes another infant but none of them do anything to change the fact that this infant is in front of you.

You imagined an infant floating in the air still dripping its umbilical blood. Infant with ancient eyes, gilded by the many versions of itself. You imagined it and it appeared. Did imagining make it so? And now it exists irrefutably, not imagined but actual. It cracks its golden lids, licks its marbled lips, utters the first language, gives you the gift of language, a language that creates itself, that floats a newborn in front of your very eyes. It looks directly at you.

You see windmills all around. Dozens and dozens of wooden windmills spinning wildly, faster than the wind itself. You know you have imagined these, projected these out to the world, that they are uniquely yours, that they exist but nobody else can see them. They become deafening, ringing your ears, propelling the sound through your body. They haunt you day and night, powered by the fury of your nightmares, by the terror of obligation.

But everyone sees an infant. You didn't imagine it; you woke to it. Everyone has always seen this same infant falling forward into the future. It existed long before you ever did. The infant is the same infant billions of times over, as it always has been. Its form is nowhere but its center is

everywhere and everyone is born, collective wonder spinning from its own center, and it smiles and reaches to touch you. It smiles and reaches toward anyone who is ready.

3. prophecies

*“Sadly we sing and with tremulous breath
As we stand by the mystical stream
In the valley and by the dark river of death
And yet ‘tis no more than a dream”*

—Charles W. Ray

the predictions went like this:

“the ones who now dance
will float just above the ground
the ones who lie
will be shortened—about a foot tall
the ones in the valley
will be flooded and will falter
they will be made of wood
and will become as old
this is what will become of
those left behind”
and they were true

in the lymph of your misgivings—
the hands of elves—
centipedes capsized and convenient
the uninitiated fold themselves

crows will grow to blind you
swarming with bees
harrowed holes for eyes

a coiled snake skeleton
is a coliseum of compost
ruin of renewal—the very center of the world
a wheel of toil—the very essence of the world

this is the city of after
city of forgotten faces
this is the holy city
faces peeled of rinds
of the roles they're playing
letting the precious gift
of unfolding futures fade

the prediction went like this:
“half-sized souls sprout legs
turning tadpoles to torpedoes
abandoned to anachronistic outposts”

each misfortune an omen
an open mouth
that refuses to heal that murmurs
the story of people twisted
from twigs by coyotes
now under land under lie upon lie
a heart in the soil keeps beating
leaking blood all the while
haunting the dreams of occupiers
sores on the face of their god
all around the dead listen
through the grass
hear your doubts and fears
you were certain
but now have only questions
become cleaner clearer soporific
impenetrable replicable
inconceivable city

is this the same world?
the same underbelly
in the gravel of speech
in a once-human figure circling
unconcerned with gravity?
or the circles of flame
and broken hoop of inheritance
never wanting to see itself

in either shadow or light?
people beg and line the roads
uttering a single whisper:
“nothing in the world
will be uncorrupted
dear hearts a blemish
and blight brought
not by justice but by
its abscess revenge
please tell us
how
we are
wrong”

*

the predictions went like this:
“liminal hosts
in a limitless
ovarian heaven
over agrarian land
with glass skin
and waxen hands
will come loose when you shake”

a circle of men in robes
listening to signals
in metadata

*

the eye sinks in the ocean
fish swarm from a bottomless pit
candy-colored and caustic
holy relics, divine images
longing and heartbreak
holy kneeling at holy places
the land where the tide goes out
where you may sleep day and night
and dream of sable crowns
empty sleeves
sweet nothings
below a painless sky
here you reside eternally
everyone lives eternally
everyone you know anyway
eventually
caterpillar to chrysalis
to butterfly
without a mouth
with which to eat

four paths
six directions
arc of a burning eye
the center of the earth

the tracing of a heart
a precious name
the tip of memory
marked by an aurora
new sky over the empty
ancient cities
over orange trees
from infant hands
kneel to say the prayer:
“fatal garden
fertile compass
cardinals
axis of the world
poppies splitting bone.”

a city silk-sewn
by a spider upon
lotus upon lotus
the eye entwined
in the roots of a tree
of a desire unwished
says come sing my song:
“a winter
carcass
hums with
living
voices”

4. the tree

“Truth did not come into the world naked, but it came in symbols and images. The world will not receive truth in any other way.” —Gospel of Philip

Rooted into the underworld is the canopy of creation. The dead climb the branches and fall again with each leaf, born anew in the dying breeze, bedeviled by winter’s blackening until pierced by spring’s spears when they sink back into their circle, redoubling their efforts for the next cycle.

During the day, necromancers, men in red robes lying prone, facing each of the cardinal directions, lie face down as stepping stones. They ritualize to find the story they want to accept. You wander away and into your new reality, something is wiggling and gnawing into your head where it whispers intricate instructions, making you a cat’s paw to your celestial double. You sigh with relief. The land speaks through your mind.

The indelible moment circles on itself, the irreversible: the forests, the plains, depopulated towns. Flesh and blood are cleaved, strangers to their cascading former selves, each of which falls to the bottom of a starless lake. Twins stare at you from within, not seeing but knowing. Their eyes are

your eyes. Their eyes are the black mirror of water. Their eyes are the eyes of an infant.

The tree is endless, boughs bejeweled by stars, sphere upon sphere, tree upon tree, bloom upon bloom. A clatter of bones in the branches, feathers aflame. Cardinals dangle and adorn the branches, still seeking acceptable stories, until their gilded remains slip from their robes, blacken the soil and bring scions wherever they land: infinite infants, each with the snowy head of an owl.

Witches tell a story from one thousand seasons ago, written in silk, a story that repeats itself so many times that it becomes a forgetful old man in an infinite spiral. While you slumber, they stuff your belly with needles, circle your lips and leave a diadem of dread. In the morning, you sit up suddenly awake, touching the coarse twine stitches on each articulated pair of your ribs.

Endless. Boughs bejeweled by stars, sphere upon sphere, tree upon tree, bloom upon bloom.

The moon: a spoon of silver on the Elysian sphere, a medicine sewn into the sky. When swallowed by a fathomless blackened rose, when staring upward from the bottom of a deep lake, you will see the two birds in the sky, circling with wings spread, telling you of the shame of crippling servitude and how to float on the soundwaves above it. This is the gift you will receive, a gift of rising song. This is the touch of infinity, forever unfolding. The gift is this very instant and nothing more.

A newborn in the dark, initiates around a campfire, radiant horizons, a slaughtered bull.

Hawkmoth among the bees, rowan tree circled with candles, black-eyed raven, twilight forest of the hunt.

Black ocean, wind-whipped alabaster plain, the stretched bones of a cardinal rose, pyramid of golden skulls.

Saucers of stars for eyes, twin owls, messengers in a hail of diamonds, spiral arms of the Milky Way.

This very instant and nothing more. Endless.

EVERYTHING IS TRUE

"Everything exists, everything is true, and the earth is only a little dust under our feet." —W.B. Yeats, The Celtic Twilight

first

one the smoke, two the fires, three the air

a breeze

a breath

a burn

on the inside of the glass, outside is the road, inside bedside
beats the ground, slips the air, glass ghosts
three ravens, now three pairs, now flown away.

they watch the sun, the earth below, the canyon maw
three suns pulse and rise from the breast
the glass melts, the roads melt, the bed melts in flame

three faces, over a house, over the roof made of birds' wings
cooking fire chant, a hollow tree sounds, crown in the air

from its bed, slides through the glass, sounds above the road:

“firstborn at first light
long hands, bloody footprints
eternal solstice, shadowlight
birds and blackened moon”

sheds its papery death, coils in the gut, slides up the spine
its heart petals, a three of threes, hunted now hunting
to the bone, a sound before a sound, peeled in a dream

peak	spell	spoils
------	-------	--------

center of everywhere, a thousand petals, ash above flame

the gale	the gust	the gasp
the eyes	the lungs	the rasp

second

one a mother, two a ghost, three the suns
branches, plucked eye, a bead of blood
three the hearts, two the snakes, one the spirit

a cloud in the body of a queen in a shell
of the winds and whatever else walks
in a thicket of thorns, the thread spinners

drawers of lots in their whirling woods
upon a body, of a body, through the earth
new needles root, a twist of leaves

a well of light, alight the sun
their clouds of birds, their skins of air
on the skin of earth, skin of the sea

lapping onshore, a coveting shrew, lanterns
one a mother, two a ghost, three the suns
they embody your omens, open and yowl:

“riverwasher, keening, fate in the seams
three sisters, three faces, stream of shadows
bloodrush, feathered tongue, moonlit dreams”

this is how you see the mother:
a crone with a bubbling soup of eyes

this is how you see the father:
a drone, a hum, a sound in the sky

this is how you see the sister:
a stone, a strum, a long goodbye

wildness finds the walker
lost in a forest of willow
wind your way into their woods

the seed of the triple heart
swept by a sign, now singed
seething secret words

cloaked in a cloudburst
keening crows tearing
collecting their cuttings

they chant as always
on glassine wings
away from your mind’s etchings

the screech owl, the howling night hag, deep in the wildwoods
look into a well of eyes, the pool without end, leviathan in the deep
with three faces, over a house, over the roof made of birds' wings

eye of your passing dream, of falling flickering petals, of wings
your songs are stilled, in ethereal quiet, circling foresight
living springs from the dead and the living raze again

world after world, nested inside, you swallow anew
with fingers cupped to drink: lucid, absolute, infinite
dream of a passing eye, of spawning petals, of flickering wings

third

this world devours itself in desolate bliss, lies as a
deer on snow, an elliptical forest, a pearled black eye
spirals in the stone, a diadem of stars, rayless abyss

from the dusk
always dusk
dust and half-light

from the resin
hanging cones
seven cedar saplings

from the spell
hunting wings
circle in the grove

floating ash, falling bough, alight on a mare
stay the spells, say the needles, stray a bell
three dark suns, two closed eyes, a breath of flame

dreams upon dreams stream from a skull
the deer is a growing cloud, more than can be
can always be, swirl of dreams, bringer of light

this world, this womb, this dark of night
this moment, always now, day upon day
this world, over and over, light from dark

suns in the dark, in a well of time, stars in a spiral
three ravens, now three threes, now twenty seven
omens open, cloud of wings, cloud of mouths

new feathers outfold, rise, on a dream of dreams
ascending and burning, a moth in flame, scions from soil,
all wings are dust, cinder from cinder, flight upon flight

with three faces, over a house, over the roof made of birds' wings

THE SKIN OF THE MOON

1. the eye

with the glimmer nymphs of night
a sticky octopus of purple swirls
tiny aquarium dreams
a slow-spinning glyph:
nonsensical saucer
skims the streets

zero-eyes slip and skip
forty tons of nightmares
in the murk of chemistry
Lethean sips in the backseat
brains set to stun
down and draining in disbelief
this flower garden is fatal

mute minders suck their cigs
suckle guns splatter the skins

hunters hunt and become
buried in a line
a bilious blossoming
the Babylon book forthcoming
open pores of their naked night

overhead skeletons in the sky
tell us what we were to say
land littered with electric locusts

What can be said of such a bargain?
What murderous machinations mush
the minds of simpering smirks?

2. the I-and-I

these ills eat every one here
edge toward Kali in her toil
shaking a necklace of skulls she
shimmies and shines severing head
after head this supple wife of Shiva

and it shames lives lived like this:
themselves compacting
souls to a sterile sphere
who terrorized truncheoned
their deaf and demonic selves

a plundering plantation nation
cargo ships and systemic panic
munitions munificent with Puritan pain
marbled with the green rot of greed
the discreet desperation of a game show

the monetized syphilis of this
parched Athenian land
grow the scattered scions of capital
from a soil so pumped with poison
that it bleeds Coca Cola

when the jet stream falls
border coyotes raise their rates
when oarfish rise
red-eyed and die
cities will snow smog

when the dithering drunks
ran the ship aground
when the way away was shut
there was no other way to live
but small and close: enclosed

3. eyewitness

and yet it tears apart like tissue lanterns
in junk and juniper garlands of wreckage
galaxies of waste overgrown
undermined by moles beneficent
and simply digging and feeding
and dying until fields are fallow and full:

an animism from its own specifics
glass-winged spawn
daughter of shards and styrene
butterfly burnished
entropic eyes
seraph born in the dark

and the intrinsic appear
along forgotten salt paths
eternal veins incandescent
flower of fire cracking the cerulean Arctic

filling the world and floating the poor
upon cardboard rafts of misfortune

this world is not new nor is it paradise
the ancient flood of green lifts
because it can only baptize with
the blessed stains of communal pain
the sorrow of a woken worm wept
from the eye of a mule or was it mole?

in the palm a shrunken city
breathing from your veins
your heart branches a blue tree
from the center of your chest
from a beveled hole of bone grow
leaves crackling in the ice wind

the skin of the moon is a rippling muscle
and a saucer-eyed marsupial meditates
under a maroon mushroom: paranormal
at best but present in the middle distance
where is the circular ladder of ambition?
where are the ice stairs of isolation?

whatever comes your way
cannot be predicted
whatever the way forward

it is already present
seeking the way
is not the way

furies rise in irrational hope
for our daughters when we arrive
to nearness and to songs
sung deep in beating blood
alive to the soothing call
of a hurricane

GODS OF DISORDER, GODS OF NO CENTER

circle of teeth
on the forest floor
with a wolf's gait

frontiers feared and barbaric
the unwashed naked and braided

the dandy's vicious sweat
is the god of uncurving lines
an empire clean of the beast
gilded houses and crooked heads
stars of summer and stars of sand

three owl-witches
an incantation
a mare and wolf

Gods of disorder, gods of no center. The grass and the trees, gods of no center. Gods of disorder, gods of no center. From the soil they grow, gods of no center.

ringlets of gold
barbarians gather
servitude god
in chains of words

Turns to a boar, turns to an ox, turns to steam, turns to a hawk.

Gods of disorder, gods of no center. The grass and the trees, gods of no center. Gods of disorder, gods of no center. From the soil they grow, gods of no center.

wants men bridled
wants to harrow
wants to shepherd
wants their marrow

In full moon light, antlers shine. Three faces knock, at the door. Ravens remake the world at night.

dismal swinging axes
of naked and wild hunters
of the hunt
polished breasts

In the dream, she was a mare. In the dream, she was a wolf. On the shore,
men were trodden. On the shore, men were bitten.

cutoff souls
shoreline birds with
heads in their hands
souls of men
on her belt

dry blood
in the beak
once-alive blood
this blood
never was

charged with gods
stars are
far away fires
winter suns
when time was three

In young crazed heads, swim crooked souls. In young crazed eyes, rise
crooked tears. In young crazed eyes, shores shrink away. In young hearts,
nothing is crooked.

foams and shakes anew
weeping shore of eastern sea

howls swollen to the hundreds
campfire stars on the hillock

In full moon light, antlers shine. Three whispers at golden doors. Ravens
remake the world at night.

now wander
now so small
now whisper
now remain

Gods of disorder, gods of no center. The grass and the trees, gods of no
center. Gods of disorder, gods of no center. From the soil they grow, gods
of no center.

ONE

(Adman and Ātman)

—for Isabel

“What is happiness?

Happiness is that moment before you need more happiness.”

—Don Draper, *Mad Men*

“So the unwanting soul

sees what’s hidden,

and the ever-wanting soul

sees only what it wants.”

—Lao Tzu

तत्त्वमसि

(Tat Tvam Asi)

“That Thou Art”

—*Chandogya Upanishad*

once was one

one was whole

all was one
one was wonder

but in a bang
one knew wonder
of its own wonder
was not itself wonder

one knew worry
and had become
not one in wonder
but a one with want

one became one
inside of a none
one alone and want
gave way to crave

so one became
one and another
either and neither
one and an other

one and other
now with want
from new want
more want

with new want
grew new worry
each new other
made yet another

all knew want
all knew worry
sorrow sown
ad infinitum

some wanted
others to be other
to keep from them
the wonder of one

some wanted
wonder alone
the only ones
with wonder

some wanted
others to want
to crave to give
up the wonder

some sold want
as the wonder

and made more
worry and sorrow

where was one
the one of wonder
in all the want
worry and sorrow?

how now to lose
so much sorrow
from all the want
and all the worry?

could so many
become again one
as it once was when
one was itself wonder?

or should we
just be and see
we are one
and are wonder?

all that is now
is one and is
everything
one thing

in every one is
everything
is wonder and
also sorrow

everyone
knows sorrow
sown from
want and worry

sorrow is a sea
where we see
only want today
worry tomorrow

we can sink
and not see
we are not we
we are one

the sea is not
only sorrow but
also wonder and
everywhere now

if we see
the wonder

we are one
we are wonder

sorrow is
but also
wonder is
always is

everyone is
in every one
everyone is one
every one wonder