Tenebrae

A Journal of Poetics

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Tenebrae

A Journal of Poetics

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ed. by Kyle Lovell

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Editorial

Dear reader,

At the heart of this publication is a drive for a collaborative criticism, focused upon intersectionalist and interpersonal approaches toward a notion of contemporary poetics. The questions of philosophy, geopolitics, queer theory, climate change, anti-fascism, the anthropocene, anti-colonialism, faith, and feminism, are all vital when we attempt to consider and critique our understanding of modern poetics.

Through this recognition, it is our hope that Tenebrae shall act as a groundwork for individuals and groups to collaborate, critique, and respond to each another's work. This shall not only be a community of collaborative criticism, but an attempt to forge a practical response to the issue of over-arching, ill-fitting, and embedded notions of 'grand theories' within both academia and *ars poetica*.

Following along this path, we encourage you to respond to the works within this journal in whichever form you see fit, and send them to us, or to other journals. It is this active movement of engaged interpretation, criticism, and response that we at *Tenebrae* intend to publish and support. For as long as this is the case, I hope that you find this journal to be one worth your attention.

Sincerely, and with my best wishes,
Kyle Lovell

Canterbury

Opportunity Cost

The opportunity cost
of this line
hemmed by cowardice
and internalized stigma
is this one.
The opportunity
cost of speech
is breath.
The challenge of calling
breath an opportunity
is not lost
on this year's operations
manager. Go ask
the budget person
what a budget person means.
There's only so much
room for the appearance
of wisdom. The op-
in opportunity is different
than the op- in open
or opiates
is hardly helpful
at this time. Unfortunately
we aren't a great fit
for ourselves, though we encourage
ourselves to try again
in the World to Come.
The opportunity to say
this opportunity only comes once
is your mantra
and is a performative contradiction
never arrives.

That is to say
its arrival is inopportune.
I am fortunate to say so, though
my portending leads me dangerously close
to pretension. Meanwhile, the
opalescence of a word like opulence
is a diversion from what's truly
figuratively on your heart. The opportunity
cost of pointing out what irony can't buy
is a deficit of self-exile,
leading to a deficit in justifications
of alienation.
You are on your own, whether you wear
khakis or a caftan; whether you spell
Hindu with a u deliberately or not.
The opportunity cost of growing up
in China is that your cat will not meow.
In Palestine, freedom will be the opposite
of occupation. One cannot name a place
without an opportunity cost. In America,
the cost is that you will think you are living
in America. The opportunity cost of gratitude
is demanding what you deserve.
What one wins on merit one loses on grace.
Jesus says we are entitled to nothing
but salvation. This allowed him to cash in
his asceticism for apotheosis. Good
for him. The opportunity cost of being
a Jew is seeing every standing structure
as a false god, a meager substitute
it is the fact that one must live with the secret
knowledge of one's inadequate truth.
Because I am a Jew, I cannot speak
to the opportunity cost of being

an antisemite, but I can marvel
at the irony that we invented self-hatred.
Or so we like to think,
since, being slaves, it is important for us
to prove our worth to the nations
who dwell within us.
Maybe only a slave would calculate opportunity cost.
So that's why we need Sabbath.
Or is Sabbath only the opportunity cost of work?
So that the cost of not keeping it is a world
where there is only opportunity cost?
"It's a good pitch,
but I don't think people would understand."
"Don't sell them so short."
I debate with myself until I am dying
and the opportunity cost of reflecting
is letting go.

Letting Nothing Wait

Numb to the fascism of ordinary things
the reported chaos of listicles

the ambient panic of winter sky
pretending everything is fine

your hands perform their necessary
crunching while your mind runs

critical calculations. I talk to myself
about writing a poem

and the uselessness of being
clear in an age of segregated tears.

I am already aware this poem,
like perhaps every poem right now,

has
become bad—

too much tell, too political,
not enough misdirection

or else, not enough tell, too apolitical,
too much direction.

The language is coarse
like celebrity hair implants

and the private misery of fish.
Coarse and hungry, like a full belly

is full of regret, the need to shit,
and a sharper apprehension of cosmic emptiness.

I am already aware of what a pushover I am
to be writing poems while people are out

clamoring in the televised streets
and perhaps you will love me

since you, if you are reading this,
are also likely a pushover.

Perhaps this covenant between us will serve to reinforce
our feelings of moral safety, which, we hope, are our best chance of payback

for a lifetime of getting kicked around by meanie-butts,
who drown out our cries with History's laugh track and claim it's live.

Tom Snarsky

The Fiction of Shape
Desire & Form in William Bronk and Gilles Deleuze

We head for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and we return with bloodshot eyes, yet they are the eyes of the mind. Even Descartes had his dream. To think is always to follow the witch's flight.

Deleuze and Guattari, What Is Philosophy?, p. 41

*

Cut off from any ground of belief, secure only in its desire, consciousness therefore creates a world, which despite its insufficiency in metaphysical terms nevertheless allows for the rendering of form—the poem.

Norman Finkelstein, "William Bronk: The World as Desire", par. 2

William Bronk was a twentieth-century American poet who lived most of his life in Hudson Falls, New York. Despite winning the National Book Award in 1982 for his collection *Life Supports*, Bronk is usually understood as a chronically obscure poet, and David Clippinger has documented Bronk's exclusion from two major American poetry anthologies of the mid-twentieth century: Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* and Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson's *New Poets of England and America*. The past few years have also seen the publication of articles titled "Why Nobody Reads William Bronk" (*The Literary Review*) and "Why is William Bronk Perennially Under-read?" (*The Paris Review*). Following in this line of anonymity, we can consider Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their reading of Kafka, as we take these desiderata as auspices for reading Bronk's poetry as a kind of minor literature.

Deleuze and Guattari stress that Kafka's oeuvre "is a rhizome, a burrow" with multiple entry points; "The Castle has many entrances…the hotel in America has too many doors for us to count" (p. 3). Bronk's singularity of focus gives his poetry a similar effect, as described by the poet Kay Ryan:

I love to open the big book of William Bronk poems, Life Supports, and read one at random. It doesn't matter which one shows up because they all release the same bracing smell and parch of stone, the same chill of stone in the shade. I don't remember a single individual Bronk poem, and I don't know if they're actually memorable; anyhow, they don't matter to me in that way. For me they're like the small brown bottle my grandmother carried in her purse and sniffed for the pick-me-up jolt…Bronk's body of work is a strange achievement which it is hard not to call brave. There is such a grave honor in its repetitiveness, how it harps on what it can't have, and how it won't bend—can't bend. (pars. 2 & 5)

Nearly all of Bronk's poems deal with the theme of access to and desire for a *real* world, and how desire relates (or fails to relate, or relates imperfectly) to that world. Following this line of thought, we will consider Bronk's poetry (and, in particular, 'The Fiction of Shape') as a lived example of Deleuzoguattarian desiring-production at work. Bronk's oeuvre is a powerful example of what thinking can look and sound like when it is displaced into the non-standard philosophical medium of poetry. where it is forced to grapple with the philosophical pull of transcendent or metaphysical identity as well as the immanent powers of desire.

Each of Bronk's poems operates as both a "rendering of form" and an act of thought, one that must become decoupled from the comforts of memory and representation to participate in the altogether new world of the poem.

Form is desire…

To begin, here is Daniel W. Smith's exposition of the Deleuzoguattarian account of desire (meaning here, simply, the state of all the drives) within *Anti-Oedipus*:

Deleuze and Guattari famously…argue that political economy (Marx), on the one hand, and libidinal economy (Freud), on the other, are one and the same thing."The only means of bypassing the sterile parallelism where we flounder between Freud and Marx,"Deleuze and Guattari write, is"by discovering…how the affects or drives form part of the infrastructure itself "(AO 63). This is an extraordinary claim: your very drives and impulses, even the unconscious ones, which seems [sic] to be what is most individual about you, are themselves economic, they are already part of what Marx called the infrastructure. (2007, p.71)

A claim of this sort, however "extraordinary", is directly in line with Deleuze's perennial concern with *univocity*, dating from his earliest work on Spinoza. Deleuze once remarked in a seminar (on January 4th, 1974) that "univocity is the strangest thought, the most difficult to think, if it has ever been thought."This strangeness might be why univocity is so intimately linked with the other crucial themes that return time and time again in Deleuze's mature philosophy, including *immanence* and capital-L *Life*. If Being is said in only one voice, so too must be the mechanisms of desire, and therefore desire itself must be of a piece with the worlds it creates and sustains — all beneath the umbrella of Being.

'The Fiction of Shape' begins with an assertion of identity — *Form is desire* — that is directly in line with Deleuze's view. Bronk's poem expresses the paradoxical position of the desiring-subject by stressing its performativity, its need to produce by doing: "to say *I want* though not [/] to remark the form or to say the form is the want."

Form *is* desire because it requires that an *I want* actually be *said*, whatever the *I* and whatever the *want* may be. On this reading, the denied latter phrase, "to say the form is the want", would amount to a non-productive view of desire: that desire is simply an artifact of (or a lack located within) some given form, some predefined structure — some pre-existing world. Perhaps in such a totalized space the "I" can still "remark the form", but it can only do so *later*, not in the very act of enunciating the *I want* — desire must construct the world before the "I" can say anything about it.

We have jumped right into something that emerges as a major strain in Bronk scholarship: that desire creates a world for the speaker of the poem to think and feel within. Norman Finkelstein describes the dynamics of how this process comes to pass in Bronk's poems: "…consciousness, out of historical necessity, turns from the totality of the outside world and out of lyrical fragments creates its own totality" (1982, p. 481). Bronk's is not a poetry that can be collapsed into the tradition of Romantic interiority because, as with Deleuze and Guattari's radical identification of political and libidinal economy, for Bronk the interior (the desiring-subject, the lyric "I") and the exterior (the *ex post facto* "object" of desiring-production, the world) are equally (univocally, for the speaker) products of desire. Returning to the first stanza of "The Fiction of Shape": "The form is a tool to tell, an abstract of, not [/] itself, but of that desire it tells about." This echoes the empiricist (and explicitly Whiteheadian) pronouncement in Deleuze's early work that the universal does not explain, but must itself be explained; the form emerges *from and through* desire, via the conduit of the poet.

Perhaps more strongly, though, the idea of form as "a tool to tell" echoes a different moment from Deleuze's early reading of Spinoza: "in the 'intuitive' kind of knowledge, 'we think as God thinks, we experience the very feelings of God'" (EPS 308, quoted in Kerslake 2009). So the godlike act of giving form to a world—a (post-)Romantic poet's greatest conceit—is a function of immanent feeling and knowledge enacted by poetic *intuition*, as it feels acutely the pangs and pullulations "of that desire it tells about". This provides a new, poetically-attainable notion of Truth, as formulated here by Beth Metcalf:

Reality is not a unified Truth that could be represented from different points of view. Rather, points of view are all really distinct Individual-worlds, ontologically single. (par. 11)

The poet's task then becomes that of realizing their "Individual-world" as an empowered subject of/to the dictates of desire.

In this poem, and elsewhere in Bronk's oeuvre, it is clear that it will not be enough for the poet to rely on memory, or on the mundane and unchanging surface elements of an already-given world. The poet must use *poiesis* as a "tool to tell" in order to get beyond the surface, to "[tell] about" desire *itself*, rather than just producing a reified memory or a representational repetition/recollection of it. As Mark Rudman puts it in his major essay on Bronk, "Memory is comfort. And…Bronk replaces memory with thinking." The next stanza of "The Fiction of Shape" demonstrates to the reader what can happen when the poem *fails* to think, and instead falls back on its ontic laurels of memory and representation.

We look to believe…

In the following stanza, the power of saying has shifted. Whereas the "I" was the subject of the verb "want" in the first stanza (displaced only by the infinitive "To say"), now the power of *want* (and, via the mechanisms of desiring-production, the power of *is*) has been displaced to the form itself. Bronk's speaker seems committed to the idea that desire passes into being by taking some form (maybe with the help of the poet-figure) — after all, "Form is desire". Once the form is *there*, however, it may or may not remain close to the force of desire/the real that determined it in the first place. In order for a form that is no longer auto-produced by the real to perpetuate itself, it will require the force of *belief*: in Bronk's words, "belief is to think the want is in the form."

This is markedly different from the kind of thinking described by the first stanza and enacted by the poem as a whole. "[T]o think the want is in the form" is no longer to refuse memory or comfort: it is instead to embrace a preëxisting form *as given*, to see that form as "all our being". In this case the poetic subject is deflated, becoming merely an interpellated artifact of the

form, of which she can only be a mere vessel or identical repeater (since she can no longer give or create form—the form is already there). And what if it is no longer true that "the want is in the form" after all? What if the form is no longer in real causal contact with the movements of desire/the real, but remains artificially propped up by belief? Belief in such a form cannot truly respond to desire, but it can certainly foreclose it. Bronk's speaker is warning us that "[T]o think the want is in the form" is really not to think at all.

This outlook is a very real possibility that we need to take seriously in both Bronk's poetry and Deleuze's philosophy. Alain Badiou, in his reading of Deleuze, is well-known for arguing that Deleuze's philosophy requires a notion of the One-All with a clandestine, unthought Two at its heart (Badiou locates this Two, among other loci, in Deleuze's bifurcation of the real into the actual and the virtual, the latter of which Badiou calls "the principal name of Being in Deleuze's work" (2000, p. 42)); Badiou worries that this One-All of the virtual, in its self-movement, determines *everything* by itself:

The more Deleuze attempts to wrest the virtual from irreality, indetermination, and nonobjectivity, the more irreal, indetermined, and nonobjective the actual (or beings) becomes, because it phantasmically splits into two. In this circuit of thought, it is the Two and not the One that is instated. And when the only way of saving … the One, is by resorting to an unthinkable Two … one says to oneself that … the virtual is no better than the finality of which it is the inversion (it determines the destiny of everything, instead of being that to which everything is destined). (ibid.)

If the virtual wholly puppeteers the actual, then what can we (as actual beings) actually *do*? Badiou draws myriad political conclusions from this and his other criticisms of Deleuze: he remarks that "Deleuze's conception of thought is profoundly aristocratic" rather than egalitarian/communitarian, and that "just like Stoicism…[it is] a philosophy of death" (2000, pp. 11-12). Leaving aside the question of how correct Badiou's criticisms are, it is helpful to see precisely what this sort of fatalistic aristocracy of thinking might look like, under the sign of total unilateral determination by the virtual (the real, desire). Conveniently, Bronk's darkest poems provide a perfect model for studying this phenomenon.

Not every Bronk poem is as liberatory and self-defining as "The Fiction of Shape". We will limit ourselves to just two examples, following Norman Finkelstein (and restricting ourselves to *To Praise the Music*, the same collection that includes "The Fiction of Shape"); 'Something Matters But We Don't', and 'The Real World'.

These poems reek of the fatalism that Badiou sees as a direct consequence of an aristocratic philosophy of the One. In these poems, the poetic subject is at best reduced to a trivial aftereffect of the movements of some other, distant, inaccessible, *real* world; at worst, the poet extrapolates from this position and churns it weakly into the only gesture she can muster: an equivocity or a nihilism ("good [/] or evil, it doesn't matter what we do", or "It is beyond our knowing or speaking").

Why is the poetic subject so *stuck* in these two poems? It seems she is trapped in precisely the paradigm of belief that Bronk diagnoses in the second stanza of 'The Fiction of Shape': if the "real world" (whatever its name) *really is* wholly determinative of the poetic subject, without any possibility of that subject concomitantly creating something real or dictating its form, then the speaker of "The Real World" is right to say "We can't [/] say anything about it"—she knows that the real world, as the sole determiner, must be "beyond our knowing or speaking". This sort of total powerlessness in the face of a metaphysical One leads, Stoically and quite directly, to the starkly defeatist conclusion of the first poem: "it doesn't matter what we do."

These poems show Bronk at his most uncompromisingly negative, in part because they no longer take seriously the idea that the poet-subject can control (to *any* degree) the form the real takes.

I am the unbeliever…

This triumphant and climactic stanza from 'The Fiction of Shape' saves the speaker of this poem from succumbing to the quietism of pure belief that infests the poems from the previous section. This stanza is a euphoric consummation and conjugation of the speaker of the poem with the desire she takes as her subject.

The lyric "I" of this stanza inhabits several different identities in the first two lines in a buildup to the last two (heavily chiasmic) lines where Bronk's virtuosity as a poet is on full display.

In the last two lines especially, the poetic act serves as as a reclamation of agentive immanence, a linguistic playing-out of what might be called the *mutual determination* of the virtual and the actual in Deleuze. In the space of the poem (itself a kind of plane of immanence), Bronk's speaker is manipulating language to create the particular form in which desire manifests itself in this instance. Bronk is well aware of the duality at issue here because he plays with it at the level of the word (and even the letter) in these last two lines: the mirroring of "It is as I, I it" and the doublets *daft/deft* and *aloft/afloat* play at the relation between the speaker and the force of desire; the extended chiasmus and jumbling of letters (the *t* moving through "It…I" to "I it", the transposition of the *f* and *l* in "aloft, afloat") show vividly and artfully what it means(/what is needed) for the poet to be a "lover of form".

Bronk is not merely toying with orthography and syntax, though: the semantic content of the doublets *daft/deft* and *aloft/afloat* both indicate that Bronk's speaker is not only *immersed* in desire (daft/afloat), but also able to *work with* it, using it to rise up and create something new (deft/aloft). Nowhere, here, is the nihilism of the other two Bronk poems in the previous section; rather than capitulate to belief in a totally inaccessible world, the speaker of "The Fiction of Shape" is able to use desire as "a tool to tell"—and the telling is of an exquisitely musical and liberatory poetic thought.

In the end...

The poem, for Bronk, partakes of what Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* calls "?-being": the poem is an incomplete solution to the particular, singular problem of its conditions of composition, the product of a solution process that is repeated with every poem Bronk wrote. This process produces different poems each time because the eternal return to the poem is always an eternal return to/of the different, as conditioned differently each time by the real, the virtual, desire, etc.;

the reservoir of want is renewable, as it is "still and only the want", and after the "doing" is done (and so is "the form done"), the poet can repeat the process anew under new conditions, changed and redistributed (in part) by the very acts of *poiesis* she has already engaged in by creating other poems.

We have discussed the equivalences that Deleuze drew between immanence and univocity in his early work, but it wasn't until some of his last writings that he drew one of the equivalences he is most known for today: on page 28 of *Pure Immanence*, Deleuze writes, "What is immanence? A life…" Deleuze makes much of the indefinite article (a life), stressing the lack of identity and definition required for an immanent life (and have we not seen this with the poet who works *in* and *with* desire, assuming Keats's mantle of the Poet who "has no Identity"?). The parallels to the critical response to Bronk's brightest poems—his poems about light and about life—are striking: "The idea of a vessel, a form, again appears: light enters and vitalizes matter, giving it significance, just as life enters the living" (Finkelstein, p. 489). With this parallel, the title of Bronk's *Life Supports* takes on new meaning, as a complete declarative sentence rather than a noun phrase: Life *supports* the poet, but *does not* fully determine her; rather, it helps her to enact the very *poiesis* with which she will build her own world.

Indeed William Bronk and Gilles Deleuze help to bring out the best—and the most dangerous—in each other's work. Bronk's poems benefit from the perspective of a thinker like Deleuze in order to see desire as productively hopeful and poetically useful ("a tool to tell"), rather than erroneously hopeless (in which case, as in Bronk's most pessimistic work, "We can't [/] say anything about it"). Similarly, Deleuze's philosophy benefits from an artist like Bronk who can performatize thought in a non-standard philosophical idiom (poetry), which exerts an irreducibly unique torsion on the dreaming and reverie required for "the witch's flight" of real thinking. Bronk's (a)typical poetic speaker, with her constant use of the royal "we"—a lyric identity dissolved into the crowd, or the figure of generic humanity—is an uncannily good fit for Deleuze's Dickensian model in *Pure Immanence* of immanence as "*a* life": "A disreputable man, a rogue, held in contempt by everyone, is found as he lies dying.

Suddenly those taking care of him manifest an eagerness, respect, even love, for his slightest sign of life…Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of *a* life playing with death" (2005, p. 28). Bronk certainly played with death in his poems, but over and above all, like Deleuze, he thematized *desire* and *Life*. The ultimate convergence of these two remarkable thinkers of desire (and, by Deleuzian extension, of immanence and univocity too) is therefore unsurprising; on this score, we will close by letting their final written works speak for themselves:

We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete bliss.

Gilles Deleuze, Pure Immanence, p. 25

Art isn't made, it's in the world almost
unseen but found existent there. We paint,
we score the sound in music, we write it down.

William Bronk, Metaphor of Trees and Last Poems, p. 147

Postscript

This essay leaves open the question of other potentially fruitful interlocutors for Bronk's work. One name that has come to mind time and time again during the composition of this essay is François Laruelle, who may (in some regards) be an even more fitting interlocutor for Bronk than Deleuze is. Bronk's poetry, though it thematizes *Life* as Deleuze does, is not intrinsically vitalistic because of how frequently it traffics in the language of abstraction—cf. an exemplary Bronk poem title: "The Abstract as Real—Concrete as Imaginary". Laruelle's career-long engagement with abstraction seems an *a priori* justification for putting the two into dialogue. Moreover, in some ways it seems that Bronkian *poiesis* functions more like Laruellian non-philosophical praxis than Deleuzian vitalistic "transcendental empiricism": for example, Bronk's speaker's self-identification as the "vector of empty spaces" from *The Fiction of Shape* matches perfectly with the recurring Laruellian trope of the (imaginary) number, the vector as immanent matheme *par excellence*. In this analysis, poetry is still very much a dream/reverie, as Laruelle characterizes his own non-standard thought: "…non-philosophy is a dreamed philosophy, a reverie or a fiction that owes a great deal to a certain power of dreaming peculiar to music." For a parallel example in Bronk, we can look to his collection of three-line poems, *The Force of Desire*: "Waking, we subvert our dream experience [/] by using it. Asleep, it takes us where [/] we mean to go, the place we mean to be."The epigraph by Norman Finkelstein with which this essay opens stresses that, for Bronk, the individual poetic world is not *sufficient*, and Laruelle is known for nothing if not his trenchant critique of what he calls "philosophical sufficiency". Finally, Bronk's eternal return to composing different poems on the same small set of themes mimics Laruelle's repeated implementation of his logic of unilateralization(/unilateral duality) in various contexts throughout his work. Bronk's inviting contradictions as a poet show the need to mobilize different theoretical apparatuses to read him, and Laruelle's non-standard thought might be one other interesting way forward for Bronk criticism.

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Holding (Fishing Baulk)

Whether I begin at the lighthouse or inland at Plover Hill

if the first hole was cast by hand between rocks

once larger, less barnacled, more musseled,

in the middle of a slab of pink bedrock that erodes faster out of the water
than in (look to the keeper's cottage for proof)
I do not know.

I continue as a constellation of holes
shallow openings

pauses in the ground
interrupted by broken stakes

(the height of fossilised shins: of ankles: of lugworm debris)
uprights for willow fencing no longer held.

Each pause a different length, marking

a curve of receptacles
also filled with water: air: algae: grit: mud
when the tide's shrunk. How much a body can hold.

Today the invisible is in relief.

Ancient monument of a thousand holes:
memorial of absence: woven branches: fish
(I am the fish that got away): a singular bright eel.

Absence is what makes me.

I hold the story, despite tide, passed between tides

between old man with walking stick (who is this place's son) and newcomer
woman in love with this stretch that's a receptacle itself.
(I receive it and)

I keep alive
King John's generosity, the lepers, and monks claiming impregnation
is worse than murder.

I cross channels scrabbled out of rock piles

walled and gated to stop sluicing from the dug-out pond.
I hold the thrashing salmon, flounder and trapped plaice

no longer here.
I hold the plankton unseen in water-plugged hollows
that may still be here.

I am overlooked by men repairing the lighthouse, for whom a hole
is something to fill.

A delay of stakes
of broken wood, rotting with weed, some sawn short,
guy-roped to this greybrown baulk: closer to the moon

than tomorrow, I am the assumption
of tidal flow.

I withhold: take hold:

refuge: drilling half a kilometre: eight hundred years.

Weightless (of course)
yet weighted with all that came before. I am as water carries itself.

I know as water.

Silent as holes balancing the story.

Men on Horses

About war, they say, there is nothing new to learn. It is as common to sleep, as it is to die. It is the quality of one's sleep, and by equal turns, the quality of one's death, that may cause us to reconfigure the banal. A man on a horse may be in a state of grace, or destined for the big fire. Two men on a horse may be in hopeless flight, or part of a comedy bill on a Tuesday night at the City Halls.

Men In Retreat

About war, they say, there is nothing new to sell. It is as common to come upon a lost platoon of scouts in the marshes, as it is typical to be buried in the debris of a shelled outhouse (and, moreover, one in which you believed it would be safe to hide, and to which you persuaded others to follow). It is the loaded but jammed gun lying next to our temple, and by equal turns, the rancid smell of decaying flesh floating through the grocery aisles of the supermarket, that may one day force us to consider our deeds, to balance the good versus the bad, should we ever learn to distinguish between the two. One man reading mediaeval morality plays for instruction may be musing on the capricious nature of parking attendants outside the library, or dreaming of camping in the magic forest. Two men reading mediaeval morality plays for instruction may be the most recently hired interns for a literary festival, or mercenaries on the lam from a Balkan conflict posing as formally uneducated fishermen.

Poached

Like mushrooms like a shark
on the main parade, liking

generous pockets of castor
oil in an outdoor shelter, or

liking a motto free of sound
and foam. The game's no

longer pinned down, and the
field becomes once more a

real arcade on which the peoples
stot for moulded shot and shells.

The mesh is giddy with it and,
just for a second, the fruit grown

for all the world can drop like
price. Yet, grabbed, it'll fly in

the face of those who run to
tag it. It fades into the likes of

common prey, as the pastors
of the planet stay up all night

probably saving us, and casting
it down once more as an office

romance. The scattered plums
make land as clear as carpet,

as all those alien rights recede on
to their feet, and feed and litter.

Cradled

We developed the utopia ware
houses, we put to rest in the

utopia containers – and
the numbers, holding as close

as they could to the margin with
out freezing, were know just

to the numbered themselves.
They were the secret many

kept backed on the wall we
tended with paper and gum.

Everything tacked and we all
saw the cursory tacks we all

made, bar by unscreened bar,
while overhead cried out to

extend the charge of Paris
right to the sea. If the work

reached a resourced island and
made of us some allegory, we

would feel it as a pelting rustle –
as a goat with its face in it

and a dove and the vulnerable
form of a mouse riddling out

their own passes from bank
to bank. The bowers will bend

as far as we can throw them, out
beyond our peripheries, and as

long as I can judge the wait
for pulses and meal by touch,

until you bow and the bag breaks.

NONVERBAL

Fish are godless creatures.
Without skin and without
heart. Don't know how
to hurt or to die or to eat
properly. Pass through a
fish's gullet - when you are
water - then you will know
mindlessness comes from
the ocean. Words fall
away like ink unthreading
when the sea yearns for home
again. *Nóstos*: nobody thinks
about love after looking
at fish. *Álgos*: water loosens
before leaving any mark. Fish
are not made to understand
how bodies make, dim, and
lose, but home is the colour
of a deconstructed bruise,
and the sea, after all, is
seamless. Fish are godless
creatures, but whatever the
sea is, they know--

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POETRY – CONVERSATIONS – ESSAYS

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