

Water's Work

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**Abstract**

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Water's Work is a playful exploration of lyric poetry, etymology, and sound. The poems in this collection use repetition, often through off-rhyme, alliteration and consonance, to mimic the rhythm of water and its propelling but erosive force, which can be seen as analogous to language's constructive and destructive potential. Water's Work is both incidental autobiography and excited abstraction, which aims to showcase language's failures as well as its affective force. "At Sea," pours out a poetics of loss and discovery through citation, where identity is in a constant state of encoding, simultaneously one and many voices.

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WATER'S WORK

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## GREEN SCYTHE

When you are ready, please turn  
over this new leafy patch.

It grows  
long of the people.

Name it pastoral or postural.  
Does it taste of dirt or silk?

Wedlock requires  
wherewithal.

For once & for an owl's outburst,  
you are ready to see  
lawns worn out  
by stitches, by harp thorns.

Make an unswept vista footfallen  
for eyes little enamored of landscapes  
without people in them.

RESISTANCE WHICH BLOSSOMS

A wolf skulks  
for apples on stilts  
turns its seeds

back to the land's  
velvet distances

hope unhusked—  
hare in the mouth  
to run with or hunt.

## WORK APPEARS

I want to stop  
this fruit—bristles  
after taking a spoon to the flesh.

A thick skin,  
a forgotten barrel.  
What tone?

I call to the fully tuna:  
one side “Barrow”  
one “Parker.”

Tuck the seeds away  
under my raw  
tongue, under a plate.

A figgy gist  
whets the planet  
the better.

Sweet shells  
a wound.  
Watermelon down

with a succulent berry won't  
endure halfbitter sense.  
My tissue succumbs elsewhere.

## WOODS FOR WHAT

We had been hunting to a hundred  
years, I reckon.

He thought across the bayou.  
Gambled in his sleep.  
A country would that it were  
flesh, that he were.

If any body would  
keep his back down  
and sweat, of course,  
he must stop being:  
the real world,  
the real outdoors,  
the hunt, a little camp.

He drew two people on  
the heat, fire.

And we could hunt until  
the dogs come home.

Never alone, never  
a miracle.

A YAWN IS EAGER AND EMPTY

Morning fog  
wings  
its way over our  
summer gallery.

The view  
turns  
with the roll of toy marbles:  
beveled weather,  
bends of grass, dew, dirt.

Color (categories of light)  
opens  
its fabric, stretches  
over chair frames  
in a sweatless shift:  
blossom to illumination.

Discord over the purposeful  
winding of a watch.

## HEAVY LIMBS

imagine a second  
caught  
off the ground  
split as even  
scores on crust

you are stuck  
in salt cedar  
expecting

discovery of provision  
in wilder cloth  
stretched over rest

## A SUMMER TO PUCKER AND POCKET

The weather is bitten, has listened to the sun. Notice the lake, the lawn broken into each other: fractured brightness or broken by it. Sunset's a supper portioned out to be sunk into the side of the hill. And the sun says, Become a speck! —of picnic, of pinpricked light, flecks apart from fire. Says, Step into the trace. —of atoms, Share space. —like a vest of chain mail. Pool to splinter into leaves, dress folds. Parasol to shade oranges, round, juicy, a spirited rind. The sun says, Step out of my hot spell. —into the tangy season.

## STRANDED

Cat city  
not for kitty  
for tipsy

pluck  
dignity by tilling  
the warm winds  
of heaven

extract a thorn  
from a lion's paw  
& bring it to the kitchen

a body tries to leave  
head a sunken bloom

cut all his hair  
stamens like arms  
poised

NO MORE PART OR PLACE FOR IT

Begin with the red hair, that speaks

what do my limbs say  
'the rain will fit into my hems'

and bruise neon into  
the atmosphere, throb, purr

this navel is alien axle  
burnished through complexion

my pupil won't align

my breast / appetite  
my weather / kneecap  
my lip / luster



## HOMING

Home is spun, a sticky  
body bound—made  
more maker, less stead,  
more land. I want  
to be base-  
less so I'm always  
in the stretch  
of free, sweet leaving.  
I run away;  
how a pigeon finds  
her page—can't be  
sick if I'm grown  
from a home with range.

## A GREAT COMFORT

Before I go,  
that is to say,  
the movement is softer.  
Less often,  
what I mean to say  
is that this might not be better in a distinct,  
clear voice. I have a small body of, perhaps,  
below the normal softness. I have a glass eye  
that, when half-closed,  
that is to say,  
my eyelids itch.

LET ME UNMAKE YOU OF ALL YOUR LOVERS ALWAYS

Heavenly body of the doglike—we admire your proper paw. What tweed pride allows your repose? Your brow is too carefully groomed, to what end. While my hair frightens up a nimbus crown. I have a memory for unoiled hinges and you boast a buckle, bronze. A dream boy. A doo-wop. A do-what-you-want.

## SPREADEAGLE

The body is chore, no  
border but a  
disorder  
of possessions.  
Felted pelt, rolled & pressed  
until the surface  
is smooth. Remove  
the who-wore-it-  
west  
edges. This is not  
a test. A rock to the right  
& never the twain.

## CRACKERJACK

Dear crackerjack of the unknowable,

Tell me if poetry is all hands on—indecision ruled by strikes of a higher order. Show me how you upset hollows with tiny fires. *Though your shadow puppets hide the glitter in the walls.* When you fold the empties inside out, you mistake new silhouettes for magic tricks. *They are only peanut skins.* You find white rabbits tucked into paper and say, “Oh, isn’t recollection cute when it fails, when there’s nothing saved for winter?”

SLIGHT EPISODE

Are you or are you paper—

creased pressure on a surface  
of sheets dislocated by origami,  
parsing a way of falter.

Are you or are you paper—

a folded plane for gliding missives;  
this blimp broken open, closed  
window pane. Are you or

are you turned & tucked letters—

together a dimension beyond  
a feather's look. Our hands  
incised by tips of no plan, no

looking on to that misdirected

material; ballooned notes on  
skin splay this torn inclination.

## LIBRARY

This proximity to other  
bindings  
may not break  
a marble bust free

from its pedestal;  
pages turned too  
frequent  
across  
centuries loosen.

Mark your place  
between shelves,  
this long room  
waiting.

A PALATABLE FROST

fleece all flake  
out of delicate  
symmetry, for it  
is a semantic  
sixfold to keep  
you from sleep  
if there's wind:  
knocking whistles &c.  
tend to it  
by ear sap  
& brick channels,  
fur neck lace  
be it flannel  
or furnace, this  
toddy is to  
sort you from  
the sugar (give  
me some) a  
formal lesson in  
winter's stiff bite

## FOR THE REST

A room can bear a history  
beyond any hiding of it,  
though the sheets are crisp  
white swathe again.

Let humor be its condition—  
twists of a barber pole—  
each notch between you, me,  
& the sturdy timber  
that holds our sleep, light,  
& the hinge that lets me  
shut you out.

## DOWN PLAIN

Denim looks after  
our dust hours,  
                    caught  
in seams and folded  
before a  
                    day more  
blue-to-blue & familiar  
than sky.

Twill the soil into new  
crossways.

SWEET IF SOUND

I am a shepherd in sleep to sugarloaf fields  
a herd lost among spine & cabbage, desert spoon  
bats sweep down for insects, unsure pollination  
blind eyes to nectar make no difference  
my flock's petals, the tangled stamen;  
all dwellings but the sea  
what is habitable, what now blooms well, little bat  
my seeds are sugar felled

NO HYPNOSIS FOR GOODBYE

The brain is colored with purpose: go  
forth or discontinue.

Nervous. One word to quarrel  
with the known matter.

Breath blown—curious postures, limbs  
astray.

Hands full of gold—a watch.  
She takes hold of the chain.

One word means quarrel, its forms:  
origin and a wider spiral.



ODE TO WATER'S WORK

undo leaf

undo lawn

undo late

undo long

undo loosen

undo lung

undo young

undo yawn

undo right

undo raw

undo wet

undo wait

undo want

undo wake

undo wrong

undo song

undo strong

undo sweat

undo straw

undo toil

undo try

un deux trois

IS IT SAFE TO EAT THEM WHOLE?

This is the sun	shot
through with	ocean
plucked con	stellation
placed	in the ebbing tide
& now	the night sky is
seaworthy	scattered
	with salt.

## SHORE SPINDLE

A once-flowering sea  
rose its well on the coast.

Its whirl takes all to the bottom-  
most straw.

Two lovers sleep before  
a lion's cage.

They make hay over  
knee, over lap, hook

& needle deep,  
a sharp slip into kelp.

A sea steer has numbed her to rock.  
The boundary paws, sirens roar.

MY APPETITE FOR ANY EDGE YOU GIVE ME

find salt in kitchens, sweat, sea

find a neck that is a memory for secrets

find that brooding tightens the stitches

what blueprint, blue recipe

the salary of labor

quarreled with rain

NO NAME BEFORE YOU SPEAK IT

recall my oar in your water	—our rowing
nulled ribbons	—not the rigging
hung tapestry	—take it all
	—into knot

## STRONGBOX

### I

You found it. You need to know you are lucky. How, how, it hurts. What are your debts? is the road behind you darker in its reflection? The hills are so continuous that the blades of grass blur. We are opposite coasts even as the Pacific skirts our ankles on the same beach. I want to relate to you. Maybe I want to have part of your life when I grow up. What does that look like? Foreign imports and low brick walls. I could promise myself these things, insinuate it among the perennials.

### II

Chance completes itself. Be a beggar. Be against us in the sea tended by tide. The mariner blesses the ocean with a warning. He shifts his helm. All the body is an operation through water: one eye on the coast, rough thumb along the hull.

ODE TO WATER'S WORK

undo lover

undo limb

undo light

undo line

undo listen

undo laugh

undo wild

undo wool

undo salt

undo sound

undo tempt

undo taste

undo trap

undo take

undo tongue

undo thumb

undo thought

undo thrill

undo thigh

undo tired

undo tide

un deux trois

CHANTEY

I           The sea  
              set  
              me  
              on  
                          besotted  
                          orbit  
              around  
              the hollow  
                          world.

II

My porcelain

ears were never  
close  
enough to hear  
beyond  
the subtle  
lisp in his hushed

“sieve me.”

III

Steel

it is a girded  
blare  
that withdraws his neck  
from any nightcap  
implication.

The gales was a bucko  
an' the sea...

IV

Whisper to salt

cedar

cicada

cou a neck

lost

coo to return

V

Worth a grain of earth

rubbed into the sting  
of wind

a gash

a gale

(listen for it)

VI

It certainly

didn't

last

a moral loosened from light

upon ladylike

upon wind

VII

A voyage forgiving

its sail

cloth

wild

boom

(the goose, the hen, the hounds)

MY HIPS DROP ANCHOR AT NOON

I am held  
together by rust.

My hair drags along  
the coast, the threads  
unsettle substrata.

Twisting & bending winds  
change at last, but I lose  
rivets by the bucketful.

There is no one to witness  
my sinking through binoculars,  
my bare silhouette,

buoyed by my cork-filled life jacket.  
I am two pieces of shell, more pale  
toward the end of the hinge.

I am an incurrent siphon—only  
tow ropes saw me go down.

On the surface:  
a town with one stoplight,  
a cavity,

another southerly load of stone.

SWIG THE WOODEN SHARDS FROM YOUR TEETH

I build you a ship bottle born  
I cough up napkins for sails  
I whittle my fingers to a point to fit the glass gullet  
to be a bottle more perfectly bottled by swallows  
the smoother the deeper the echo  
the more beautiful the stone  
from so many thrown evenings

BOTTLE POUTS FORWARD TO HELL

Inhale hair pulled through your lips      torn stray  
                         the secret is the masts      a long thread  
through the neck may reach them      bow  
                         your sails      blow me down  
                         aye      the sea is never-  
stricken by the likes o' ale      am I

## BLOW BULLY BLOW

the language you are most faithful to / the laps that mud  
you / you learn / bateau / the language that rode the waves  
west / bouteille / a wistful affection for wetted earth / the rhythm  
you are most faithful to / that you do most / the ground

onto which water drips from the eaves

## A TATTOO IS NOT A GIVEN NAME

### I

The evening drum imitates impatience, unchosen but settled—the powder keg deed. The shallow motion necessary to yield gestures of sea: blue gilt, chipped off foam. We bet on reflections. A heartbeat below starred darkness. How we tire our arms with dust. What is cast off is not mulled.

There is a flag you only raise in deep water, when water is all witness: your most puddled self. Again, little throat.

### II

The image of moses as a tattooed sailor moves water. Punctuation as bucket. The look of bible as inked man is incomplete. We try to stop our sinking by the rupt of an idle jaw. But whose? The palm fronds are dull thoughts, the shore has a head of froth—frustration, water broken by rock.

Skin as surface. The specks of sand. A reminder that what is constant resists depth. The appearance of language that veers and blots.

ODE TO WATER'S WORK

undo rust

undo rest

undo risk

undo rock

undo rain

undo rhyme

undo yes

undo you

undo stitch

undo step

undo wit

undo wrist

undo way

undo waste

undo won

undo stay

undo sun

undo sift

undo sleep

undo twist

undo twitch

un deux trois

NO WAY TO BE WEARY

Each conversation pointed,  
moment-to-movement elbow grass.  
We trimmed the sails but how with words?

The birded land hauls out my tongue,  
measured for function: the longest way  
down to smooth fear.

A hinge in the pit of my stomach.

All the glass serves to prism, to sentence  
my nerves to inaction by sawing  
a window to watch other windows.

I'm ready as a gull to be fragile and hungry.  
Is it called love?—this attraction to ground.



TO DRINK IS AN EXTENSION OF THE JAW

A puzzle of elbow  
and cucumber,

my palm deterred  
by your mad

apple. Here's how:  
a cheer, a choke.

I hear the blossom  
is a rumination. Mud in

your eye for a pick-me-  
up. Follow the strong

joint. Set articulation  
on edge of teeth

squeak one over  
the flexed vessel.

Easy to drown  
a dove, jug bitten.

## WHAT IS INFINITE

A small part of his mind rests  
in the spirit of the other  
person's dropped jaw.  
Think irregularity, jagged  
and humble.

## START AT A CORNER, WITH YOUR FINGERNAIL

On his mind as in revved up turned on toward every horizon by turns in turn which way deserves another don't turn a hair his back on his heel a new over in mind tables noses tricks and turtles it's about leaving or giving but the direction of generosity is up and that means he stops overboard capsize surrender cold turkey is a quick meal but I shiver leftovers shiver me timbers splintered plank to make a clean slate a carpentered forest for a room not a carriage carried away carry on the room where I'm a frequent visitor my innings: in a bad way a brown study a heartbeat a nutshell a pinch a spot a twitter a vacuum a word deep water—in pup fawn and fashion silence or sooth in full view in the clear dark cards clouds god's name good time one ear and out the other three strikes and he's what remains surplus the after the used the consumed I shiver leftovers to be over him and above and done to be over and over him excessively the unwanted degree utterly completely over as upper outer extra overcast overtime over a barrel a bottle with both barreling along chested—hit the bottle bottled up blond green fed the neck or mouth of or nose to spite my face by a nose keep it out of the grindstone to tail can't see further than in the air or always under mine—it's about leaving two left feet right and center I leave at the post for dead alone leave it at that much to be desired out of off at left field leaning cold in the shoulder comfort in blood down or in the mouth to the ground to-earth and-dirty and-out down the hatch the middle the road to the wire down timber time beat burst cast fall home on the down-low for the count.

ME A SECRET / YOU A SECRET

new  
possibility of you      the whisper in the current  
people are forgettably the same      the realization that I am  
a fool      my toes as explicit  
your eyes on them as men knocked      away just you a flickering screen  
due to my eyelids      fluttering hesitation and thrill  
what rabbit would I be to you if I could      did I say thrill  
to touch      a quiet grazing  
the thrill of this new  
shifting      fabric with the slip of tides  
text the texts it rises and fails us      the unremarkable rhythm of sadness  
so unsure not myself      I'm thymus gland  
a rabbit fried with small leaves      when it was over  
I dreaded this part      the fall over  
the whole life again with someone else      the sad book  
speaks of happiness      more times than sadness  
inside it there is little      known of happiness  
it is lost      compared to pain  
ordinary      quiet  
you said it first how      important is honesty  
only one in the boat at a time      else the storm starts up again  
even as the water rises      over our mouths into our lungs  
your mouth your hand      guide my joints into awareness  
the gravity of bodies under a table      the fisherman  
I can bend      I want to now

THESE STAIRS ARE MY CHILDREN

*Weep not nor blush*      knowing that most things break even bones  
sleep then sleep, pillow that is wellspring  
the hip, the thigh

before you speak my name  
*nobody loses all the time*  
*all beasts rest*

## NO PHOTOGRAPH IS POSSIBLE

Night scenes:

squares of light

interrupted

by a silhouette,

the moon too

far away, warm

breath at my neck,

falling asleep.

Layers of light,

shadow, to be

here. What would

I hear: a hum,

wrestle of covers,

a scratch on

unfinished wood.

If you had ever.

Remember how much

darkness we shared,

years of it, over

and over in these hours.

## EFFACETONE

A diamond whose lifetime      crossed centuries says to a disciple:

My body was caught up      in the idea of a separate self  
cut into pieces.

                         All images      (graven, colossal) are cut up  
and caught up in endless selfness.

A silk road asks the mountain:

Is stone an image or does war      bleed stone?

We won't go to war over stone      no blood has been shed.

Retook image, image of pockmarked cliffs      open and cold for the internal clash.

Humiliation talked out of heritage      copper masks, drought, earthquakes.

(No aid forthcoming)

The world cared for two statues      how little it cared.

                         Archaeological remains      a crime against temper.

Buddha tells the hungry hawk      chasing a pigeon:

One black line must be painted      across the throat of each living being.

## CUTWATER BUST

When I am gone I give again. I am gone to say just a little: the first ports were closed, so think of me where she washed away. The sea I love. And what the sad had to say for the sea, so sing and think of me. Where she washes she ends. Think of me where she's a wind of names—where she's the wind of my names.

Wash not beauty from me. There are vessels for honest tar, vessels for the wind of me, vessels for the sea I love. But what sad passage was captured and then we rose high gone low and the trouble getting around. By a heavy blow and songs to be sung.

One verse reads—our names, whaling vessels for the most beautiful of those names over time, the most beautiful of all the men cannot be appreciated by ship-owners, the rail. When furling, haul the buntlines and think of me. I'll be gone too long to give again and think of those names.

How to say what washes a passage.

The most beautiful burden of me is where she's wind of me, where she washes, says a little for the wind of gone to say some kind of me where she's wind again gone too high too low.

## MAY MY TONGUE CLING TO THE ROOF OF MY MOUTH

### I

I want to be turned like wild jasmine, flesh blown by the window with the world faint. I want to palm through the paper between grief & shoe-sole grief, & outside of the body. I think memory would live in a box carefully.

### II

Memory. Memory. Memory, forever & I hear a preliminary murmur in the palms. I don't think memory exists outside of the dust. Memory couldn't live without the graveyard-creeping, but I would still think of the bright star. It was just memory, lowed into the breeze.

### III

Not to the old meat but to words, so long. Forgetting is how the wild jasmine would blow defeat, blow entrails.

### IV

I don't want to be waiting, so I make lungs from cigarette papers & try to catch the breeze because memory is wasted. I accept that habits are all about the dust.

### V

Thoughts of wild jasmine, flesh lived to thrill with touch. I can't begin a memory defeated. My cigarette palms the breeze because I rubbed to want, to want. Since I was the body in dust and wild and inescapable swamps. The way I can't completely vanish.

THE YARD IS NOT A PLACE TO HIDE

I see us on a porch, as you do  
as you promise it goes away

to miles, slumped and under  
prim and rose, a prime for us

this is how to promise the morning  
all vision of you in the morning

what is slight is undone is in the eye  
to restore, to build, to instruct or give

it is a situation all in an afternoon  
another noon for miles and hours

fallen, you sleep in a round way, whole  
to be whole, restored, kept and yet

the vision doubles and moves away  
a body doubled by more versions

what you mean to restore by a promise  
it is hours and miles and under

then a year interrupts us  
bodies of water and wanting run aground

a body made into mouth, open  
a situation or an occasion, you say

a yard is a wildflower occasion  
but the years double now

as your mouth does into  
the floor more morning

the ground is uneven  
unfixed by promise and night

to put ground under is not  
a night restored but darkness

## NOTES

The final line of “Green scythe” comes from Anton Chekov’s short story by the same name, translated by Robert Payne for *Forty Stories* (New York: Vintage Books by Random House, 1991): ‘I am myself little enamored of landscapes without human figures in them.’

“A summer to pucker and pocket” remixes phrases from various translations of Rumi: ‘Stop trying to be the sun and become a speck!’ (from “Mathnawi V,” translated by Kabir Helminski), ‘sunset like supper’ (from “Those who don’t feel this love,” translator unknown), ‘like a vest of chain mail’ (translated by Coleman Barks).

The final line of “Spreadeagle” merges phrases from Rudyard Kipling’s “The Ballad of East and West.”

The italicized lines of “These stairs are my children” are sourced in order: John Donne’s “Epithalamion Made at Lincoln's Inn,” E. E. Cummings’ “Nobody loses all the time,” and The Book of Revelation 14:11.

“Effacetone” uses language from the news article “Why the Taliban are destroying Buddhas” by W. L. Rathje, *Discover Archaeology Magazine*. 22 Mar 2001.

“May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth” uses language from the final paragraph of William Faulkner’s *The Wild Palms: If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*.

# Poetics

## AT SEA :

A LIQUID POETICS OF INFINITE (DIS)PLAY

an echopoetics of (in)appropriation; a puddle poetics  
of aspiration/transpiration; a cavern poetics of woven  
voices; a cavalier poetics of wavy avoidances; a sieve  
poetics of broken vessels; a vast poetics of (no)origin

Here then is a map of my planet.<sup>1</sup>

The poem avoids the unsayable by its appropriation of other voices—an echo.<sup>2</sup> Texts speak to one another all at once, and that incalculable din of tangled voices is a seabed, a planetary silence, a puddle of water, from which I emerge scratching my head, saying to myself: je veux l'intraduisible.<sup>3</sup> My mind's shelves.<sup>4</sup> Voices without whom I would be without myself.<sup>5</sup>

In one another we will never be lacking.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. H. Auden, *A Certain World: A Commonplace Book* (New York: The Viking Press, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Perloff, "Poetry on the Brink," *Boston Review*, May 18, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Nathalie Stephens, *Absence Where As (Claude Cahun and the Unopened Book)*, (New York: Nightboat, 2009), 74-75.

<sup>4</sup> Hélène Cixous and Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, *Encounters: Conversations of Life and Writing*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (Malden, MA: Polity, 2013), 111.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>6</sup> Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1.4 (Summer 1976), 893.

I unfurled the words.<sup>7</sup>

The making of this poetics declares the impossibility of return and the laying down of roots.<sup>8</sup> I always felt the need to understand down to the root how each word could emerge from its bed like a river or suddenly be drawn to a luminous source to split into two and confound all expectations.<sup>9</sup>

Language has forgotten its own roots and needs re-membering. The impossibility of return. Call it to mind, stitch together the limbs, hems. A language to skirt the edges of meaning,<sup>10</sup> the borderlines of language, where meanings contradict and overlap. What do my limbs say? The rain will fit into my hems.<sup>11</sup>

I neither strip nor tease, I parody.<sup>12</sup> I speak only in riddles, allusions, hints, parables.<sup>13</sup> I am a hoaxer: I give the impression of giving the naked truth.<sup>14</sup> I stick out my mother tongue at the hemlines of language.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Nicole Brossard, "Fluid Arguments," *Onward: Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 334.

<sup>8</sup> Caroline Bergvall, *Drift* (New York: Nightboat, 2014), 161.

<sup>9</sup> Brossard, 334.

<sup>10</sup> Harryette Mullen, "Snail Mail from Coast to Coast: An Interview of Harryette Mullen by Barbara Henning," *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, April/May 1996, Issue 161.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Baker, "No more part or place for it," *Water's Work*, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Body, or the Mass Grave of Signs," *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 1993), 107.

<sup>13</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 143.

<sup>14</sup> Baudrillard, 107.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Johnson, "Taking Fidelity Philosophically," *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph F. Graham (London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 147.

## Weaving and spinning.<sup>16</sup>

The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what she listens to impressed upon her memory.<sup>17</sup> A fixed gaze is an essential asset of the storyteller.<sup>18</sup> Weaving and spinning,<sup>19</sup> her clothes are scattered on the floor around her. She uncorks her navel and deflates immediately, leaving only a small heap of skin on the stage.<sup>20</sup>

With the body running down inexorably, how can we each day reweave our net of closeness and distance?<sup>21</sup>

Even if a woman sits at a loom, it does not mean she must weave a cosmogony or clothes to cover the emptiness underneath. It might just be a piece of cloth which, like any center of attention, absorbs the available light the way a waterfall can form a curtain of solid noise through which only time can pass.<sup>22</sup> Even when the last piece of clothing falls away,<sup>23</sup> rain—moisture condensed from the atmosphere falls visibly in separate drops.

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskóv," *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*, ed. Dorothy J. Hale (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 367.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Baudrillard, 109.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin, *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Baudrillard, 106.

<sup>21</sup> Rosmarie Waldrop, *Lawn of the Excluded Middle* (Sausalito: Duration Press, 2001), 56.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Baudrillard, 122.

## The self-forgetful.

The self lost not only in order to silence but to seize myself otherwise so that the distance so many times undertaken with on my tongue, the echo that delivers me, incarcerates, embeds me will make of absence, of the incomprehensible, a terrible tranquil devastating tenderness.<sup>24</sup>

The language you are most faithful to, the laps that mud you. You learn, bateau. The language that rode the waves west, bouteille. A wistful affection for wetted earth. The rhythm you are most faithful to, that you do most. The ground onto which water drips from the eaves.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Stephens, *Absence Where As*, 74-75.

<sup>25</sup> Baker, "Blow bully blow."

## Description as method of invention and of composition.<sup>26</sup>

Words can give the imagination places to inhabit, can give it triggers for exploring its own itinerant investments in what makes its constructive power visible and accessible. This power is: a moment-by-moment feeling for—the expansiveness that language offers, the cares and traps it evokes, the deep troubling it causes.<sup>27</sup> Feeling for—we all know how to finger them, mouth them, feel them, speak them.<sup>28</sup>

Description is a particular and complicated process of thinking, being highly intentional, while at the same time, because it is simultaneous with and equivalent to perception, remaining open to the arbitrariness, unpredictability, and inadvertence of what appears. Or one might say that it is at once improvisational and purposive.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 138.

<sup>27</sup> Sandra Lim, “The Purposeful Lyric Life,” *Boston Review*, December 6, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 88-89.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

A kind in glass.<sup>30</sup>

Language is always referring, if at times obliquely, to its own motives and what solicits them.<sup>31</sup> A spectacle and nothing strange, an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling.<sup>32</sup> Languages work in profound ways. They intermingle and act as obscure relays of one another. They call up all the languages of the world.<sup>33</sup>

The whole erotic secret and labor lies in this evocation and revocation of the other, through gestures so slow as to be poetic, as is slow motion film of explosions or falls, because something in this, before being completed, has time to pass you by, which, if such a thing exists, constitutes the perfection of desire.<sup>34</sup> It is motivated by simultaneous but different logics, oscillating inferentially between induction and deduction.<sup>35</sup> It is slow because it is discourse, the construction of signs, the meticulous elaboration of deferred meaning.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Objects," *Tender Buttons* (1914) (Project Gutenberg eBook, March 17, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Lim.

<sup>32</sup> Stein, *Tender Buttons*.

<sup>33</sup> Bergvall, *Drift*, 161.

<sup>34</sup> Baudrillard, 108.

<sup>35</sup> Hejinian, *Inquiry*, 139.

<sup>36</sup> Baudrillard, 109.

As you promise it goes away.<sup>37</sup>

Language's tendency to obscure, the ease of lying.\* A lover's betrayal is not original. In the domestic space, it may fit into expected vessels: the bottle. I have already promised; or rather, and sooner, the promise has seized the 'I' which promises to speak to the other, to say something at the extreme limit to affirm or to confirm by speech at least this: that it is necessary to be silent; and to be silent concerning that about which one cannot speak.<sup>38</sup>

\*This should not be done in a poem, accusing someone of lying.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Baker, "The yard is not a place to hide."

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Denegation," *Derrida and Negative Theology*, trans. by eds. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 84.

<sup>39</sup> Erin Mouré, *Furious* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2006), 48.

This isn't research, it's conversation.<sup>40</sup>

How to approach the fifteen thousand aspects of each 'you.' To call each thing 'you' ... bid it let itself be called and recalled, by each moment of life.<sup>41</sup> Woman, almost everywhere. 'She' is indefinitely other in herself. Her language in which 'she' goes off in all directions.<sup>42</sup> A life, incidentally, that comprises not only her own experience but no little of the experience of others.<sup>43</sup>

As when you throw a stone in the water, the water ripples but becomes smooth again.<sup>44</sup> It melts, reabsorbs, like water in water.<sup>45</sup>

You are moving. You never stay still. You never stay. You never 'are.' How can I say 'you,' when you are always other? How can I speak to you? You remain in flux, never congealing or solidifying. What will make that current flow into words? It is multiple, devoid of causes, meanings, simple qualities. These movements cannot be described as the passage from a beginning to an end. These rivers flow into no single, definitive sea.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cixous and Jeannet, 111.

<sup>41</sup> Cixous, *Vivre l'orange/To Live the Orange* (Paris: Des femmes, 1979).

<sup>42</sup> Irigaray, quoted in Hejinian, *Inquiry*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin, "The Storyteller."

<sup>44</sup> Cixous and Clément, 155.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>46</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 214-215.

Undo leaf / undo lawn / undo tongue.<sup>47</sup>

The idea of not being able to say, never to say, not be able to celebrate except in the catacombs, to feel (I rejoice in it all the same) the connection or alliance in the gesture of writing. To dig up and re-bury, in the very act of recovering, the interminable pursuit of the shimmering and ungraspable avowal.<sup>48</sup>

Autobiography is less of a chronology of our personal life and more about tracing the questions that are connected to subjectivity, to the making of the subject, and, to the making of the writer and the writing.<sup>49</sup> Waves erode the beach and carry sand offshore.

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<sup>47</sup> Baker, "Ode to Water's Work."

<sup>48</sup> Cixous and Jeannet, 134-5.

<sup>49</sup> Caroline Bergvall, *Talking Poetics: Dialogues in Innovative Poetry*, interview by Scott Thurston (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2011), 98.

I would grab hold of the helm.<sup>50</sup>

For all one can say about love's deep process of reconnection with forgotten impulses and discarded knowledges, at first it really provides no grounding, no view, no balance, no safety, no future.<sup>51</sup> The actual gap between a lost past and a future that rediscovers it.<sup>52</sup>

Nowhere else than upon the sea do the days, weeks, and months fall away quicker into the past. They seem to be left astern as easily as the light air-bubbles in the swirls of the ship's wake, and vanish into a great silence in which your ship moves on with a sort of magical effect.<sup>53</sup>

Unfathomable sea whose waves are years.<sup>54</sup> Writing becomes tracks and traces and lines, patiently it stays afloat and waits for a time, draws a way back towards language.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, *A Roll of the Dice* (Seattle: Wave Books, 2015), 5.

<sup>51</sup> Bergvall, *Drift*, 161.

<sup>52</sup> Cixous and Clément, 25.

<sup>53</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea: Memories and Impressions* (1907) (Project Gutenberg eBook, April 7, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Time," Poetry Foundation, [www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174408](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174408).

<sup>55</sup> Bergvall, *Drift*, 153-4.

## Lost at sea.

The poet is a navigator on an unknown ocean of white space in a textual vessel which pitches and tosses, having no specified direction, no known purpose for the voyage, no familiar navigational guides.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps the men she carried had asked her to do too much, had stretched beyond breaking-point the enduring faithfulness which seems wrought and hammered into that assemblage of iron ribs and plating, of wood and steel and canvas and wire, which goes to the making of a ship—a complete creation endowed with character, individuality, qualities and defects, by men whose hands launch her upon the water, and that other men shall learn to know with an intimacy surpassing the intimacy of man with man, to love with a love nearly as great as that of man for woman, and often as blind in its infatuated disregard of defects.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Virginia A. La Charité, *The Dynamics of Space: Mallarmé's Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'abolira Le Hasard* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1987), 97.

<sup>57</sup> Conrad.

Is it called love?—this attraction to ground.<sup>58</sup>

Remorselessly, language seduces with horizonless plane after horizonless plane.<sup>59</sup> So we move roses, highways, the horizon if necessary, the sea in another dimension. And everything remains to be begun again because during the brief time and irreversibility of the instant we closed our eyes from pleasure. Horizon translates a need for space, for freedom. To be seen in relation to the sea and the desert.<sup>60</sup>

How vessels shape language and transport it: the boat, the bottle, the mouth. A body made into mouth, open a situation or an occasion, you say.<sup>61</sup> Intoxication, lack of control and responsibility for language. You say. Horizon as edge.

Set articulation on edge of teeth. Squeak one over the flexed vessel.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Baker, “No way to be weary.”

<sup>59</sup> Bergvall, *Drift*, 162.

<sup>60</sup> Brossard, 339.

<sup>61</sup> Baker, “The yard is not a place to hide.”

<sup>62</sup> Baker, “To drink is an extension of the jaw.”

There are many kinds of chanties, a chanty for every duty—

and the order to heave and chanty brought redoubled efforts and made them lighter.<sup>63</sup> A work song matches the rhythm of its labor: the capstan chanties used in weighing anchor or hoisting sails, the long-drag chanty for topsails, and short-drag chanties for bowline.<sup>64</sup> And by imagining a rhythm to match an emotional labor, the poem aids in that work, conjures its force.

But in a sieve I'll thither sail, and like a rat without a tail, I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Frank Shay, *Iron Men & Wooden Ships: Deep Sea Chanties* (Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I.iii.9-11.

## Hide and go seek.

The tongue becomes observant and gets tough inevitably, like a fruitskin.<sup>66</sup> As if licking could be short of honest.<sup>67</sup>

I've been licked all over by the English tongue.<sup>68</sup> I say that I was reading but in truth I was licking.<sup>69</sup> An instinctive taste for the echo.<sup>70</sup> From the moment I open my mouth, a taste of salt.<sup>71</sup>

The birded land hauls out my tongue.<sup>72</sup> I prefer when one large bird is attacked by little birds that fly at it and force it to come lower and lower as there is only the wind that keeps it as the wings are extended.<sup>73</sup> Easy to drown a dove.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Hejinian, *Inquiry*, 68.

<sup>67</sup> Erin Mouré, *A Frame of the Book* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1999), 42.

<sup>68</sup> Harryette Mullen, "Licked All Over by the English Language: Harryette Mullen in Conversation," interview by Caroline Crumpack, Poets.org, February 21, 2014, [www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/licked-all-over-english-language-harryette-mullen-conversation](http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/licked-all-over-english-language-harryette-mullen-conversation).

<sup>69</sup> Cixous and Jeannet, 126.

<sup>70</sup> Jean Starobinski, quoted in Baudrillard, 211.

<sup>71</sup> Brossard, 335.

<sup>72</sup> Baker, "No way to be weary."

<sup>73</sup> Stein, *Lady*, 95.

<sup>74</sup> Baker, "To drink is an extension of the jaw."

Language itself is never in a state of rest.<sup>75</sup>

For it must be remembered that while a sailing ship may be regarded by a theorist as a mechanism, the actual fact that ships under sail and steered by men are not machines at all but sentient beings of which the master, the seamen, the masts, and sails and cordage are organs of a living whole.<sup>76</sup>

All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again.<sup>77</sup> It is very rarely that an ocean empties itself of its waters.<sup>78</sup> As when you throw a stone in the water, the water ripples but becomes smooth again.<sup>79</sup>

The inability to speak. The vanishing point on every word.<sup>80</sup> Silence gathers everything present into presence and lets it present itself.<sup>81</sup> Silence, the silence under oceans, in the deep water of the body, its blind side facing the brain.<sup>82</sup> Deeper, deeper to where a voice that doesn't know itself is lost in the sea's churning.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Hejinian, *Inquiry*, 50.

<sup>76</sup> Shay.

<sup>77</sup> Ecclesiastes, quoted in Susan Howe, quoted in Perloff, "Poetry on the Brink."

<sup>78</sup> Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, trans. Katherine Woods (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 54.

<sup>79</sup> Cixous and Clément, 155.

<sup>80</sup> Hejinian, *Inquiry*, 106.

<sup>81</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Logos: Heraclitus, Fragment 50," quoted in Hejinian, *Inquiry*, 37.

<sup>82</sup> Erin Mouré, *Domestic Fuel* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1985), 103.

<sup>83</sup> Cixous and Clément, 106.

So to forget everything, forget on both sides.

Forget your memory of the coast, your sense of earth and sea, and forget your sense of the passage that ensures immortality.<sup>84</sup> These streams are without fixed banks, this body without fixed boundaries. This unceasing mobility. This life, which will perhaps be called our restlessness, whims, pretenses, or lies. All this remains very strange to anyone claiming to stand on solid ground.<sup>85</sup>

Adventuring, without the masculine temerity, into anonymity, where I can merge with without annihilating myself.<sup>86</sup> Secretly, silently, deep down inside, I grow and multiply.<sup>87</sup> I rise with my red hair.<sup>88</sup> Not erection. But diffusion. Not the shaft.

The vessel.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Manhattan: Letters from Prehistory*, trans. Beverly Bie Brahic (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 173.

<sup>85</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 214-215.

<sup>86</sup> Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 888.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Sylvia Plath, "Lady Lazarus," *Ariel* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 14.

<sup>89</sup> Cixous and Clément, 88.

Il n'y a pas de hors-texte.<sup>90</sup>

There is nothing outside the text. There is no outside-text.<sup>91</sup>

A leaf on the shoulder, a slip of the tongue.<sup>92</sup> A poet who understands that language has no static quality, that it exists in a constantly liquid form.<sup>93</sup> Infinite play,<sup>94</sup> endless slips, shifts.

Language says and says and swirls as if saying were its form of stillness.<sup>95</sup> Every time you try to stabilize the meaning of a thing, try to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away.<sup>96</sup> There is no stable halting point in language, but only infinite play, the endless slippages through which meaning is sought but never found.<sup>97</sup>

Slippage / thinks random patterns.<sup>98</sup> The thrill of this shifting.<sup>99</sup> Play as movement. Play in no clear dis-playing. In dispersing. Hide and go seek.

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<sup>90</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 158.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Cixous, *Manhattan*, 77.

<sup>93</sup> Dorothea Lasky, "Scientist or Mystic," *Boston Review*, December 6, 2012.

<sup>94</sup> Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 280.

<sup>95</sup> DH Lawrence, "Seaweed," *Echoes of the Sea: Poems*, edited by Elinor Parker (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977).

<sup>96</sup> John Caputo. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 31.

<sup>97</sup> Alex Callinicos, "Obituary: The Infinite Search," *Socialist Review*, November 2004, <http://socialistreview.org.uk/290/obituary-infinite-search>.

<sup>98</sup> Lyn Hejinian, *Writing Is An Aid To Memory* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1996); quoted by Hejinian, *Inquiry*, 52.

<sup>99</sup> Baker, "Me a secret / you a secret."

Has the siren been seen or not?<sup>100</sup>

Thing in itself folding itself up inside itself like you might fold a thing up to be another thing which is that thing.<sup>101</sup> Her text knows in seeking itself that it is more than flesh and blood, dough kneading itself, rising, uprising openly with resounding, perfumed ingredients, a turbulent compound of flying colors, leafy spaces, and rivers flowing to the sea we feed.<sup>102</sup> The versification was simple and there was much latitude as to rhymes and meter, and most of the airs would sound monotonous to ears accustomed to more highly developed music.<sup>103</sup>

If only ears were not so formless, so clogged with meaning(s), that they are closed to what does not in some way echo the already heard.<sup>104</sup> As long as we keeps hearing words, we're sure that there's a meaning somewhere.<sup>105</sup>

My porcelain ears were never close enough to hear beyond the subtle lisp in your hushed 'sieve me.'<sup>106</sup>

The text: it rises and fails us.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Malcolm Bowie. *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 126.

<sup>101</sup> Gertrude Stein, quoted in Hejinian, *Inquiry*, 104.

<sup>102</sup> Cixous and Clément, 88.

<sup>103</sup> Shay.

<sup>104</sup> Luce Irigaray. "Mechanics of Fluids," *This Sex Which is Not One*, 113.

<sup>105</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, quoted in Hejinian, *Inquiry*, 52.

<sup>106</sup> Baker, "Chantey."

<sup>107</sup> Baker, "Me a secret / you a secret."

I'll show her. I'll shore her.<sup>108</sup>

Unleashed and raging, she belongs to the race of waves. She arises, she approaches, she lifts up, she reaches, covers over, washes ashore, flows embracing the cliff's least undulation, already she is another, arising again, throwing the fringed vastness of her body up high, follows herself and covers over, uncovers, polishes, makes the stone body shine with the gentle undeserting ebbs, which return to the shoreless noorigin, as if she recalled herself in order to come again as never before.<sup>109</sup>

Will I die by a storm? Or will I go out by a light that doesn't wait to be blown out by the wind but which dies tired and self-satisfied or will I extinguish my own self in order not to burn down at the end.<sup>110</sup>

We admire the waves rolling incomprehensible resolutions in a border of darker and darker gray.<sup>111</sup>  
We will get out of the ending by stepping fully clothed into the sea.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Mouré, *Furious*, 48.

<sup>109</sup> Cixous and Clément, 90-1.

<sup>110</sup> Cixous and Clément.

<sup>111</sup> Waldrop, *The Lawn of the Excluded Middle*, 56.

<sup>112</sup> Mouré, *Furious*, 101.

Out of sight of the land the sailor feels safe, it is the beach that worries him.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Charles G. Davis, *The Quotable Sailor*, ed. Christopher Caswell (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 2004), 97.

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