

Number Opera

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The Human Voice

Hello, birdfoot-yellow sheets. Hello,
rows of antique atomizers, globes
of stemware stuffed with tissue,
soft-padded and waking-pill morning.

Goodbye, scrim of limey shower.

Hello, monodrama. Hello, curtain call
after curtain call. Hello, characters
with my body and props preferred
to characters. Hello, face painted
for the back row.

[sticky with stage directions]

Goodbye. [lilting like a lifted shirt]

Hello, first gray hair spotted
under strained filament. Hello,
stomach opening like blown glass
and body belted into the wrong dimensions.
Hello, gown made more flattering
with clothespins and splinters
running down my back. [wriggled
out with a tongue of whipstitched rawhide]

Goodbye, footprints scrubbed from the bathroom floor.

Hello, stories of victims.
Hello, virtuosic intensity.
Hello. I thought you'd never call. I love you
through the receiver. I love you through
poor reception, with a mouthful
of cordless, kinked and curled
from the wall to my ear, after
the wobbling softness of the ringback,
scoured and scented and powdered and
inaudibly in the swollen night. I love you
with water softened fingernails folded
into my palms. I love you though
I'm no victim, no virtuoso.

But hello, Act II. Hello, initiation side effects.
Hello, pit orchestra, follow me on this one,

and party guests, I hope I look alright,
and drinks reserved for intermission

Goodbye, initiation side effects.

Hello, no-one-attempts-suicide-twice bathrobe.

Goodbye, brava. [tongued on glassy teeth]

Hello, telephoned ululations and strawberry splash.

Goodbye, vocal range. [to the floor
measuring square footage]

Hello. [in tones that snap with strands of phlegm]

Hello, lines pointed and deadly cocked. Hello,
blackout curtains. Hello, curtains called tormentors,
drama's trajectories, glass stem's leaves,
mottled shatter, blocking like dosages,
lung-longed music, lungs longing, wet
and mute, chestfuls that aren't
in the budget, fistfuls of
smattered blossom,
storied bird blood.

Hello. I thought it was you calling
last night before I realized my curtains,
where they brush the base-board heater,
had caught fire. No matter how dark
the room, I couldn't wring the burning out.

Ostinato

The volume of pop, the squiggled
 timbre of synthesized tambourine,
the chorus' arpeggiator tent-poling

to erect a three-minute cathedral
 at 116 beats per minute—
 this is no economy of devotion.
A chorus of angels must have

 a powerful low-end to press,
 like an organ's pedal,
the sternum into the heart.

 In the tenth year of her loveless marriage,
Saint Catherine of Genoa was struck
 by her first bout of ecstasy.

She stayed married until the day he died.
 Pocked by pink and green lights,
 just beyond the fog machine's limbs,

wax-fruit-faces roll pleasantly,
 looking for whomever
 they came here with. Saint Francis

preached to his sisters the birds.
 Several people reported Saint Teresa
 levitating during mass.
When someone speaks

 on the dancefloor, heads tilt
like hands into hats to hear.
 At least ninety-eight saints
 left incorruptible corpses,

 many still emitting a fluid
like blood and sweat mixed.
 If you lean too far, you'll feel

 the limit of the muscles
behind your knees. Saint Gertrude
 could not tell religious rapture
 from pathological and would, after, ask

Why didn't you wake me?
not knowing if she had come closer to
or further from God. The song says
put your hands up again and again.

Bone

The bone wasn't always porous on each end;
I can take it to my mouth and blow out hisses.

When the fox that slept on his shed died,
cats crowded the slate roof, stretched into
one another. Now the bone is dark, but

it was once bright with fingers of capillaries
that wrapped around. In the musical instrument
museum, there's a bagpipe made out of a dead cat:

head replaced by a bellows to be pressed
in the armpit, legs replaced by hollow rods

with rows of holes. The label says, "Bagpipe; Poland;
Materials: wood, brass, pig's bladder, cat." Strange
the pig should be parsed like that. I never told him

about the bone I found in his yard
while he frogged his legs in the bathtub.

Once he got so sick, his tongue blistered
and he wouldn't kiss me, but he, instead, opened
his shirt and asked if I was repulsed by his moles,

surprised I had never seen them in the light.
The bone is dark but was once luminous

with blood. Why should I know my lovers' moles
when the fox doesn't need to know what props up
his own black legs? The bone is dark but brass turns

darker. The bone is dark but sometimes
I think about writing on it "I've never once

needed this" and mailing it back to him.
He will open the mailbox and pull out
a twist of something covered in stamps.

Gluey streaks left when he peels the stamps away
will rub off on his hands and buttoned shirt.

Valkyrie Dances on her Own

Nocturnality's technicalities are a ruthless education,
physically speaking. Funding's in blond-dyed

moisture, so sweat for them, you fiery frog-ankle,
until you seem faux finished, your weaponry

sticky with grenadine. Breastplate watered
with colored lights and cup brimming with chipped ice—

men put their hands on you and stay there,
leave little v's of steam between their fingers

on hammered bronze curves. You came armed
with a pin pulled and ignited, and every song's

about loneliness. As the pleats of your skirt widen
over a row of knuckles and his wrinkled root

reaches out from a haze of curls, your request to zip it
away goes the way of myth: spoken in the song's key

and dulled under the pulp of maraschino cherries.
You decide to pay for the next drink yourself.

Out to Win the World to God

aria for Howard Finster

Marcato e stridulo

When I color angels, I coat their eyelashes
heaviest, line lime and sulfur irises with black

billyclub hashes. My wrist's too splintery for heaven,
dunny Master of acrylic feathers,

so I pray with a clacking right hand
that stripes polymer star deaths, harpy talons,

and key slits architecturated to her eyes.
Neighbors pray with the radio on while eldest

daughters pop into the night—gold bubbles
up a champagne flute. Summers:

neighbor boys ask for change to buy worms—
steamy creatures like rolling cat-shoulders,

grimy and cinched, nothing but joints.
When I shaved the waist

of my angel too tight, she snapped
across the middle and shambled

across the garage floor, and I realized I'd painted
her eyes upsidedown, like she's plummeting

and ribboning her crape robe, eyeball first,
to an earth of gnarly boys and dingy quarters.

Slope

aria for mathematician

Andante agitato e smorzando

What silly beginnings familiarity makes.

[light of morning on an angular house]

[smell of beer bottle's sour sigh and dribble]

[soloist unseen behind the bathroom door
that stands diagonal to the window.]

Low trill of piss and pale eggy toes
squished against the bathroom floor.
I'm peaked and stink like a whipped
meringue and hiding from Pythagoras
in his wet reverie of rubbing, rubbing.

[pythagoras downstage where the window is
not like a sea because the sea has no
fog pushing under it but salty rot instead]

He rubs into a moony pane an upward
slanting line—pushes steam that pulls
a coral grin out from under his nail—as tall
as from belly to eyes and as wide as from
piccolo-key nipple to piccolo-key nipple.

[slobber-hot inside reduces outside to a tilting line]

Pythagoras naked and thinking squeakily.

[blue dark grows a sherbet shade of dawn]

His fingers purpled after he pressed the knife
into the cork, pulled out, turned a little, pushed in
again until he made an oozing asterisk.
Wine's a warm kind of wet, but dries
to feel like a palmful of powder. Fog's gash
will re-suture itself when I wash my hands.

[tympani tunes lower lower lower]

I worry about the house holding up

how I worry about the smell of my shirts.
Little rope of urine spooled in the bowl,
but he's never dropped a chain into his mouth,
a cold kind of dry. Pythagoras stretches
his hands' webs, assumes a starry stature indoors.

Valkyrie has a Casual Encounter

You said it means *chooser of the slain*, but he
flashed on salvation and only saw *Kyrie*, heard

a requiem, a head-voice pointed and screw-threaded
through the walls of God's bathroom, and watched

His daughter spelled in letters and dimensions writ
big, beautiful on his screen's all-nite blueish. He wants

your numbers to read like chapters and verses,
not to say goodbye to his own wretched manliness,

so he figures Val-Kyrie must mean *farewell to the LORD*.
Leave the TV on. Leave your helmet on. Leave

your phone on the couch just in case. Better make
tonight a pre-Christian affair and enjoy yourself.

The chainmail across your hips is mostly made of holes,
so pull him through and make him a bloody glitter

of an addled man. Busy gorging on your torso pics,
he forgot to punctuate his emails as questions.

Ghost Variations

Something romantic about noselessness,
a head swarmed grainy, a tongue packed
with splinters. Something of a bust

crusted with birdshit and moss-clogged
bulletholes: Schubert of sausages crossed
in a bowl of pea soup.

I heard you have a disease.

Schumann's *Ghost Variations* came from
long-dead Schubert plinking around E flat.

Yes, but I'm better now.
Yes, but I bleed devils.
Yes, but all flesh is as grass.

Yes, but they come hoof-first.
All flesh is as green, as impossibly itchy
once we roll around in it, as wintered brown. All

flesh is as blighted, as blessed.
Blessed is the blight.

And Brahms of the *Requiem*, of no place
to seed his lawn, of making Schumann malingering.

A tongue in one hand, he pulls, with the other,
a sliver of the pencil Schumann held in his teeth
when he seized. Here is no tongue to say: I AM A SOLOIST!

See Schubert. See Schumann. See Brahms.
See their cheeks that would be gray if they could be
anything at all. Being syphilitic and being a statue
give you, eventually, the same face. Blessed

is the composer whose face darkens
as fog bellies against his statue. Blessed
is the tree running watery into matte sky.

I heard you have a disease.
Yes, but, yes, but. Blessed

is the syphilitic, is yes, is but, is he
who hears the ghost, is a little body
bursting to the brain with bacteria.

See Schubert pressing against
a torso, mahogany in the dark,
and unbuckling. Schubert
snapping his own tin buttons.
Schubert bringing himself,
hoof-first, to a man he hardly
knows. His cheeks grow
grassy stubble. See his little
glasses, his little poisoned body
get incidental—variation, visitation.

Some grasses grow in fits and starts.
Some blessings are best not doled out
to the living. And some men
compose as disease dictates. Blighted

are the men who make music
for a line of the hairless dead.
And what about the ghost
who rattles little tin discs?

The *Ghost Variations* are nobody's requiem,
but most men's fingers are paunch-swelled
and slender enough to slide into ears.

Valkyrie does Porn

An unfinished rose ringed with electrolysis scars and pale
as the motel room walls blushes when your forehead

filigrees slightly wiry. Orgasm under camera requires
focus. The semi-complete tattoo on his shoulder

ripples veiny as he tries to turn you onto your back
and asks if you can take it, but you, granite-hewn

horse-rider, know how to make it look like
you're not trying. Hands flat on drywall and knees

behind your ears, ask him what he wants on his
funeral pyre, if this will end in a wedding or not.

We've seen this one, Valkyrie, but want to know
if you can make the battle-cry melt the gel off his hair.

Ho-jo-ho-to! And ride him into vascular body heat.
And up an octave. And your own immolation devours

the scene. Light-meters and soft-boxes and polyester
drapes burn up in your pyroclastic eye-roll. Money shot.

Layers of Static, Bursts of Tone

The drought had called for desperate measures.
The two farmers spent almost as long lining up eyes
with the holes of their ski-masks and stepping
into rubber waders as they did searching
for a gap in the barbed wire fence. Close to midnight,
just north of the Kansas-Nebraska border,
they pressed into each other for warmth
and pressed bootprints into the dust
as they treaded toward the drying Republican River.
Its mud-caked sides looked like the windshield
of their own filthy truck driven upriver
toward where the water still moved,
where rivals had been syphoning it out
before it could reach their own farms.
Knee-deep at the center of the river, they filled
chipped Dominion jars with the slow current,
held them up to the moon, and looked through the bottom
of crusted glass for clockwise-circling patterns
of glittering mica. Hundreds of feet beneath them,
the Ogallala Aquifer swirled like muscatel
with the moon's pull. The underground sea,
bound by muddy tides, scraped out its bed
under gravity's push and dug itself deeper;
an ear against the earth would have heard it groan,
but the farmers were busy complaining
about cold rubber against their legs.
Hours later, near dawn, they had both
gathered perfect jarfuls and swallowed the water's dirt
that weighed heavily in their throats—completed the charm
against competing farmers. They smashed their jars
on the side of the road and climbed into the truck
just as bands of mauve seeped over the horizon.
The driver rubbed sweat from his cheeks and picked beads of wool
from his eyebrows; his passenger, face still covered,
switched on the radio. They sat for minutes,
listening to the interference of Jupiter's magnetic field.

Libretto

after Britten and Auden

The composer wants a plot of *hillocks*.
 he pronounces it with a little [lump of]
tongue [whipped] onto his palate,
 as if libretto's a geography.

Sweat collects between his shoulders
 in fingernail trimmings of lavender
moonlight as they row parallel to shore.
 The librettist eyes [the wet trail down]

 the composer's ropey back, measures.
Libretto's a length of silence
whittled away at by little words:
 bush [flamboyantly budded rococo],
 dune [unfocused by firelight between pebbles],
 wood [water-polished to tree-sized cylinders],
 wake [cross-cutting the rowboat
 which tilts its belly to permit the water].

The librettist wants a plot of tiny sounds,
 tiny visions. [bush dune wood wake]
 [at night they're all lavender]
Mostly breath of starting

 and stopping, *hillocks* gets ugly when sung—
the composer [nearly] contradicts himself.
 Opera's the sum of their blindnesses.
Notte e giorno faticar.

 Blackening horizon's a long overture.
 Don Giovanni begins with *No...*
 Lippily pinching his cigarette,
the librettist steps off the [lavender] shore,

walks into the ocean to fill his bucket
 with black water to extinguish the fire.
Both [their bodies] remember the waves
 as they're lying in bed, re-rowing

 into sleep—muscle memory of rising,
 falling [and permitting]. The composer:
some vowels are licks of lilt.
 [dome dune bush wood wake]

[wake day notte no hillock]

Stepping into the length of waves,
the librettist didn't see lavender
umbrellas of jellyfish at his ankles.

At dawn dewy domes of spiderweb
are the color of soggy ash.

Two Brothers and a Year in the Shape of a Triangle

duet for mathematicians

Alla valzer con moto

Press pins into map's
ersatz vellum, then
bind up a paper ocean

in scalene segments. Once they're pulled
the water's wired for light.
Held up to the window,

the map juts out cones
of light that end
on our foreheads.

Sun-circle over a brother's
eyebrow: pinhole projection
for winter's eclipse.

Then the blizzard,
and then he's an axis on which
snowspecks tilt. Three points

make a plane, make him
cleaved and cleaved.
Whirling triangles define

The river there ran so close to the sea
it changed directions with the tide.

Delta's the difference from,
the distance between, the before

but also after. It sifts its shape
from silt thumbed by moon,

strips its three sides
necessary for definition.

But if the body's mostly
a river on foot dropping

the rest, then delta's a peeling
of our clumsier dimensions.

and redefine the surfaces
running through him.
Statement: afterlife.

Reason: bisected body.
Little pictograph
for bony fish becomes

a four, and little bones
thread through sand
as frilly rot floats

up to the ice. The ice tastes
like the fish melting
through it if you taste

it long enough,
and there's a formula
for this frozen diffusion.

Is unpacked fishmeat
pummeled into grit, does it get
back the speckle of its scales?

World willed
into the shape
of a triangle

Our bodies are mostly each other's.
A snowflake melts into a ball

of wet around a speck of dirt.
In each of the glints on my collar

is a fleck of delta. River flows
from here to there and home is

neither. Yes. River flows from
here around us to ocean. No.

Here to delta. Here to delta.
There to delta. Here.

is pressed slow as delta.
Before and also after.

Where here are monsters,
there are no shapes left
for them to take

but lacy fishmeat
turned triangular.

I'm Last of Man. Help Me. Help Me.

aria for Royal Robertson

Con la forza di un uragano

Andrew whips his boomerang of metal-white
bug-wings that flap in a dinosaur swing—

boggy bomb over everyone down to the center
of the Earth. Did he come from outer space?

In space, men and women have the same haircut.
Here, my haircut's the only haircut left.

Storms don't care how paper and wood differ,
how branches give the house the what-for

and paper piles up in pulpy corners.
Storms don't trust what men do to trees

matters much, only that what set
them budding gets them snapping.

Loamy red eye that bulges from the cicada's head
in matte marker sees your lust, lady.

Air after Andrew's so heavy that fan blades
curl like they want to touch themselves

in a drooly green dream, that even they dread
no one's watching when the world's drowned.

Storms see no difference between scorned and sinner,
but the cicada's filthy eyes are getting rinsed.

Character Shoes

Rabbits are digging
beneath the shoestore.
Fuzzed bodies fill
rabbit-sized tubes
under the foundation,
and the fur boot
is the size of the foot.
The vinyl fish-shaped flats,
peep-toes of leech
and espadrilles of tender
belly, have sexy names
like HILARY, ANISE, FIONA.
Bibliomancy: divination
by pointing at words
with eyes closed.
If, when she puts
the sneakers in the box,
the left toe points up,
she'll buy them.
Toothy lace-knot tightens.
If pulled tighter, the name
won't be yours.
Step with heel, then toes,
then you're somewhere.
From here, they're anywhere.
The shoestore is built
on a web of rabbits.

My Long Hair is Braided

is the only aria from *The Amber Witch* performed anymore. The soprano, in her silver-studded belt, four fingers wide and rimmed with crystals, tucked it into the middle of her recital, and I wondered how the buckle was latched. Having spent the last summer in retail, I learned the technology that held women's clothes together: hooks and eyes, cogs and gears, levers and wedges. I'd show customers buttons hidden at the ankles or a strip of elastic sewn into the pump's upper, explain how to step into a dress through the armpit or how a blazer's invisible velcro kept the bust in place. One woman, holding a pair of slacks out at me, was silently asking for a fitting room, but I reached inside the pants to show her the silver clasp hidden in the seam like a necklace sewn into the hip. The seat sighed open in her hands as she glared at me before marching off to find someone with more discretion as to the machinery affixed to her pants. No matter how many times I'd painted my face with makeup or piled on nickel-plated jewelry, there were some things I wasn't initiated into knowing. A boy may walk in heels, but must not make it look easy. A boy may know to wear an odd number of accessories, but must arrange them like a table setting. His drag must be as gaudy as a rolled /r/ in English opera. The man I was dating knew someone who knew someone, so we were able to go backstage after the show and meet the soprano. I loved the Wallace, I said, as she reached out and hugged me, thinking I was someone else. Without a word she let go and then hugged a friend. Where the belt had been cinched was a crease like a slash between "and" and "or."

Henry's Girls

oratorio for characters

Alla danza burlesca

BESSIE

We're slivers of our sex written without
astrology's implied endings,
half-born under his starless sky.

TANIA

I star in the famous passage,
where he free associates
everything I shit after sex:
arpeggios, narwhals, franc pieces,
marmalade, the foot of a ladder.
He needed a new geography,
a famous passage.

GERMAINE

His streets: the urgent spray
of a gutted and rusted bidet
across the page and his paunch.
But it's troublesome
for us tiny fictions in his city.
That wasn't really Henry.
This isn't really Paris,
but that's real gut, real rust.

UNA

Mine sounds like it's sore underneath,
like it'll crust over,
swell up and fall off.
Our names are sounds inside
lips curled around
an icy chunk he could fit in
but never swallow without
gagging on the taste of fingers
so cold he shoved them in his mouth

just to know they were there.

MARA

Every secret scent
and rough patch,
and crack that runs too deep
and too far for me to trace,
and strand of hair too long to enmesh fingers
and only ever glides between from root to tip,
and every appendage ending in torso
and beginning out of the air,
and the dampest laughter
are pressing against the yellow dress
I wear because it's Thursday.
It's always Thursday.

OTHER TANIA

Henry Miller's Henry Miller ironed me,
folded me, re-inflated me at a dollar-a-page.
The two tramped through their soles
in a Paris winter. Can the stylist endure
self-abuse without a character?
Which half of which shoe fills with snow?

MONA

Half-way through he changed
my name and I changed his.
The dress stayed yellow
along the hem, where pigment
runs like watercolors.

BEATRICE MILLER

Fictions: cold-water walk-up, awkward legion
of childhood friends, my half-light, half-wit
presence, his departure, his Brooklyn.
I can't judge his cities. He strokes the absurd
smooth. We do the same to our half-truths.

BARBARA MILLER

Semi-stars
at a daughter's
birth light
his half-watt
end.

$$(x-a)^2+(y-b)^2=r^2$$

Sometimes we arrive at things already complete:
reflections off a bowl's rim, distractions
in spode. We identify

ourselves by shape, color, and imprint,
though planed see-through
isn't an option. Our first dinner

party was the sort of gathering I'm too young
to speak in. Proving my maturity
is like swapping razors;

there comes a point when
"intimacy" is no longer the right word.
Don't leave your fork and knife

dangling like skin tags. Ask permission to touch
someone you don't know. Scoop from the far side.
Pass port. Pass port.

There are appropriate methods of panic.
Pass port. Numbers don't prove
a story's truth.

In our kitchen we noticed how ears lock like
dovetails. Our circle has been pared
so small, the street's noise presses

on my window like a reception.
The shower's been running for so long,
not even the mold can stand its heat.

Etude for the End of Time

duet for visions

Furioso ma non troppo

When the teabag sinks:
moon-blond tendrils.
Begin with a beginning.

But only if the water's boiling,
if the teacup is white—only
then the triangle of lemon.

Wage your wrapped war,
airtight styrofoam ancestor.

In an attic bedroom, primed-white
walls multiply the square
of sun through a single window.

Trajectory of slopes and ceilings
like a proof. Statement:
cue the lights. Reason:
cold butterknife gouges like morning.

My autobiography is
a thousand years of cues.

But the sun's angle is only right
in summer. In Winter, the window boxes
a pink slope of snow, the neighbors' roof,
and I am a third my original size.

You'll see me when towers
tumble, when you make your hat
out of teabags, when you're
a dose of gossip.

And under that?

And though he wears a rainbow
on his head, the white shall not register it,
the water shall not register it,

When the world ends:
trumpets and gongs
and mystery of sound.

Consummation of celluloid, the hand-stained
streamers of squares: when the map
curls over and devours itself.

Balance on you moon, scarred madonna
of a thousand names, with you headful
of stars and cup of tea.

The pole sewn into my dress connects
the sleeve to the hem. A parrying wrist
makes it one expressive mouth:
lip-tremble of the damned.

It melts into the color of tea—lemony
pucker and honeyed shut—but listen
for the starry unspooling of chiffon.

What *Dies Irae* is this? What twilight?
What boredom but the glass rhythm
of windows in a hi-rise condo?

Follow me with various disasters.

Some girls don't know how to handle
themselves in a crisis, how a drop of snow
melts into pink, how white it is
under that and, under that, pink again.

Can't build the snow first.

the growth of the branch shall not care,
and the trumpet shall play and not play.

Shall not play and play.

Will not play and then not play.

Fire doesn't offer resistance
but tempts it from fashion
and blue-orange glass.

The scene is stock footage.
This apocalypse is rehearsed,
and acoustics are terrible.
All we hear's the water sifting into mesh.

Fire's disaster enough, sister.
It tempts geometry's
patience for ancients.

Counter Tenor Crown

Boy,

The kind of story here, the rules for doling out
tragedy, is no cushion for this fuselage
like a femur. Convention is no diagram for
your gleaming body's dismemberment.
The teeth of your zipper nipped a fleck of flesh—
not yours. Now everything softens like marrow.
What you gain from carrying a dim menace
in bones curved with grace and submission
is a silence broader than snow-clad cities. Burning
bad news seldom thaws black ice knuckles,
and putting your dukes up at a bespoke narrative
won't diminish its velocity. Slowly,
the story goes that we learn our own fragility.
The story goes on without us if it has to.

Man,

Whatever we don't, you and I shall assume,
unerringly understand, it's up to us to look it up.
Your consummate cohort, male humans of history,
isn't but birthright, butch bequest—yours, maybe mine.
Whose inheritance (Gutenberg's?) am I going to get?
Whoever stamped it second, lived long enough
to bind it in books. Masculinity's mostly
my limbic library, and also the apogee
I'm patiently anticipating. Man, I don't desire
anything but boyhood. I'd rather not remember
works and words you worried and rubbed into records.
What I assume, shall you assume? Shouldn't we whip
these shroud-sheets? My required reading list
makes nothing like knowledge, not even its evidence.

Boy,

The hurt that kids like you can expect isn't the hungry kind of guts yarned and knotted. I'm hardly qualified to give you an account of how careful gardens yield the most brilliant flowers, but, having cut gushing yellows and reds from rough-hewn kinds of gardenia and yarrow, I've seen the horrific cultivation to be gained from haphazardly cast grain. Yesterday I saw, woven into an arbor, little twists of daylilies I thought were weeds lodged with total dexterity through the most alien-looking tarantulas of daisies. Think, why does rope looped and twined decide, then, to weave into itself and leave the tinge of disaster thoroughly? Your hurt's the task of daffodils: the arduous blooming.

Man,

Adumbrated destiny,
calculated shadow that
evolution isn't aging, as
Getting hard is getting
ingenuity of the chest:
ka-ching below the
make a crotch
original sin? Just a
quietude as opposed to
Stuff this stuff,
underwhelming adulthood.
wonderful fodder for
You've taught me two
1) Manhood's for sissies.

biological fate,
darkens behavior:
far as I'm aware.
hard. Broad, handsome
jugulars don't make a
left clavicle, but split,
near the heart. Where's my
precious, lattice-work of
rock-rigid anatomy.
this avaricious and
Virility is a myth—
ex-infantrymen.
zero-exception policies.
2) Only bones get soft.

Boy,

The emerald insinuation around a pigeon's neck
knocks black out with refraction—stretches,
catches headlights and fires. But no one studies
sturdy bodies. No one measures out in verse
bird-like clots with matted claws. You should
shed your obsessions with the dirty dove's green
ring—fastened delirium of pedestrian concern.
Unlearn what you're convinced is your vision.
Shun the hypnotizing repeats, the tantric loops
spooled up and over, up and over, up and over.
Reverb is emptiness. Epiphany is just music
sickened by its own replaying. Amateurism
matches lacquers of gold to what's known.
Flown far from song—your birds don't breathe.

Man,

Lousy lover with sylvan-scape—sounds
like a lonely story for sorry stalkers,
doesn't it? Still-life with lemon and weevil
describes the rarefied look of loud winners
better. The weevil nibbles softly from behind,
between the niçoise salad and French bougie
wine. Against the solid black background,
the wine's a seamy brown. Buonissimo!
A clever Dutch-style portrait, you and your
hunting dogs, or a picture of your yummy
dinner stroked with Flemish verve: which would
dangle most suitably from your gallery walls?
Their splendid frames are made of children's violas.
The shrunken violas were made of fine splinters.

Boy,

Those who walk without sin are so hungry,
but she, liquefied with starvation, proves
the inverse. Jellyfish: scrap of angel
wing, beaten bolus, blinded and holy
cataractic lens. Her heavenly loves
are digested in her rapt limbs. Careful,
the seraph without a stomach—body
a white flame licked from the sword—cleaves
from the duty of naming. So fearful
a sight makes seeing self-invisibility.
Impossible—

Man,

The draftsman drafts.

The craftsman crafts.

The frontiersman fronts.

The sportsman sports.

The handyman hands.

The sandman sands.

The archer quivers.

The donor livers.

Your role's formal:

to make it normal,

to stamp out mystique

with a burly physique.

You're a busted minivan,

an old St. Elmo's Fire-man.

Boy,

Surely sense's feeble momentum loses its shrapnel-zone's far-reaching perimeter in shadow. Strange fact about pigment: the shortened scope of vision somehow makes shaded tones seem verily black instead of shuttered, subdued versions of magentas, chocolates, and scarlets. Fundamentals in charge of sight get forgotten at midnight, when boys are forced to seize the azures made up in favor of such assured tones as muddy foreheads and soured chardonnays. Please hold votive lamps skillfully, or choose to be foul Eros—light sparking off your chest and prayers for scars that shine precious silver.

Man,

Get icky, Heracles; I'm your Iolaus: lover/
nephew. Get newborn; I'm your baby-self
strangling snakes. Get slithery; I'm your snake,
making your making mythic. Get grown up.
Go faceless, fortified with a dramatist's
mask. Go heroically under the mountain, where
we used to sleep. Go youthfully to the usurious
ends of our little loves, little lores. Go away.
Give me a sip of the ceremonial wine without
cutting me. Give it classily like a proper pagan.
Or conceivably classically. Give an assignment
to the theorists following along at home. Give out.
Gather your receipts and hope for a refund.
Gather your yoke, your years, your nerve.

Boy,

Suck, smack, tick off tooth by tooth the taste
foaming up your tongue: white dusting of thrush.
The squeeze along the brink—sick and earthy itch
squelched onto your cheeks—in agitated grist
and crunch of the pink, sickly sinew is a symptom
no one warned against (before or after you got it).
Welts strewn into your throat? A few did.
But chewing with jaws like Byzantium
burning? Sacking your Carthage mouth? This
Sherman's march to your gums' decimation
shouldn't distress me as it does, but, boy, listen:
the soldier sings with a bayonet between his
teeth. Stand wider than a frontline of dentures
and let the empire in your head yellow and rust.

Man,

New coast, new city, navigated now
through narrow lanes named for normal
directions. Nothing here, not even curves—
nimble, naked niches nailed to a network.
Super sprawl of system supine in supplication
to the surroundings. Why sample the saddle?
Stride simply into soporific streets from such
sordid outsides. City subordinated to the stream.
Each element of the erotic essays everything.
Every electric edge elongates to educate.
The egress to evisceration exceeds elbow room.
Where woken wanderers wind up: western
bodies, western voices; wound and wound
city around body; wary and weighed wonder.

Boy,

The smell of smoke is smoke. The thick
of fog is rain tomorrow. The luminous
soprano's voice is practiced. The body
between us wormed and funneled outward.
The stuff of time is most like the line of ants
filing through the crack beneath your wall—
hundred of red bodies dispersed in the carpet.
The itch is the thought of the thought of the itch.
When I think of you, boy, it's all animals
and the fester, perhaps ripening, of powdery
lips—quiet and moist. No need to consolidate
our lessenings, to tally cells we might share,
because the fractured song asks for more voices.
There are things a sonnet can't help but be.

Man,

The subwoofer in your car rumbles testicles
against beige leather. Perhaps that vibration
is where masculinity resides: glands against
upholstery. There's something to be said
for contact. There's something to be said
for geometry, a bisection of a line segment—
from stem to sternum, lung to lung, thumb
to ride—contracting and expanding as it passes.
Maybe years is the suitable measurement.
Boy behind, man ahead, perfect pulse
playing between. Us three are cruel and kept,
penned and penned. If I were to ask why
the repetitions, you'd evade the question
and say I'd know soon enough. Soon. Enough.

Secular Cantata

for gay men's chorus

1. Adagietto con moto

Teeth packed
in the smallest of mouths—
the pomegranate opens
like a vowel.
The dove ascends at the clap
as if the clapping makes the dove.
Beating wings echo it.
They are bright and they are bright
and body is borne as light.
Located in the chest,
diagrammed in muscle
is the celebration
we've not thought yet.
This is the making of things.

2. Lamentoso e sostenuto

Liquid moan from the cup—
spill the good wine first.
What drunk is this warm
and what sister proud as goats?
Body's brink is the beginning
of books of gods.

3. Andante grazioso

What white glove is this,
lined with blue satin?
Whose hand is this,
marking the air with x's?
What kiss matches my
pucker of petal and knuckle?
Yellow fist of crocus' center
lowers to my hand in the soil.

4. Pesante

Deliver me from the wings of bone,

the dark night of echoes,
the litany of ghosts of sons,
the folding arms of the altar
shedding their gold leaf, the rows
and risers and stillness.
Deliver me from stillness.

5. Larghissimo assai

Must we sweat into each
other's hands in the dark?
The voice is not a body part.
I feel your pulse; it's a greater
mind than the thought of it.
Everything is new.
Singing your voice,
I land higher and bear light.
The voice is not a body part.

6. Poco adagio brillante

Then, shot pink and tangerine,
sunlight beams into the attic.
Slung over a chair, the fabric opens
to the light. Between warp
and weft, tines of sun spire
through the blanket.
The weakest points
of the weave
luminous at last.

God of Teenagers

Those years were miracles
too heavy for the ritual
of risk. Perfect pivot
grown into elbows, bracelets
made of fingernails:
a charm against handcuffs,
and a buzz captured
how prophets recover
destiny—there were a few
initiated into this.
Standing on an beach,
under a threnodizing
moon, she plucked
grasses and asked:
If I stuff these into
my shirt and howl,
will you take my picture?
Cream added
to tequila-spiked
coffee curdles and rises,
smoke-hued: curse.
He lines the glass box
up with his pupil and
the frame goes dark.
All the oracles were blind.

Pareidolia in Greens

Green's a grandmother's squat yard's perennial reseeding—
sour stung thatching of mint weed. Green's a muddled myth:

queen of the underworld jealous of another's good looks.

[green's good-looking] Green queen turns her into mint leaves.
Green van, green dress, green-eyed nudities. A grandmother's

house, withdrawn from the street, was mostly painted, stained,

and carpeted green. Her hair done up like a Pontiac fin
and her husband quietly jealous with a crumby job while she

traces lines of a strange butt's flask print. Green at the edges

where grass got through his denim's widening mesh—green denim
made mostly of holes and green blood sprung from a grandmother

who sees him, curled like a sprout, how she sees warps

in her wallpaper. Later: green funeral. [mint covers the smell
of dead bodies] Green rot between my grandfather's teeth.

Green flowers printed on a plastic cup of warm vodka. Green stem

undressed with a rough hand sounds like a laugh. Patterned tumbler
throws the suburbs all across the walls and they, grandmother

and green grandfather, pull the furniture across the living room until

the green carpet is swirled with giant fingerprints. Let's get drunk,
baby, and make it look like our house because it's not his anymore.

Green's what plastic turns into. Green's what stubble looks like

before it's hair. Green cheeks. Green of yellow. Green of tangerine.
Green of flowers painted, chipped, and transparent. Green grows

on my lip. [so fine I only shave once a week] Drink like a grandfather

but weep like the husband who cursed him into the mint weeds
leaning from the house but never making it to the street.

Yield to Total Elation

aria for A.G. Rizzoli

Sacra e con moderazione

If desire's fear's gaudy cloth—beaded sarong
or drum-tight veil—why should it be drawn

as dimpled grapefruit-lobe thighs or bookended
breasts aggressively rounded? Silhouette's

a pair of lips compassed in granite whorls,
and, O, to draw a love so small it could be dried with

one tissue, a mouse or a doorknob! But my mother
sleeps perpendicular to me, reach of a cantilever,

though I think of her as a container, like the glass
globe grown around the coffee or canvas sacks

strapping down uniformed men as they go door
to door—starched and impressively harmless.

Can you put a television in a cathedral? Can
you build a water feature as wet as giving,

as the snow on a screen that characters come out of?
To draw a face as it looks when the TV is only

just coming on: polite trespasser regularly
smiling for the children while their parents

up-curl their own wet lips from tooth-squares
with the manners that only happen in homes!

Symbolic Analyses of Lightning Through Water
songs for mathematician

Aleatoric, use binary number system

Tiny genius blown sharp in wind whittled
peninsula. Tiny genius blown bigger: [yes/no]
[here/away]. Tiny [calculation/genius] [vice/versa].

*

Giant lake droops into peninsula
and buries bog. Always algebra calculated
quietly. Peninsula swallows lake: [here/away].

*

Electricity on angel's terms like mountain on fire's.
Bog's boundaries break like angels:
[sexless/all business]. Dark begins brightening.

*

Bright begins dark, banded revolution
around battery, bands and battering
of bright across bog where thunder [rumbles/brambles].

*

If I am the tiny genius of the (un)expected
then (dis)simulated and (in)exact. [O/()] is the
more/less poetical [()/apocalyptic].

*

When I pour water down the blackboard,
it makes a cross through the numbers. [Problematic(/)
crucifixion]. Mind, angels will swim.

*

Either the mountain is (infinite) or it isn't.
There is no terrace like afterlives.
There is no purgatory for the tiny yes.

*

The peak is the
the bog is the
is [angel/maybe].

lighting how
lightning. Spark
[Never/maybe].

The Last Castrato

When ribs continue lengthening and the cartilage
never hardens, a chest can hold enormous pig-belly

lungs. Giant breath and kiddie cords, wind over
a narrow alabaster sinkhole, voice of a mummified

child. See him romping downstairs on Easter morning—
sheathes of skin rolling off his shins—squealing

God's praise for candy. Mummy-baby with chocolate
cheeks pressed to teeth, how do you, in immaculately

white scarf, open your lipsticked mouth so wide?
But now: another victim of spiritual and sartorial trends,

a giant golden raisin smashed upon a shrine.
What man wants to know how much body to lose

for the sake of grace? Who wears a white scarf anymore?
A calf on its back, same rouged snout as our ruthlessly

pater noster-ing angel-throat, strains its neck off the ground.
What sounds like a calf's scream is a grace note tripping up

from more than an octave below. Eventually, we go for the blood
of the ruthlessly youthful. A needle tracing the suture

along the top of the skull vibrates almost like a voice,
but the castrato's skull never closes. It leaves a silent gap.

Miserere Mei, Deus

aria for Mozart

Vivace, alla melodia giovanile

Never trust a teenager, not even
the one tucking cadences under his wig,

where, according to puberty's genius,
they fit snugly. Gee, my nervous

legs wobble on the marble floor while I watch
mouthing faces mouthing Allegri's *Miserere*—

judged too holy for anywhere but the holiest churches.
I am not sorry about stealing your song, Gregorio.

I am not sorry about faking these nerves, and I am
not sorry you'll be famous for being plundered by a child.

Who's entitled to mercy? Perhaps only God himself,
who isn't us. Strange salvation comes in powder

rubbed into false hair, little boy bodies
worked into God-locks by his big boy man hands.

Whose title is Emergency? I grew hair on my body.
and plucked a strand from my sternum's notch,

little hatch in my parting ribs. Bead of ink, bulged
on black follicle, deposit the dot beside the B.

Cut the cube from stone—heels to make me taller
and stamp out marble shards of model planets.

A Brief History of Loneliness and U.F.O.'s
suite for boys' choir

A windmill demolishes it.
Aurora, TX 4/17/1897

What we found around six that morning
were scraps of shining metal, pieces
of Judge Proctor's mill, indecipherable
materials from the airship, and enough
of the remains to know he wasn't of this world.
We'll toss what we don't want and the scraps
of martyrdom into the eye of the well.
The funeral will be at noon tomorrow.

The sky phenomena hung suspended.
Fort Knox, KY 1/7/1948

Two hours after communication was lost,
the gnarled remnants of the jet
and a pile of bone and gristle were found
driven into the ground with astounding force.
Though the object's shape was debated,
we all described it as something inverted.

Grown from seven to 17 feet
Flatwoods, WV 9/12/1952

It was the smell they remembered most.
When asked to draw the monster they saw,
six boys sketched out the towering stench
of citric vomit, palm sweat, prolonged decay,
and leering eyes a the sin inhaled. Later,
we saw the seventh witness brought
on TV, asked to stand, unsmiling,
before a picture she did not draw.
This is not it, she thought.
It didn't smell like this at all.

[See picture 1]
Warren, MN 8/27/1979

[Take note of the nothing

on either side of the road.
Look at his eyes, the burnt corneas,
and tell us he didn't see anything.
Trust in a spotless reputation.
Imagine: waiting for a ride
between night and morning.
Fall in love with controversy
but try to ignore travesty.
Occupy the space in between
and make it last forever.]

This has really opened up people.
Phoenix, AZ 3/13/1997

Or rather span the space across,
like the crooked row of lights,
maybe six or seven or seventeen,
implying a slit in the night sky.
Standing barefoot on our driveway,
the cactus blossoms dusty,
we wait for the neighbors
to leave us alone with them.

They formed a graceful arc.
Phoenix, AZ 2/6/2007

Sometimes (meaning this time)
we were lucky to have even heard,
to have heard the voices murmur
shapes and colors: an amber arrow
directing the gaze eastward.
The sun had singed
these pinpricks to nothing
by the time I turned to see.

Recall the famous.
Phoenix, AZ 4/21/2008

Sometimes (meaning this time)
traces of pressure were all I saw,
fists pushed against closed eyes.
More than enough.
Light without explanation
was never anything new.

Definitions

Not until the bottle's empty do we call it a soldier,
and a moon through brown glass
is so dim it practically shines backward. Unlike

horseshoe *u*'s and stemless *n*'s, tire tracks
don't indicate direction. Black snippy shapes
spell one dimension of a spinning circle.

Spell has fifteen definitions.
Gull. Null. Gull. Null.

Given enough time, there's both a bird and not.
Herons look like backward-flying geese—
pointed toes toothless as their bills. Are juniper

berries backward-blooming magnolias,
blue waddings of footsole petals?
Were there magnolias where you came from?

Being from a hundred places,
why not nowhere?

In the dark, a bowl of berries is coffee
or money. I'd like to know now
about your childhood: when you stole candies

from that gas station, ate them on your back,
and sugar and ants, biting your cheeks,
filled your babyfat jowls.

But *goodnight, goodnight* like a perfect
slice of cake cut from nothing.

Signs of Infidelity

[overture]

Little

dog

asleep

carries

himself

upstairs

one hair

at a time—

belly fur

like lymph

splattered

interstitially.

He's learned

not to sleep

in one place

at a time.

[curtain up]

[act I, scene i: six signs of infidelity]

While the dog sleeps himself across the stairs,
the house gets taller and the vinyl siding splits.

1. Speaking with the foamy volume of a performance.
2. Music converging on the sternum like red light on the retina.

Flaps of siding snap and curl into themselves.
Rupture changes dimensions: rate of woody vines hardening,

3. Waking up confused, unsure where he slept.
4. Financial secrets like coins with flecks of tongue.

distance from man to dog to wolf,
length of strides man takes as he steps

5. Wet rag of you pulled out and played.
6. Refusal to represent animals on stage.

over dreamy pale hairs. He imagines
dog's tiny skull graphed for trepanation.

[phonograph cylinder: roller carved with woody pattern

rolled over softened vinyl siding for oaken effect]

[act I, scene ii: dinner's slowly cranked]

Dogs don't have cheeks.
When the man cooks

vegetables, he snaps
and thinks of possum

slippery down his throat.
With his muzzle

buried in the possum's gears,
he can taste mushrooms

growing through its pelvis:
flared and earthy.

He knows, said little dog to the wolf, the shower
running so the man couldn't hear. You need to stop
calling here. He asked me who it was with the spluttering
cigarette lighter voice, so I asked why his sounds
like busted tile and thrushy tongue.

During dinner, man asks
the dog about muscles.

The act's a muscle, man says.
The gears are muscle,

says the dog, cranking me, you,
possum, flowers, and wolf.

[same wood-knot presses
into the house interstitially]

[man's aria: acute onset]

Before the numbers have become
measurable, it's felt in the throat,
and then the torso. The nightsweat,
like the body pushing out its satin,
is only for the hairless though.

Little knots of gland behind the tongue
ripple through night, sing worthlessly
in mornings. Sometimes
the tongue blisters and bleeds.
Suspect muscle, lying muscle

cools eventually, and then thrush—
like fur moving down your throat,
swallowing the possum in one gulp.
Sign: body unmade into number
of gears turning over small fingers.

Coda:

When the body's
pushed open and turned
for the sake of performance,
the performance
is opera.

[act I, scene iii: dancers licked on money's secret]

By the fence he lifts his leg at each plank
to arc urine across it. Every spike of particle board

turns a new shade of green with the splatter (mint,
pistachio, seafoam) up to the flowers, where

the little dog stops, where the flowers are carnivorous.
No enzyme and digestive juice, all tooth and bolus.

The man comes outside to cradle the dog's face
in his hands. The man has the smallest hands the dog

has ever seen. Hair pet the wrong direction bristles:
a ruff of even smaller hands. The dog's are nothing

like hands at all—how the wolf's tongue is nothing
like kisses against the little dog's teeth—nothing like teeth,

but a crooked yellow row of medicines—a capsule
kickline. Tap on his jaw and hear

[leitmotif]

hollowness inside his snout.

[little dog's aria: words never used]

adonisian, boustrophedon, cuckold, denouement, effable, fabrication, garrote...

All-a-sudden I consider the
building space between kitchen and

commode, the house that's too limp for
dual residency, and each hill around it

filled with sudden space. Growing in

height stunts other dimensions. For
instance, jungly kudzu. Literal or not,

my body's too big for the two of us
now. Now as in our old functions:

parents and friends splitting
quaintly sheeted cake,

rambling uncles describing
summers else-when. It's

tomorrow and even summer now.
Unsolicited time, avuncularity

vouchsafed by widening and time.

X-rated (what else?) phone calls,
yellow/red flowers & yellowing domesticity,

zero parameters (perimeters) for marriage.

Coda:

Possum's face—intervals
of skin under white hair—
is smeared with garbage.
This way, the wolf can't smell him.
Dog loves wolf.
Man loves dog.
Man makes possum of himself.

[act I, scene iv: offstage]

If the director says he can't represent something on stage, he only means that he can't imagine it. That's his problem, and it's his job to remedy the situation or you find a new director.

[the wolf would take five puppeteers: one with a pole
for each limb and a fifth for its head.]

If you can't fit a house onto the stage, then the house is your stage. If you can't fit a stage into a house, then the stage is your house. If you can't calculate the size of either, then use the blood.

[the little dog would require six. an extra puppeteer would
have to operate its ears. dogs are more expressive than wolves.]

If you can't get funding for your opera, then try cross-casting. A single vocalist can sing the parts for all non-human roles. If he's talented, then the audience won't hear he's also the director.

[the possum, who only drinks in circles until
he falls asleep, requires just one hand.]

If you're still struggling to pay your performers, the animals' vocalist can sing the role of the man as well. The breaks between numbers will provide him with time to prepare another range.

[the only difficulty, then, is the carnivorous flowers.
this music comes with thousands of them.]

[intermission: program notes]

Opera's continued success is due exclusively to the medium's predictability. Opera's characters will die as soon as they walk onto the stage.

This is not philanthropic. This is barely even true. The number opera is defined by its pauses between its musical pieces, by tonal consistency, utter lack of surprise, suggestion after suggestion, invariability.

A million dying men went to the opera. A million dead men do not go to the opera. A man with a CD4 count of less than two hundred does not spare his numbers, does not have spaces between his numbers, is made mostly of numbers.

Dramatically, this is true enough: little dip and little lift and pink pills big with toxicity, then a shot of steroids to the hip when his body pushes out the pills so the last sign of infidelity is a rash around the wrists and knees.

High note. High art. High camp. High animal drag.

Recurring themes direct attention toward the inevitable; therefore, number operas are always comedies.

[act II, scene i: nine signs of infidelity]

The joy of being kept comes from
afternoons at the bay window.
Clouds reared up like half-men/

1. Mentioning a name in conversation one too many times.
2. Exotic gifts like bouquets of carnivorous flowers.
3. Hidden hands when he's lying because they aren't hands at all.

half-beasts. Red rag
of forehead when the hoof
lands is the joy of being hairless.

4. Confusing red for yellow and green for greens.
5. Suddenly upset at being kept.
6. Growing uncomfortable when bestiality is brought up.

What's counted in the blood
is only real in the blood.

[what's performed first
and felt later is opera]

Dogfoot: four faces and a meal for one

7. When he likes it slick like a possum's gears.
8. When he likes it sudden like a stripped gear's slipping.
9. When he likes it ribboned like a strip of yellow light between red curtains.

[act II, scene ii: offstage]

Why do they sing like that?

[because it's more difficult]

Why do they dress like that?

[because sweat shows through the fabric]

Why do they sweat?

[because the word is so quiet, it's the only way to tell they're singing at all]

Why can't I understand the words?

[because you're not reading them]

Why can't I just listen?

[what if you hear the wrong thing]

Like what?

[appended
[bloodborne and invisible
[century of stoniness
[daily and nightly
[early dawn possum bait
[for how long
[glowing skin and teeth
[heart
[idle
[january isn't dark if you

up-ended]
wholly indivisible]
closeness and boniness]
red, yellow, and wholly]
every dark symptom's mate]
forever]
pillowy pale eyes]
coffee terribly dark]
hide all]
can you reckon sex if you]

[know to stay in the yellow
[light of the freezer
[mixing your fingers with
[narrow slivers of ice and
[ordering bags of coffee so old they're
[probably as bitter and
[quiet as your
[red-rimmed nails and yellow-
[stained palm pads
[that haven't been touched by much
[unless you count uncauterized
[volumes of
[wounds and
[X's that once were kisses
[yet have become starkly
[zoological

know to say it and aloud]
like other men do]
maybe you forget which]
arrow shivers up your end]
of things or who was taken first]
who was blown bigger than]
coral gibbous]
of redless moon up and yellow-]
ing partly]
then who swells downy with fluff]
white as a belly round as an eye]
visions of]
wolf and]
presses in sheets shaped like]
wolf have been darkly]
pathological]

[wolf's aria: history of zoology]

The first animals didn't have feathers.
They had petals. Flowers are too common
a motif for a drama like ours.
With muzzle in soil, the possum

smells what's passed through the flowers.
From the hill, I count the nodes on the house
to figure how tall it is. When it splits,
dining room becomes lesion, a possum

walks in zeroes on stage. Imagine the cold-blooded
springing a thousand silky slips from their scales.
Flower-chorus sings itself into stems,
and sharp satiny flaps flip on the soil.

Coda:

The easiest way to represent an animal
on stage is to puppeteer its carcass.

[act II, scene iii: tricks, signs, blood, and more]

Inexpertly arranged flowers are yellow until sun,
violent through muslin, eventuates them red.

1. LYMPHS %: within standard range
2. ABS. CD3: within standard range

Crescents lining little dog eyes inflame when he shuts them.
On the linen, possum's thumbby footprints of cognac dry red.

3. CD4 ABSOLUTE: 192/uL standard range 359-1519
4. ABS. CD8 SUPPRESS.: within standard range

The correct level of brandy won't spill from the snifter
when its laid and rolled on its side.

5. CD3 POS. LYMPH %: within standard range
6. CD4 POS. LYMPH %: 11.1% standard range 30.8-58.5

Head inside crystal, possum licks boozy smudges
and rag-remnants while pushing the glass in a tight O.

7. CD8 POS LYMPH %: within standard range
8. CD4/CD8 RATIO: 0.23 standard range 0.92-3.72

Speckled tail drags a slow arc, a full revolution,
by the end of each scene. Every color's a trick of light.

[another sign another trick

more tricks than scenes

more number than songs]

[possum's aria: zero's not a number but a shape]

Voice reverberating from inside
the brandy snifter sounds like
another's. A formula for calculating

the time it takes to complete
an O mimics the formula
for subtracting to zero the same.

Check your program notes
if you're interested in finding out
for yourself. When my bathrobe

comes back from the cleaners,
it's wrapped in cellophane
just like a bouquet and smells

just as good. Of course it's
a shade of green (pistachio,
mint, seafoam—who knows?).

Around my waste, the sash
cinches so erotically that
everything tightens.

Coda:

Of course, sexy
isn't what you
expected from me.

[finale]

Little

opera

singer

carried

across

the stage,

and his

hands

are wolf's

gears.

Signs of

wolf-hood

start in

little dog

splattered

across

a mind

pressed:

trepanded

skull.

[curtain down]

If All the Men Knew All the Ladies

A dollop of sickening—not in the voice but the body—
and a pinch of laudanum in her made-up elbow pit:
this is how opera ends. Campy trope trapped,

though never quite realistic. But what would we do
without an out? Imagine if all the men knew all the ladies
died of consumption. Synopsis: nothing matters

and then she dies. Or: she dies and then no one matters.
Her pear-colored gown swells with her aria's death-rattle;
pluck it and the branch recoils—fruit in your hand

as the orchestral rustle rises. Her death is a ripeness
that drips down your arm as you swallow the scene,
gets sticky in the pit of your elbow. Opera's how to live

forever and die with everyone, how the pear gets sucked
clean night after night. The black drops of seed, like teeth
blacked out for the stage, always grow a new diva.