

Writing Unknowing: Body, Moment and God

Alec Gabin

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Committee:

Rebecca Brown

Joe Milutis

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Alec Gabin

University of Washington

Abstract

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Alec Gabin

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Rebecca Brown

Creative Writing and Poetics

This thesis explores love, nothingness, the body, the moment, and God. The human bodily experience is one of mystery. In writing toward this mystery, I try reclaim my own body and connect with God. My experience with God is an experience of language, but it is also entirely unreachable with language. This work explores this paradox with a critical essay, drawing from multiple genres and time periods, as well as an original book of poetry titled *The Son*.

I

Desire Without Object

Things are making a sense they didn't used to. Though this sense is not the same as understanding.

My time in graduate school has been transformative. Writing has been an integral part of this process; as a side-effect of it, and a party to it, and a cause of it. None of this has been linear. Everything is woven together at the level of the thread.

I arrive at where I remember being, though I have never been there before.

I have begun to see trees in a way I never have before. To let the sun hit my face. To notice my chest, stomach and lungs. To live more immediately in the sensations of my body. These things are new, both in practice and as aspirations.

Mostly, I have lived with things at a distance: ironic, cynical, intellectual, humorous. These dispositions have their place, but a compartment within me has begun to depressurize, and my perceptual habits become more clear every day: I have often confused truth with passion, courage with excessiveness, and rebellion with depravity. Much of my desire to take up space has come from a wounded place in me.

Working on my writing has been, in part, a way of looking at these things in myself.

I am trying now to see all my desire as desire itself; *desire without object*. Desire itself is something I am interested in writing about; or toward, or in. I point my desire at God as much as I can, because if I do not, a thing becomes my God and I am quickly ruined by it, lost to myself, as well as to the people around me.

I have done a lot of cringing at my work this year. But I am trying to keep looking, keep seeing; to stay with it, and to not *identify* so much. Looking has become an important practice in my life. Wanting to be right has begun to bore me. And trying to control how I am perceived. And trying to make everyone understand.

I keep stumbling into this Rumi poem:

Gamble everything for love.
If you are a true human being.
If not, leave this gathering.
You set out to find God,
but then you keep stopping at mean-spirited roadhouses.
Don't wait any longer.
Dive in the ocean, leave, and let the sea be you.
Silent, absent, walking an empty road, all praise.

I used to want to tell you how it was. Now I am more interested in how it is. Not the story. But the immediate reality of it: The body, the mind, the spirit.

How can this experience be approached with language? How can writing be a part of the experience of God? Writing as an action has always been there for me. But what is writing as an artform tethered to my deepest pleas for truth? Or for relief from the self?

To write in a way which is grounded in the experience of wanting to abandon myself to God, out of love, or desperation, or both.

...

This year I read God-conscious writers from many times and places. Writers less concerned with who they are and more concerned with what God is. It would seem religious experiences are not rare, and that they are often, in part, language experiences.

Inspired by the vulnerability of these writers, I began writing fragments instead of polemics. Awkward attempts at faith rather than diatribes and endless neurosis. More heart, less mind. To risk sentimentality rather than exit the body for a sense of control. To learn from writers who remind me of where I am: In a body, in mystery. To write from the deepest self I can find. The 'unknowing' self. The curious self. The eternal self. The fool. The child. Trying to locate the soul. Maybe, sometimes, by a clumsy process of elimination. To integrate praying and writing. To allow the full weight of words. To let them into and out from my stomach, the place where I have the truth before my mind has chance to distort it.

Myth: If you knew everything about me, you would know me. Myth: I have to explain things to you. Myth: I can convince you of things.

What do I really want? God? Affection? Touch? Love? This place. From where am I reaching? Am I that which is reaching? I spent years chasing desire around the country, the town, the night.

But it isn't there, it's here.

I used to know what I was doing. Having gone to graduate school, and been through the last few years, I no longer do. I no longer want to.

II

Thesis Creative Manuscript: *The Son*

My creative manuscript, *The Son*, is a 150 page book of fragments. Each page is the size of a post card. I approached each of the pages on its own terms, both visually and linguistically, as well looking at each page within the whole of the book. Though there is no clear story, there is what I consider to be a "wide" narrative to the work. I went about the book like it was a collage – taking pieces and fragments from this year's notebooks and throwing them around until they clicked into place. I would delete, move, add, and reorder, until the page felt like it arrived at a question, or a half a question, that revealed something to me – ideally something I didn't know was there when I started out.

I went about the book on the level of the word, then the sentence, and then the page, as opposed to deciding what it would be about before hand - though this shouldn't be confused with a lack of intention. My intention was for the work to be as God-conscious as it could be. To let the spirit into my work in a way I never had before. To strive for the work to be a piece of music, an ode, a melody, and not an argument. To jump in the water.

The Son was a process. I combed through it over and over, sifting out every word that wasn't necessary, whittling it down and down, like scraping layers off a canvas into patterns which resonated with the larger diegesis. I am learning how to stop being worried about losing things.

While I want to be an informed artist, I don't want to *know what I am doing*. I find creative work with too much of a contrived message to be tiresome. Some of this ignorance is likely transferred to the reader – I expect the reader to be unsure at times of who I am talking about, or who is talking. I would hope these ambiguities reflect the ambiguity of reality.

Though the work in *The Son* is voiced, almost like a stage play – the distinctions between characters indicated by font and/or quotations – I think of the piece as a primarily visual, silent project. It has a private feel. Perhaps to be read alone. The work is an interior world. But we are large inside. God works in a many echoing voices within. The places in this book are all in me, but not of me, or me.

The objective of this essay to set the backdrop of influence that informed the writing of *The Son*. It would be exhausting to include every writer from this last year – see bibliography – but there are a few whose influence this piece would not exist without, my advisor Rebecca Brown included. I include her in this thesis as a writer, not as an arbitrary thing because she is my advisor. I do not intend to put her in an awkward place, but her work was influenced by the writers who I have been reading, so it is only reasonable that her work would embody many of the poetic principles I have been utilizing this year. I am stepping into a lineage and universe of writing and writers with this work, and Rebecca Brown is a part of that lineage and universe.

I hope this essay is like a quilt: A patchwork of my thought-life; torn up, transplanted, and repurposed. I want to sew the seams strong enough to hold, but perhaps their showing could be okay too, as a quilt is a thing made of fragments, and it's meant primarily to keep you warm. A book is also a thing made of fragments, and maybe also meant to keep you warm.

The most daring thing for me to do is to leave a blank space for feeling, both at the level of the page and of the manuscript as a whole. To put down just enough that there is room for the words to echo around the void, the room, the heart. That I have left space for *experience*. My habits, both on the page, as well as in life, has been to compulsively fill this space for fear of the the vacuum that is a living moment. It is only by grace that I now even want to bear the vacuum. Or that I ever do.

I like to think that if you found six pages of *The Son* crumpled and dirty on the street near the gutter and read them on the bus they would be interesting and you would keep them and shove them in your desk and maybe wonder about them occasionally. It is important to me to maintain an awareness that everything is trash; to not become too precious about things. Books, like people, are in the process of being forgotten. And this is a sacred thing. Not a subject of dismay. We are passing notes.

III

Teneda Santoka: Free-Verse Haiku

My discovery of Teneda Santoka (1882 – 1940) was crucial to both my work and life this year. I fatefully pulled a collection of his poems off the wall of a bookstore. The idea that a haiku could have a reference to a smoky factory immediately appealed to both the punk and the mystic in me.

even the snow
can't be good snow
factory zone smoke

(Mountain Tasting 66)

Santoka was a wandering Zen mendicant. He was also a drunk. His own struggles with alcohol and God inform his poetry, as much as his wandering does. He does not entirely elevate himself out of his embodied experience like many haiku poets. His mind gives him a hard time and this stays in his poems.

in the wind
walking alone
blaming myself

(For All My Walking 94)

His work is raw and immediate. He has doubt. His work speaks to the condition of my mind as a drunk – sober or not – as well as my experience trying to deal with this state through writing. Santoka looks askew at the world, and himself:

That was my face
In the cold mirror.

(*MT* 88)

These lines imply a surprise that Santoka is alive. Both that he was born and that he has not died. I have a dire need for an unknown present in which to try to make a home. Santoka's notebook addresses his own need for such a thing:

I do not believe in a future world. I am not infatuated by the past. I believe entirely in the present. Enjoy your entire body and mind in the eternal now.

(*MT* 34)

This concept is crucial to my ways of thinking about both my thesis work and my life. Santoka embodies it in this haiku:

today again
no answer
rain coming on

(*FAMW* 41)

Notice the spacing of these lines. It doesn't say "again no answer" (on all one line), it says "today again" (on one line). For all our wondering, there is only today.

The second line: "no answer". A true Zen alcoholic, Santoka is reminding himself of the empty nature of things. There is no where go. But this emptiness is both prison and door to freedom. "no answer" also implies that his mind is eager for one. This poem is efficient: Problem, solution, irony, doubt, and acceptance, all in three short lines.

Santoka considered suicide for much of his life. But when that didn't happen, he had to let go of the story he was telling himself about himself. A Zen friend helped him with this. To begin to live life as a daily experiment. Life without the plot which always ends in self-willed self-destruction. Instead of dying he started walking and writing more. Santoka's poems abandon unnecessary posturing. They are gestures of resignation from the world, or even from himself. They embody the alternative to suicide: The abandonment of self, as opposed to the destruction of it.

got this far
drink some water
and go on

(FAMW 87)

Now things happen one moment at a time. Santoka is weary and we are listening in. The airing of his private experience is the book.

...

The space around haikus makes them seem simultaneously whispered and carved. Floating and solid. What one can get done on the road, in the rain, hungover as hell. Using small amounts of paper. A solitude there. Days without speaking, without sending any kind of message.

I traveled and lived in a van many days during my time writing my thesis, as well as developed a walking practice. I feel a kinship to Santoka in being an in-between person, in not belonging, in seeking solitude in motion. Alone on the road, trying to turn to God, and writing along with this. For this. With this. Santoka sums this up in his journal:

The fusion of the subjective and objective into a single entity, or the fusion of the self and nature [...] The individual simply undergoes fusion, melts into it, as it were [or] he actively seeks to achieve fusion. [...] a realm in which nature is one with the self.

(FAMW 76)

When one is in solitude, one becomes as big as the room. On the road my interior is reflected in the sky. Santoka is a writer of inner landscape. He wrote with abandon. With immediacy. Outside of his modern time construct. Detached from culture, politics, war, and other external trends. Life itself is what's at stake. Other things are just clinging to what we think we are. The illusion. The thin garb of identity, of psychology, of personality. Of points, awards, achievements, careers, and esteem.

All day I said nothing –
The sound of waves.

(*MT* 61)

Eternity, right here. If only I'd listen.

IV

Flannery O'Connor: The Fall

Flannery's O'Connor's *Prayer Journal* is a private mode of writing, written when she was young. In common with Santoka's haikus, *Prayer Journal* is not self-conscious in its nature as writing, but instead reveals the humanity of a self-conscious human being; with a body, fallen, insecure, striving.

I do not want to be lonely all my life but people only make us lonelier
by reminding us of God. Dear God please help me be an artist,
please let it lead to you.

(29)

The above passage is at once self-conscious and desiring the loss of that self. Though her most well-known fiction books are not this personal, they are underscored by this same religious

longing and curiosity. How do we remember what's at stake? And how to keep remembering. For Santoka, it was a walking practice. O'Connor speaks to a different conception of remembrance:

We lost our innocence in the fall, and our return to it is through the Redemption which was brought about by Christ's death and by our slow participation in it. Sentimentality is a skipping of this process in its concrete reality and an early arrival at a mock state of innocence

(*Mystery & Manners* 148)

One might think of religious writing as uptight. On the contrary, O'Connor is a master of the grotesque. I have found it is often nihilistic writing which is uptight. In which little is at stake but being correct. But we fell, we're here, dirty, impure. There is nothing helpful about lying about it. O'Connor's Catholic sensibility is at home in the dirt. It aims to see the world as it is.

Belief, in my own case anyway, is the engine that makes perception operate.

(*M&M* 109)

What one sees is determined by one's faith. To believe fully is to fully see. To leave nothing out. If one is in faith, one need not look away. One need not pretend all is well. Or think it's all awful either.

In her short story *The River* a boy drowns himself looking for Christ in the river (*A Good Man is Hard to Find & Other Stories*). He misunderstands where and what God is. Or does he? What does he see? We watch him see. We see his sight. He disappears into his faith.

O'Connor's characters often end up dead from their seeking of God or comfort or money. This is an irony that is deep. It's an irony that's alive and fluid. It's not a cheap irony. It's a religious irony. That irony that opens me to the feeling of the truth.

there is a tendency to compartmentalize the spiritual and make it resident in a certain type of life only

(*M&M* 151)

God includes everything.

In her novel *Wise Blood* there is a character who preaches the “Church Without Christ”. He blinds himself to prove his lack of faith. A woman cares for him out of lonely selfishness – or is it out of compassion? O’Connor prods at the workings of motivation. Maybe the woman is misunderstanding God. Maybe the woman is caring for God. Maybe the the woman is doing the will of God. “[A story] is an experience, not an abstraction” she says. (*M&M* 73) Is God present in confusion? In avoidance? In misinterpretation? The reverence comes not from knowing the answer but from contemplating the mystery. Art plays out this unknowing so that we can see it differently, newly, in small examples we can hold.

I am into making art as a practice in "unknowing". Prodding at it without an answer in mind, but to try to arrange the tensions of a thing such that the thing rings out like a reminder of something real. Without reverence for this unknown, my art is didactic, petty, contrived. And my art with God is a practice. My goal might be to love to practice.

When something is finished it can never be possessed. Nothing can be possessed but the struggle.

(*PJ* 29)

That I am worthy of the struggle. That the struggle is righteous.

...

Someone handed me a pamphlet on the street the other day. In it were hand-written quotes from The New Testament.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

This felt like a Flannery O’Connor moment. Because, though there is an irony to the situation – that I might be more skeptical than to think every pamphlet is the truth, or that I looked

desperate enough to need saving – I also was touched by the care of the gentlemen in the wheelchair who handed me the pamphlet, who looked me in the eyes with certainty. Whose crippled state added to the weight of the situation, reminding me of *Wise Blood*. His apparent inability to walk making him somehow more biblical, more fallen. His soul peeking through more easily in the light of his wound. Our eye contact, and then him handing me the paper. And me thanking him.

I keep the pamphlet as a bookmark. Because the truth is when I remember that every face is God, that everyone is Christ on the cross, I do, like the pamphlet says, feel new. And I do, like the words ask me to, *believe*.

...

I'll note that Teneda Santoka himself seems like a Flannery O'Connor character. In his way of being conflicted, in his paradox. He is at once Zen priest and alcoholic. Wise man and fool. Escapist and bravely present to his own experience escaping. I say this not to diminish the "realness" of Santoka's life, but to show that there is a deep connection between life and writing. Between a book and a man walking alone across a country.

V

Marie Noel: Alone in the Dark

Marie Noel's *Notes For Myself* is, like O'Connor's *Prayer Journal*, a collection of private writings later put together in a book. Noel thought a lot about God and writing, and wrote about both. She prayed in her writing. Sometimes she wrote prayers.

Lord purify me of my knowledge. Of my knowledge which is not mine, but which I have borrowed from others.

(102).

How do we make way for experience? How to make room for God? To be somewhere; hanging, vulnerable to the mystery. To be as truth, or love.

There is a difference between: Loving and *being love*. A difference between: Writing about love and *writing love*. The difference between: My judgement of what I look like (*vanity*) and how I feel from the inside (*proprioception*).

Noel goes on:

But to the man of great learning [...] give knowledge, full, vast, whole so through he may gradually gain the height or the depth – identical point – where all is simplified into ONE.

If I am to learn, may it be only to become more conscious. Not to go sleep in concepts. Not to hoard paper. Below my desire for finality is a desire to toss myself into experience; to give up my *self*. A desire at once beyond and below my carnal longings: for mother, for breast, for bosom, for home.

As my professor Jeanne Heuving told me: “The world cannot be referenced”.

God, like a toothache.

Noel wrote down fragments, as well as theory. Such thick darkness surrounds some of her barest lines:

I live on your word even when I have lost You.

(55)

Experience is only a continuous loss.

(171)

Other sections are poems of religious logistics. Math problems which yield heady wonder:

Great, great, great is the mystery of God: his Goodness =
Good and Evil together.

Great, nearly as great, is my mystery: Hope.
(God must barely understand Man's hope).

And both are but one: LOVE.

(138)

Notes for Myself is the writing of an interior world. At once poems, fragments, prayers, journal entries, and poetic statements, Noel reveals things to herself. The words are with her in the dark.

VI

Edmond Jabes: Voices in the Void

The words are not mine; they are ours. My old professor Leonard Schwartz used to call this “writing from the black.” You blush when I mis-use your words. I am angry when you corrupt mine. Their meanings mutate. Like sitting at the banks of a river. I wash myself or swim. Or I drown – looking to say what I cannot. Writing happens through all the writing that's come before. A single tapestry of human language. To write is to engage with this fabric.

Edmond Jabes *Book of Questions* speaks this living history. A history without time. A history alive in the moment. A history we carry in our molecules.

Jabes' book is a book of fabricated quotations. Each speaks from the dark, like a spark of light, and each can be understood both on its own terms and within the context of the page on which it is found.

“I only had eyes for the infinite. I tended to let the days pass by. They punished me.”

- Reb Alben

(331)

A thousand voices questioning God. The lonely millions. Like watching lightning bugs rise from a field. The work is voiced, but is not theater. It is intimate. A thousand voices in one mouth. Its messages make trips from soul to soul. It feels as if the carriers of its messages are hiding. Telling secrets somewhere underground.

Jabes uses italics and quotations, as well as names, to indicate polyphony. The text pretends to be written by a collective, but by *individuals* in this collective, as individuals are what constitute the whole of us. Each of us experiences some truth of this whole. Our separate lives – our bodies – our incarnations – carry something.

"All roads are of flesh."

(128)

These pages are each the interior drama of an eternal moment. Jews as Words, homeless, wandering, speaking for the God who created us and left us, to grapple with His abyss. Different than the Catholic sensibility, here the conversations are between people, as opposed to be between God and humans. Are we seeing our own reflection or are we seeing God? *Books of Questions* is a living gallery of exegesis. An ongoing dialogue between familial strangers.

“All faces are His. Hence He has no face.”

(70)

“The road suddenly became a mirror gallery. You no longer saw landscape, but faces. I watched mine advancing.”

(184)

Each of Jabes' pages seems to say the same thing; each leaf contains all the knowledge of the plant; the plant knows the forest; the forest remembers the stars, where we die, of thirst, or old age, or heartbreak.

The pages speak of a people having an experience dictated by language. There is a constant reference to "The Book", this elevated and mythological thing which seems embedded in our very organs. And yet to have been there before us as well, to carry us along with it. We carry the word in our bodies as the body carries us through the world.

Many of Jabes quotes have a circular sort of logic; almost like Zen Koans, which cause my mind to short-out, leaving a little space in which I experience wonder. Like this one:

All letters give form to absence. Hence, God is the child of his name.

(47)

A line like a snake eating its own tail.

Jabes is part of a lineage. As I am. My father's love of reading somehow in me. My own word-games with my young son.

"You comment on your commentary and so on and on until you are the great-grandson of your own son."

- Reb Saber

(324)

"You are the space of poetry. I am its dead end."

-Reb Rimah

(322)

His lines are often both an example and explanation at once. The poetics are embedded in the creation.

Marie Noel is a single voice in the dark of a house clinging to a pencil. Jabes is all the lonely voices in the dark of history clinging to each other. One is duality seeking unity, one is unity shattered into multiplicity.

Books of Questions poses the universe back at itself. We are the mirror for it. There are a million people in you.

VII

Agota Kristof: Seeing

The prose in Agota Kristof's *The Notebook* is spare. The words are like bits of debris on a window. Beyond is a world in which what unfolds does so like the ticking of a clock – with a flatness that avoids unnecessary qualification. I include Kristof in this essay to exemplify what it is to write things simply as they are. To see.

It's Sunday. We catch a chicken and cut its throat as we have seen
Grandmother do. We bring the chicken into the kitchen and say:
You must cook it Grandmother. (50)

Little is said about internal states of the characters, yet the work is emotionally moving. I am not told how the characters feel, so I feel for them. In this way Kristof trusts her readers, assumes our humanity, and our emotional intelligence and complexity. It is the same with good slow movies. Like a Bela Tarr film. The work meets us half way. It mirrors our own depth with its steady gaze. We need art that mirrors our depth. We need art that calls to attention the location of the soul.

The “we”, the narrating children of *The Notebook*, write and speak as adults. Their age is soul-age, not body-age. You'd think a dead soldier would frighten children, but no. They methodically ransack the body.

When we get back to grandmother's, we carefully wrap these objects in straw and potato sacks, and bury them under the bench in front of the officer's window.

(13)

Something buried. What sensations comes to rise in my body as I read? What's buried in me? Perhaps I often live my life based on how I think I should feel and not how I do. Perhaps I am role-playing. Perhaps I expect others to role-play, too.

The Notebook demonstrates a quality of attention. While it takes place in war time and among mass migrations, not a word of judgement is spoken about such things. The narrator is ascetic, spiritual, neutral. It is enough to say things as they are.

Maybe: God looks upon horrors. But the gaze is not without love.

VIII

Denis Johnson: It

A book of vignettes, *Jesus' Son* tells my own sobriety story in many ways. Johnson spent many more years at the bar than I did, but all the pieces are there. The book comes down to one little passage for me. The ending of a chapter in which the narrator kisses a woman in a bar.

First I put my lips to her upper lip, then to the bottom of her pout, and then I kissed her fully, my mouth on her open mouth, and we met inside.

It was there. It was. The long walk down the hall. The door opening. The beautiful stranger. The torn moon mended. Our fingers touching away the tears. It was there.

(93)

The "it" referenced in the quoted text above is not anything in particular, nor is it referring to something previously mentioned in the writing. The "it" is simply *it*.

All of Johnson's book spins on the axis of this passage. Johnson trusts me to know *it*. And I do know *it* and therefore Johnson's work is like being passed a note or like being whispered to outside a bar or an AA meeting. As with Kristof's work, there is an assumption of my depth as a reader.

Johnson's truth is one that has a slight smile as it is delivered.

With Johnson there's *a thing happening*, and there's *a person watching the thing happening*, perhaps we could call it a soul, though Johnson says nothing of the sort. There's a distance, but not so much of one that we are left to irony alone. Johnson's work stands in contrast to Kristof's here. *The Notebook* leaves not a trace of self-consciousness, whereas *Jesus' Son* has a good deal and yet does not fall into the trap of total ironic detachment.

The terms Johnson has created for himself are balanced: Between irony, a sense of the past, a sense of humor, a sense of the spirit, a sense of the darkness. He walks holding many things in a balanced constellation.

Kristof walks holding nothing.

Johnson has perspective on his own life and journey.

Kristof has *perspective*.

Is *it* God? Johnson shows me *it* can be anywhere. Like O'Connor, Johnson has no need for a purity in which only the chosen can touch the spirit.

The form of *Jesus' Son* is notable. The little snippets. Short scenes. It doesn't take much. Things fly in and out of focus before they have time to be old or have a point. It only takes a little bit to make a picture of a moment. I am starving. I need a sandwich not a banquet.

IX

Robert Lax: In

Robert Lax's poems are compelling in their visual starkness. They are repetitive and rhythmic. If read fast, the work has a strobing effect, like a picture flip-book, like the dancing grain of a film. If read slow, it is like the marching of a distant parade – tidal, or like shifting tectonic plates seen over millennia from space. This variation suggests a kind of epic relativism. How large and fast are things?

Lax's work rarely bites down too hard. I find some of his method here:

the first
thing to do
is admit
your defeat

[...]

the next
thing to do

is to start
in again.

(44)

Lax's towers unpack like lines of DNA code. They unwind – like tight coils flowering into possibilities. The poems play with the inner and outer. There is crossover, ambiguity, and the work suggests that they are often one in the same. The effect of this is a lightness, but a lightness tethered to faith – that what's at the bottom of the blank is worthy of our attention.

the
world

the
world

with-
in

with-
in

that
sings

that
sings

that
sings

(226)

The word “in” is important, in both quotes above. “Start / *in*”. Into you. Into out there. “With-*in*”. Into you, into there. Interiority is given attention by Lax. Lax’s lines reveal the membrane between in and out. Or, perhaps, between both “in”s. I have all sides within me.

No
no
no

yes
yes
yes

no
no
no

yes
yes
yes

(31)

Many of the poems leave room for humor. The above poem mocks duality as it embodies it; even, perhaps, as it embraces it.. The voice here is reduced to a sassy binary. But, then again, the text is a scathing critique of human culture. Disconcerting; that we should ever be in opposition

to anything. This poem is like watching a war from outer space and wondering what the people on the earth could possibly be thinking.

Part of the technique here is the ambiguity of who is speaking, of who the sides are.

Perhaps there is no in and out. There are membranes. There is change. There is betweenness. Lax stands in the betweenness.

X

Cloud of Unknowing: Prayer

Cloud of Unknowing is a 14th century prayer instruction manual. But it's also art. And a survival tool.

Remain blind during this time cutting away all desire to know, for knowledge is a hindrance here.

(92)

The book says that to pray I must go to a place of total unknowing. A place without concept.

Do I need this place of unknowing? Or am I a prisoner there? And is not what the writer is saying? That the solution, or the grace here, is to honestly face the prison. The prison that: *I am*.

But that: *I cannot know*.

He alone feels authentic sorrow who realizes not only *what he is* but *that he is*.

(103)

That dark room. The rooms before electricity.

The sorrow I speak of is genuine and perfect and blessed is the man who receives it.

(103)

This heaviness. We blame it on things. But is it not there before everything?

How could I write in a way which gives room to unknowing?

The author of *Cloud* knows you won't read his book until you are ready, until you want it, until nothing is left. He keeps saying, *don't read this if you aren't called to*. Shouldn't everything be like this?

A high ideal: To write in a way that deals with things on the cusp of knowing in an attempt to reveal the truth: The impossibility of knowing. And the grace of being anything at all.

XI

A Silver Mt Zion: It (Part 2)

Though He Has Left Us Alone Shafts Of Light Sometimes Grace The Corner Of Our Rooms is the name of the first A Silver Mt. Zion Record. Biblical language throughout, the record is sparse, hollow, dark. Out of tune piano and strings, recorded above an old gas station in winter, later described as a "Jewish experience" by one of the members.

There's a gloom around the experience of God on this record. Earth as a place of exile. There's a sense of waiting. Of resignation. Of the piano, like the pen, as a last resort. As something one might slump into, depraved, tired, to air some last moans before retiring. *Shafts of Light* is a cross of punk ethic and Jewish mysticism. They sing:

On silver Mt Zion
All buried in ruins
We was dancin' the hora
till we vomited blood

(Movie (Never Made))

Zion uses religious language to their own ends. Here, they demand joy to the point of bloodshed. The music is a meditation in the stubborn desire for freedom. To this band the desire for freedom is both spiritual and political. Their unknowing, played out on piano, held within a

frame of the overarching pseudo-anarchist politics. The music brings material vibration to their longing. The politics brings intellectual framework to their desire.

These juxtapositions are particularly apparent on the track *Blown Out Joy From Heaven's Mercied Hole*. The track ambles along like a sort of crude jazz. The point is this frail limping. And then the concept stuck onto it like a frame.

Musical groups make conceptual paths which pull our reaching into experience. Zion's work uses religious ideas to these ends. Idealistic as they are, they invite us to make a genuine connection with an orthodox past.

...

Silver Mt Zion's records evolved over many years. On a much later record they sang:

I learned it at 17
on drugs and well policed
It kissed me as I fell
with fistfuls of ringing bells

(1,000,000 Died To Make This Sound)

There – “it” – again. *It*.

“It kissed me as I fell.”

XII

Richard Foreman: Limits of Language

Richard Foreman has been writing and directing plays with his Ontological Hysterical Theater in New York City for 50 years. The following excerpt is from 1989's *Lava*:

I am only happy when I remember to fix on a single paradoxically unhappy fact. Namely the fact that whatever I say necessarily misses the mark. Because I myself don't choose the terms in which I explain what I'm feeling about myself or the world or anything imaginable since of necessity I use a language forced on me invented by other

people. But when I center, wobble-like of course, on that insight, only then I feel, I don't know, energized, because a gap bursts open in me and air – not real air of course – rushes in and cleanses me. [...] What I am saying is there's a hole in me. In all of us. We have to talk right? But whatever we say is off the mark. The brain has no pain fibers. Off the mark. Can you explain that I'm only happy when I can see all the time on that one idea? You realize I don't have to anything but a hole in space. That's my only responsibility.

Foreman's plays have the fallen world at stake. He is always searching for the ghosts behind thoughts. His work is heady, slapstick, comedic, gruff, nonsensical, but the gaps he finds can be glorious. He is an artist working toward the divine with language.

In a recent interview Foreman stated that when Foucault saw one of his plays he described it as looking at an opaque gem stone that he could not find the logic behind. He felt he "understood" it but could not penetrate the rules of its design.

I am excited by uses of language which call to attention not only the nature of our incarnate earthly predicament but of the nature of words themselves. The words glow as *words* and we remember that they are not things. Everything seems to *wake up* as an effect of this decontained wonder.

Foreman informs my own ways of thinking about what it means to make "sense". Foreman would say you cannot *not* make sense. The mind makes sense of things. That's what it does. His plays capitalize on this. We force our knowing on his absurdity. Just like we do in life.

Foreman writes his plays half-conscious, laying on his couch eating sweets, just sort of jotting things down on pages here and there. He then uses his handwritten notes when directing his plays, and even uses page-placement to determine the sets and stage-action themselves. So there is also something of an intoxicated or unconscious process here too. It is as if foreman drops into the *unknowing*, bringing what he finds to his sharp mind to be processed, distorted and rethought, then drooled onto a page. He is trying to see things new. To regain wonder.

The page is then turned to a play. It's put into bodies. Words into flesh. Foreman deals in interpretation of the void by having bodies say words and do movements.

Perhaps the body is what what I find when the mind cannot comprehend. How can the body and spirit work together without thinking getting in the way? How is the stomach bound to the soul?

XIII

The Next Karate Kid (1994): Moment (Part 1)

The Next Karate Kid is one of the many sequels to *The Karate Kid* (1984). I watched it with my son, not expecting anything.

In the movie Mr. Miyagi decides to teach Hilary Swank to fight and meditate. When the suburbs prove a difficult setting for such an undertaking he takes her to a Zen Monastery in the mountains. One night, feeling angsty, Swank sneaks into the temple with her boombox to let off some steam with some dancing. The monks, drawn by the music, come investigate. Embarrassed Swank apologizes and gathers her things to leave. But instead of chastising her the monks go to the middle of the room and start slow-dancing together. Hesitant at first, Swank joins them and they all dance and smile together.

I like this scene. The flowing of meaning through the stereotypes themselves. That is, that holiness draws no lines. That also cheesy stereotypes and hallmark cards and B-Hollywood movies can be real. If I let them be. I'm into these moments. These things that aren't so conscious of themselves. That maybe don't even know they were magic, that transcended their own medium and time and place and form and budget.

It's ironic, but also *not*.

My son mostly just liked the Karate.

XIV

Kafka: It (Part 3)

Kafka's *The Lost Writings* was released recently, in perfect timing for my thesis. Each of these pieces was collected from Kafka's large body of unpublished work. And each of them speak on their own from the black of the room. Some are very brief, like this one, which also uses quotes and dialogue, like Jabes.

“It’s not a barren wall, it’s living sweetness pressed into a wall, bunches of grapes pressed together.” – “I don’t believe it.” – “Taste it.” – “I’m too incredulous to lift a hand.” – “I’ll put a grape to you mouth, then.” – “I won’t be able to taste it from incredulity.” – “Then drop!” – “Didn’t I tell you the barrenness of this wall is enough to lay a man out?”

(60)

This is the entirety of this piece. The comic tone belies the depth of the passage. About faith. And doubt.

The emptiness surrounding this fragment feels like the emptiness around a haiku. As if the voices spoke from a vast place. As all people or no one. As God or a person alone in a canyon. The lack of context leaves space for a shifting sense of meaning.

And “it”? *It* is not a barren wall, Kafka writes. *It* is sweetness.

This next fragment informs my manuscript with its display of multiple levels of consciousness indicated by font and quotations.

“You never draw water from the depths of this well.”
What water? What well?

“Who is asking?”
Silence.
“What silence?”

(61)

There are at least three, maybe four, voices in this fragment: An omniscient other, an inquiring human, a second speaker, and a narrator. There is a kind of odd shape drawn by the lines of conversation. Like holding up a deformed triangle to the sky. This technique makes for repeated readings as well as multiple responses. From laughter to depth of feeling to even wanting to write it off completely as silly. I enjoy all this possibility of response. It feels very joyful. To write as a joyous thing. This is writing that is porous with possibility.

XV

Gerard Manley Hopkins: *Material Knowing*

In the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, God is right here in plain sight in the world. He is not only hidden or elsewhere.

Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves – goes itself; *myself* – it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace; that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is –
Christ – for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

(51)

As Christ was both man and God, so is each thing divine and material. Birds, people, trash, trees, oceans, and humans. Hopkins sees all shine with God's light. Hopkins poems celebrate materiality, as well as multiplicity.

This duality of material and spiritual creates a tension of three in Hopkins work: God, Materials, and the Union of the two. Perhaps a reflection of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hopkins shows us not only that every face is Christ, but that all these faces are inside us, too. We are everywhere with God. Each thing is here to do what it must, to carry out its divine nature. Knowing this I might attempt to be with God by relinquishing my nature to Him.

At the same time, my specificity – my apparent separateness – is as godly as the sea or the tree or the ringing bell. I call out, I yell, I make sound, I write words. How can I honor the experience of being a medium for the will of God? Such grace that I am capable of making a sound at all. How to honor the miracle of sound? How do I honor what it is through making it? To *know* is crucial to Hopkins. That we not forget what we spring from, as that very spring. This is Hopkins' style of remembrance.

I am attracted to the idea of transcendental spaces which exist separate from all this *stuff* of material reality. That this world is fallen and apart from some other Truth. Hopkins moves me, as a reader, to include a more immediate sense of God.

It's not easy, though; even when doing nothing; sitting in the room, under the weight of it.

And when Peace here does house
He comes with work to do, he does not come to coo,
He comes to brood and sit.

(42)

Not even 'Peace' shall be peace in this life. It is in the unfolding of time that we are in God's works, no matter what we do or do not do. To sit is work.

Thinking of Marie Noel. Alone in the dark in her house.

XVI

Tim Dlugos: Body Reaching (Part 1)

Tim Dlugos' *Powerless* feels like a physical gift. A cross-time transaction. From someone else's life.

Dlugos' poems perform a leveling of subjects so that each thing can be seen for what it is as a emotional value rather than as thing within a hierarchical system of judgements. Even in dealing with things like the death of his friends, he refuses to prop things up. His own death rides down the tape of his prose, just like describing a pair of pants, or a memory of being in a pool.

the magic isn't something
that I make, but shines through the things
I make and do and say
the way a brooch or scrap of fabric
shines from the detritus
to catch Leonard's eye
and be of use for costumes

(Ordinary Time 76)

This fragment says Dlugos' poetics – that his job is to channel the light, that he doesn't need to be the light. Like Hopkins, this work speaks to the importance of materials. The light is not far away – it's right here, it's a brooch, a particular brooch that is being used by someone Dlugos knows personally for a project. The person and his project is as much shining as anything else – on tv, in the news, or otherwise. The work combines the proclivities of Dlugos life with the big poetry concepts and tropes that can often feel dusty and over-the-top.

Like Denis Johnson and me, Dlugos got sober and then sought God. There is a resignation to the work around this subject, which allows me in as a reader. No more trying to be too clever.

He describes his drinking experience briefly but then:

There was
no hand that I could see, but
I clung to it.

(82)

And then:

This is not about religion,
this is not about belief. I know what happened.
I was there; *it* was there. Nothing can change that.

(83)

Here, there's a groundedness. It's not about some lofty idea of God. It's about *this is what happened*. And saying that on the page. Dlugos writes at the crossover of reaching-in-faith-toward-*it* and experiencing-*it*-right-now. To Dlugos, *it* matters; but *things* matter equally so. How does a vulnerable human body reach toward – or experience – infinite and unknowable God?

XVII

Paul Celan: Body Reaching (Part 2)

Paul Celan's work might be the most difficult I came across this year. Because of the unfamiliar way he uses words, his poems make broad resonances of meaning across the page. They are whirlpools. Cryptic cairns in an alien cosmos. I am pulled in just as I am thrust out. The ride wakes me up.

Something shall be, later,
that fills itself with you
and lifts itself

to a mouth

Out of shattered
madness
I raise myself
and watch my hand
as it draws the one
single
circle.

(*Selections* 143)

Where does this work take place? To whom are the words addressed? Celan writes in the bridges of body and God: "Something" meets a mouth. A hand draws a "circle". The materials meet the questions. (Just like Dlugos: "There was no hand that I could see but I clung to it." Dlugos clings to a hand with "non-hand".)

Celan:

You were my death:
you I could hold;
when all fell from me.

(117)

In this one, too, we find the physical embrace up against the mysterious something; the "you"; and falling away from it. To restate my previous question: What happens when the mind is placed aside and an unguarded body approaches the spirit?

Because of their enigmatic and compact nature, Celan's poems takes time and repeated readings to reveal themselves. The work is immediate in its strange boldness but shy in its depths. Celan developed a language. A system of meaning. A sense of meaning. The work doesn't *make sense*, it invents it.

XVIII

Kandinsky: Soul

The word may express an inner harmony. The inner harmony springs partly [...] from the object which it names. [...] the mind of the hearer receives an abstract impression only, that is to say as of the object dematerialized, and a corresponding vibration is immediately set up in the *heart*.

(15)

Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations of the soul.

(25)

This Kandinsky material is so radical as to have become invisible. I too often forget the simple truth: The resonance of words with the heart. The mind's job is to get us there, toward the heart, toward the soul. The mind is not less important but mine is often bloated. For a long time it was so loud I could not feel my body. My bias here comes from experience. My mind being 100% in charge does not help me, or – if I may be so bold – the world. The mind is crucial, but it is all *incomprehensible*, as theory seems to show over and over again. (At best, theory is its own yoga; a practice in the art of studying, as opposed to being right, or "progressing". Baudrillard, Zizek, Nietzsche, these writers changed my life; but it is at the level of their poetry in which I find hope, not in their apparent rightness.)

But: Back to *The Cloud of Unknowing*. That certain prayers must happen elsewhere of reason, without concept. The edge of the mind, a mystical place – my life depends on the medicinal quality of this unknowing.

The boundaries drawn (between the spiritual and material) should not be too definite.

(9)

This little footnote from Kandinsky is essential. I am quick to draw lines. But no. Father, Son, Holy Ghost. Are they one or three? I woke this morning at 6am to the empty house. Betweeness. Tarot card: *The Hanged Man*. The traveler, the gas station, the road. Christ in the face of a stranger. The wind in the trees. My own strange thoughts which, in my most lucid moments, do not really seem to be *mine*.

Without the soul I am left to a surface experience. Soul – by any name – is a necessary component in life and as in writing.

XIX

Clarice Lispector: Story

The stories in Lispector's *Soulstorm* ride the wavering lines lines between irony, humor and heartbreak. An ironic gesture at Christ is not always an irreverent thing. One can be at once carnal, humorous, ironic, and devout.

God is not fragile.

The Way of the Cross is a little story about immaculate conception. Maria das Dores gets pregnant, just like the Virgin Mary. She and her husband prepare things for the birth of the child which of course they will name Jesus. They even try to copy what happens in the Bible, the husband goes up into the mountains, Maria performs miracles, prays a lot. But then she worries – will the boy be crucified? So they name him Emmanuel instead.

The story ends:

Nobody knows if this child had to go the way of the cross.
The way all go.

For all our preparation, there's nowhere to hide.

Lispector is playing with religious stories as if they were just that – stories, and yet she does so in a way that does not trivialize them but which shows their flexibility, their use for real human feelings and concerns. Lispector can joke about giving birth to the Messiah and then at the end hit the reader with the greater truth we thought would stay buried the whole time. An ending at once comical and heavy as the earth. The last two lines nicely contradict themselves, too, humanizing the whole thing even more. “Nobody knows” implies ignorance. “The way all go” implies a very clear knowing indeed. Well – which is it?

There is a sort of irony that opens me and a sort of irony that shuts me down. Lispector is master of the first.

XX

Sherwood Anderson: Face of God

Sherwood Anderson echoes this same concept in a parallel too great to ignore. (See also the previous Hopkins quotation). In Anderson's story *The Philosopher*, The Doctor speaks to the boy George Willard:

The idea is simple – so simple that if you are not careful you will forget it. It is this – that everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified. That's what I want to say. Don't you forget that. Whatever happens, don't let yourself forget.

(39)

It should be noted the Doctor has been telling the boy lots of stories as well as working on his own writing; trying to transmit knowledge with words.

The doctor even says, it's the simplicity of the matter which makes it difficult. This *remembering*. These writers are telling similar stories. Because we have to *keep* remembering. In different ways and combinations. In different cultures, eras and languages. In different tones and from different angles.

I am compelled by wanting to remember, as opposed to learn. Learning implies we don't come from anywhere, or have answers inside us; or that our emptiness is unnatural, something to be filled with whatever and by any means possible.

XXI

Tara Brach: Healing in the Void

Dr. Tara Brach's *Radical Acceptance* is a self-help book. An instruction manual, much of the book is about being at once "The Holder" and "The Held" as a method in making peace with our warring insides. While this work might at first seem out of place in a literary theory essay, it is something I'd like to think lives deeply in the grain of my creative work this year. When multiple interior voices are understood on a page, there is an implication that we can be large as people. We don't have to play so many small roles. We could be more joyous in embracing all the things that we are.

When we become the holder of our own sorrows, our old roles as judge, adversary or victim are no longer being fueled. In their place we find not a new role, but a courageous openness and capacity for genuine tenderness, not only for ourselves but for others as well.

(204)

That within me is a father and a child. A victim and a bully. A cretan and a savior. And yet I am none of these things. I am the container of the things. Brach's *Radical Acceptance* and *Cloud of*

Unknowing are the same sort of book. They use words to get me to a place without them, where I might experience God. Where I might, God-willing, heal. The good is what is revealed with healing, not something one must put on top like a bandage.

This might be cheesy stuff. But it's crucial to me as a person and a writer.

To tie up a loose point: That which creates space in which healing is possible can take any number of forms. I have always been quick to label which thing is for what. But each thing can be many things: Art, The Bible, a film, a person, a conversation, "prayer", "meditation", walking, kissing, eating, reading, writing. The nature of a thing is beyond its name, as is the experience of the thing. The Bible can be read "as art", or The Bible can be read as "the word of God". And though the framing of the activity matters, it does not imply a specific experience of it. I might read The Bible as art and have a religious experience. I might read it as "The Word of God" and feel nothing at all. Each thing I encounter in my life gives me these choices of perception. Removing the labels from things allows for the immediate experience of them as a momentary *everything*. Ideally I might come up with entirely new terms not only for everything new I see, but every time I see the same thing, too. How can each moment be infinitely new? To move through the world without wasting energy evading uncertainty. An unknowing which opens the the door of the world.

XXII

Ordet (1955): Religious Room (Part 1)

Ordet – “The Word” – is a Dreyer movie from 1955. It concerns two families, each who practice different kinds of Christianity. The patriarchs of each family meet to discuss the

prospective marriage of their children, but the conversation turns quickly to disagreement about religion:

Do you know what the difference is between your faith and mine?
You think Christianity is sullenness and self-torment. I think
Christianity is the fullness of life. My faith is for all day long and joy
in life. Yours is the longing of death. My faith is the warmth of life.
Yours is the coldness of death.

I like to think of Flannery O'Connor watching this movie; of what she would have thought of it. These conflicting views of eternity playing out in a specific tragedy. This diversity of truths. Them being at odds. The posing of their questions. And seeing how they effect the material substance of life.

Everything functions on belief, God or not. What force takes belief and turns it into something one can touch, see, experience?

In the next scenes of the movie the pregnant daughter of one of the men becomes ill during childbirth. The child dies. Then, tragically the mother dies, too. But after she has been dead for a day, the woman's brother, claiming to be the living Jesus Christ, resurrects her from her coffin using the power of prayer. The other characters had thought he was crazy for the whole movie. But in the final scene he proves his claims. In light of such a miracle – the fathers embrace. They will allow the children to marry.

This constellation of religious archetypes is brought forward from The Bible to be played out up close in the here and now. As with this next example.

XXIII

Stephan Heym: Religious Room (Part 2)

The Wandering Jew puts Ahasverus (The Eternal Jew), The Devil, and a priest a court room.

Ahasverus is put on the stand – in all irony – to vouch for the reality of the true existence of Christ because he was supposedly there at the time of his crucifixion. He addresses the court:

In all the time I have known you I have never noticed you particularly loving your enemies or blessing those that cursed you praying for them which despitefully used you, as your Lord Jesus preached on the mount, nor do I see others who call themselves Christians obey these words.

(193)

The Jew here enjoys his unknowing. He isn't afraid of the questions. He is an irreverent outsider. In contrast, the avaricious priest lives in fear and vanity, desiring only material pleasure and gain. Satan watches the scene smiling, helping the priest to gain wealth and power at every turn.

This scene is comical but also important. As in Lispector's work, the implications of old stories becomes more immediately apparent. I find a self in each character. The questions set up by the characters' interactions are at once humorous and philosophical, ironic and critical, emotional and intellectual. Heym arranges multiple dualistic tensions for us. All our ancient desires, at odds with themselves, in the words of a single room.

XXIV

Kafka's *The Castle*: Religious Room (Part 3)

Kafka does this, too, in a vague, strange and detached way. In *The Castle* K., the main character, is looking for Klamm, the guy in charge of The Castle. Klamm forever avoids K's audience. Yet K. always seems so close. At once point, K. waits for Klamm in Klamm's car, determined to speak to him.

[...] as if he was freer than ever and could wait as long as he wanted here in this place where generally he was not allowed, as as if he had fought for this freedom for himself in a manner nobody else could have done and as if nobody could touch him or drive him away, or even speak to him, yet – and this conviction was at least equally strong – as if there were nothing more senseless, nothing more desperate, than this freedom, this waiting, this invulnerability.

(106)

But of course, K. loses faith and leaves the car, and only then does Klamm arrive.

This distance between K. and the Klamm is a gap of desire. Though there is not explicit reference to anything religious, Kafka writes his characters through the same arena of cathetic distance as Heym and Dreyer. There is a playing of *desire for gain* against a *desire for mystery* against a *desire for coherence via material rules and standards*.

Stranger still, all of the characters in *The Castle* act as if part of one confusing entity, everyone behaving in accordance with some singular and inscrutable force. K. prods at the foreign frontispiece of his world, looking for facts, for reason, within the structure that is both unified and multiple. But truth remains just beyond his reach.

Of K.'s landlady, Kafka writes:

An intriguer by nature, operating like the wind, seemingly to no end, upon remote alien instructions that one never got to see.

(117)

The Castle is one long purgatory. What is it K. is really seeking? And why will he do anything for even a moment with a man he has never met?

Ordet and *Wandering Jew* – as well as much of O'Connor's work – are not afraid to directly address God, Christ, Jews, Satan and other big religious words. These writers step boldly into these questions, each with a different look on their face as they do.

The Castle does a similar stepping without the same words.

After 300 pages *The Castle* ends mid-sentence. The entire book is a fragment.

XXV

Julian of Norwich: Moment (Part 2)

And so I saw that God rejoices he is our father and God rejoices that
he is our mother and God rejoices he is our true spouse

(125)

In the 14th century Julian of Norwich, near death, had violent visions of Christ. She saw Christ's blood was love, pouring forth from his crucified body, and that He was our Mother as well as our Father – He who created us into this prison where joy is our birthright if we only looked to Him. Julian wrote about her visionary experience twice, with something like twenty years apart. Modern science might have us believe her to be insane, or suffering from oxygen loss or any number of other things. But, to again quote Dlugos. "This is not about religion, / this is not about belief. I know what happened. I was there; *it* was there. Nothing can change that." We draw lines, but there are none. Perhaps, back then in the dark ages, people knew better in their unknowing; were more in touch with the immediate sensations of being alive, and so more in touch with their spirit.

But, no, they likely knew the same, the little amount, the same smallness we know now still.
Perhaps nothing.

What we have are moments. Moments which have weight if we let them.

I saw God in an instant.

(89)

From here this line looks like one of Marie Noel's. It is Santoka's poetics.

Julian of Norwich processed this single event for years – was she aware of the sensations in her stomach as she wrote about it? She orated twice at an amanuensis, who dictated her words by candlelight.

This is about allowing ourselves our moments, our experience, and our transformation. In myself, psychology has often gotten in the way of this process; the western notions of progress, of achievement, of the future. My goal is all too often to immediately pick apart art to find the “hidden meaning” and articulate it just so. As if my job was to mine a story, or a life event, for valuable ore. As if the “true” thing was somehow buried below the surface of the work – or life – and my main concern should be extricating and possessing it.

While this has its place, this is a limited, safe way of interacting with the world.

The alternative is to look for moments. I want to write moments. To give a moment full credit. Seeing it. The vision of it. Feeling it, my body in it. Taking that and pushing it back at itself, at it, at God. Diving into that. Both writing moments and writing about moments. And being in moments.

I am not good at this. I want to be good at this.

XXVI

Simone Weil: Freedom and Impulse

I have the germ of all possible crimes within me.

(Waiting For God 7)

Simone Weil never joined the church. Her fear, shown in the above quote, was not that she was different, but that she could find no shred of difference within her, therefore she could be taken up by anything. So she'd best direct herself at God. For Weil God is a matter of independence. She is proof that people can be at once God-loving, intellectual, and fiercely independent, and that these traits are not at odds as is so often portrayed in popular media.

I saw that the carrying out of a vocation differed from the actions dictated by reason or inclination in that it was due to an impulse of an essentially and manifestly different order; and not to follow such an impulse when it made itself felt, even if it demanded impossibilities, seemed to me the greatest of all ills. Hence my conception of obedience [...]

(23)

Here, Weil is talking about moments. About treating each of them on its own terms in order to try to come to the truth. Otherwise we fall into roles, in which we behave like automatons. We start to identify with the costumes we wear, rather than addressing life from this more "impulse"-oriented place that is in touch with the truth. It is Weil who shows me that through obedience I might head towards independence. I might need less props. And have more moments.

I am called to writing which creates moments in which the reader experiences what a moment is, so gets in touch with this "impulse of a different order" and so might find their own

vocation more close at hand. So to become, as The Bible says, "New in Christ", so to, as Tara Brach might say, hold ourselves more tenderly in our pain.

Paul Celan's work also comes to mind. Or Santoka's haikus. Writing that shows me what a moment is, so I can practice finding my own moments, so I can be free of roles and more dependent on truth.

Weil says it more simply:

It is not my business to think about myself. My business is to think about God. It is for God to think about me.

(9)

This quote is a bridge to the last section of this thesis. Weil operates looking outward, but feeling inward – for the voice of God. As with Rumi, Santoka, and Celan, Weil writes with the spark of self-abandon.

XXVII

Rebecca Brown: Body Reaching (Part 3)

Part of what's at stake with many of these writers is not knowing what we are. Not knowing what our "self" – our being, soul, identity, body – really consists of. That our definitions, necessary as they may be, are always failures to know *what any of this really is*. But that we've no reason to despair. There is wonder in our failure. Our inability to contain or name things is God overflowing.

Julian of Norwich:

But in our transitory life that we live here in our sensory being we do not know what we are; later we shall truly see and know our lord God in the fullness of joy.

(107)

“Transitory”, she says. We’re on our way. The body, our vehicle, is foreign to us – not in the sense of our “identity” with it (which is an intellectual affair) but in our immediate experience of its cravings and pleasures and pains. Many of the writers I have mentioned speak as if they have fallen into their body. As if banished to it. As if, perhaps, doomed to it. This is the truth and the trouble of the soul.

Rebecca Brown puts it like this in her story, *The Mermaid (Not Heaven, Somewhere Else)*:

she wasn’t that
she wasn’t half
oh what could she be now

sometimes she can't tell things apart
things don't make sense sometimes
she wanted to be remade anew
she made her fish nor fowl
she gasped and gulped and tried to hold

(44)

she couldn't breathe in or out of it
nor speak nor swim nor cry
was neither fish nor fowl nor girl
nor body nor blood nor he

(45)

Brown works leaning into bodily awareness. This feeling of being grotesque and in a kind of limbo, awash with foreign sensations. The voice in Brown’s story seems to say: I do not know what this is. Am I that? No. Maybe? Almost. There are often questions in Brown’s work. Questioning the story, and the nature of what we consider to be the facts, in order to regain mystery; to clear void space in our crowded interiors into which perhaps the spirit might enter in some momentary grace.

Brown continues, moving from physical identification with sensation to a different, perhaps spiritual, plane:

One time from far way she'd seen a prince. [...] He'd waved to her she thought but had or had she not waved back? She wanted to see him in the flesh; she wanted to see him forever. But she couldn't tell what had been seen or only hoped. Was she a fool to hope? For who oh who oh could ever love her?

Her mouth hurt with the want of him, his body and his blood. She hurt with hope and was afraid. Would hope now be the death of her? Or life?

(44)

The speaker is *remembering*; a memory of a moment. It immediately calls to mind Julian of Norwich's moment. The memory is at once painful and a source of hope. The pain is real pain, not superficial pain. The moment calls everything into question. The memory at the nexus of a larger experience.

This section of Brown's is another example of a text putting the body up against the spirit, the mystical, God, the other. Using physical sensation and description against something invisible, something elsewhere, to prod at a place where vulnerable forms of unknowing lay hidden, both within us and in the world. The Mermaid cannot find her body's truth, nor in this case even articulate the truth of what she experiences, so the questions of death, of the soul, become immediately relevant. Even urgently so. There is pain, "the mouth hurt with the want", then fear, then the profound questions set forward by the uncontainable desire. What's going to happen to me if I don't even know what I am? A desire so great, we feel as readers that this is why the poem is written. It is a place for this desire to go.

This writing is about the failure of language to contain, identify, or subdue the experience of the body. Where writing fails is where mystery begins. In its failure we experience the mystery. Part of the beauty of *The Mermaid* is its embodiment of the meekness of language. In metaphysical terms, this makes sense: It is only in smallness that we can ever have power.

What does it mean for “hope” (or “life”?) to be the “death” of someone? In the gaps created by questions like this one, Brown illuminates the distance between language and reality, between knowing and not understanding. It is the same gap that is found in the blank page around Santoka’s haikus. It is the mysterious time between Julian’s versions of *Divine Love*. It is the precipice of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The questions that are impossible to ask. Who, dropped into life, has not felt this? And reached out shaking, wanting?

The Mermaid ends:

He gave it a burial.

I believe this was something.

(45)

After the memory, the body, and the reaching, Brown gives us a glimpse at the importance of ceremony, of honoring the form, even knowing its emptiness. Of containing, for a moment, the uncontainable. In a coffin, in a grave. In something real, physical, touchable. It's not chance that the poem comes back around the physical. The physical matters. Things matter here, not just "there". Painters paint landscapes because landscapes are as inexplicable as anything else imaginable. It's looking us right in the face all the time.

As much as *it is nothing*, it is also, *something*.

...

Tara Brach's main message is that attending to the immediate physical sensations of your body with the right quality of perception will bring about healing. Weil's divine "impulses" are physical – they are found on the level of sensory experience. Brown's Mermaid, too, experiences in her own mouth the tenderness of the beyond.

Something happened within me, something is happening, something inextricably linked to the physical condition of my stomach. There is information in me, there, here, which points in the direction of something more; something both ubiquitous and entirely foreign. Learning to read this intestinal information is an art, the side effect of which is often the acute loss of identity, as well as, sometimes, the relaxing of an overactive mind, hell bent on "solving" things.

These writers speak to the reclamation of our bodies in order to find God. These writers ask me to at least *try* to abandon myself. To reach for *it*. To begin to trust. To let go. To exchange identity for interiority. To grasp at the wordless language within me. To use words from You, from It, toward It and You; to have this reaching renew my body, making it at once more foreign and more habitable. At once more vehicle and more home.

There is vulnerability in reaching toward God without even knowing what is reaching. And in that reaching I lose my desire to label myself as a static object. I become more interested in where I am than what I am.

Weil:

We possess nothing in the world [...] except the power to say 'I'. That is what we have to give to God – in other words, to destroy. There is absolutely no other free act which it is given us to accomplish – only the destruction of the 'I'.

(*GGG* 26)

When the weight of the story is lifted, I hit the road, like Teneda Santoka. I endeavor only to become motion. Moving or not, motion is all that I am.

XXVIII

George Herbert: Everywhere

That all thy body was one door.

(The Thanksgiving 14)

The Thanksgiving is a George Herbert poem about wondering how best to love Christ. The above line is the keystone statement of the piece. Christ as a way forward; a way through; a way into life. A way to see the whole – the large and small – that nothing is extraneous, accidental, or outside the bounds. Without a way into life I am afraid. Christ is one of many ways into life. A "door". A framework for an opening into a room. A thing to walk through. To cross through. A threshold. A way to understand. A way to love. A way into love. A way to find humility, to truth, to sight. To resize oneself. To know oneself by the nature of the room one is in, rather than by what labels oneself.

Let me be clear: I don't know anything about how to love right or best or what God or Christ is. But I know that I have to walk through the door to begin to know. I have to, by use of something, put my heart on the plate, deliver the envelope, use my feet to walk. Go into the house. I have to *go in there*.

There is a difference between writing which *goes in there* and writing which stands apart and casts down distance, judgement, or information. Mostly what I am practiced at is the latter. This thesis is about beginning to strive for the former. About walking through the door. Or at least summoning up the courage to try. Standing on the porch, nervous. One door. One body. Here the mystery begins and ends. I am trying to be a child.

There is something on the road that reveals itself when I am out there. Here, sitting at the desk, that truth is often only a memory. I have to go back out, or in, to remember. And I often cannot bring it entirely back. Because it is not me. Though it perhaps lives in me. A place. I don't remember the story of my travels – but a *moment* on the road; a meadow, a smell, an angle of sunlight through the clouds.

Maybe: I am tracing the poetics of abandon.

Herbert's poem ends without an answer. He is overcome with joy. He has words only to say he has no idea what to do:

Then for thy passion – I will do for that –
Alas, my God, I know not what.

Herbert doesn't have an ending. What he has is love for his door. And it's no chance that his door had a body. The triangle of body, mind and soul comes full circle here. It is through the body of Christ that Herbert sees everything. And it is, perhaps, Herbert's own body which he receives back from the door when he walks through it. He receives his own body back from the body of God with the feeling of joy at having a body at all.

XXIV

Remembering

I am making the things to remind me of what I knew before I got to knowing too much. I am not advocating for the destruction of intellectual pursuits, nor for the taking up of Christianity or religion.

Or, I don't know, maybe I am.

I acknowledge, too, the paradox that I have been claiming to know so much about not knowing. I am clearly at risk of being holier-than-thou. It is seemingly a part of the process of making art that I might later feel myself to have been deluded in some of this thinking. Perhaps, God or not, I am still a hypocrite in trying to write my experience – as if the "world could be referenced", as if I could solidify understanding, even clandestinely so, under the guise and credo of *not understanding*. But here I approach a heady circle of intellectual imprisonment, wishing to tighten my designs to the point of cutting off the circulation of experience, or vulnerability, from my stomach and soul.

Simone Weil:

For the good which we can neither picture nor define is a void for us. But this void is fuller than all fullness.

If we get this far we shall come through all right, for God fills the void. It has nothing to do with an intellectual process in the present-day sense. The intelligence has nothing to discover, it has only to clear the ground. It is only good for servile tasks.

(Gravity and Grace 13)

I spent many years determined to *think my way out of sickness and humanity*. Until I began to see the ineffectiveness of this kind of thought, I found no relief from myself.

It is a strange thing to think about writing as reminding us of our bodies, because, basically, *writing is an intellectual thing*. But what of a writing which "clears the ground"? Which gives us back the void in which God might enter if we give up control?

The roads I have found outside myself – the rolling hills of Oregon, the muddy coasts of Washington, the high deserts of California – have corresponding interior roads which intersect, combine and speak supernatural information; a transmutation in some internal cauldron; a place, an interior city, that is not discussed in The Academy, or in the media, perhaps through no real fault of these institutions, but simply because it *cannot be*. Though ineffable, this mystical experience

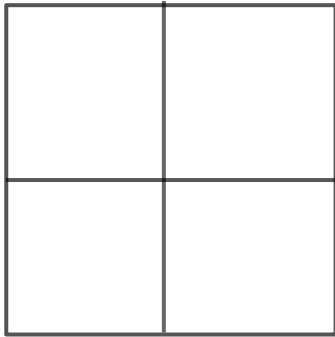
is also not rare or special. In fact, though I so often forget, this mystical experience is the main material of life, though it is often gets buried in the noise of other modes of being.

I am fathoming a writing which uses the intellect to clear the highway from soul to stomach in a mission to regain this holy commonness, and so regain our bodies. Prayer is not only a list I perform in language. It is a desire to be an authentic thing in relation to myself in the world. Prayer is a state of being *true as can be*, or at least *in truthful desire of this trueness* even if I feel hopelessly cast away. Writing and reading have helped me grow toward desiring this state. I am lucky for the magnet pulling me. These books, thinkers, writers, are like the guardrails on my highway to a heaven that's here. In me. Now.

All of the artists in this essay find power in their smallness, in their admitted ignorance of the truth. All of these artists want to see the difference between what's real and what's imaginary. The use of the imaginary is to carve a place in which the real might enter.

I know less every day. I used to think the future was coming. Some days I am still quite sure of it. But this notion is rejected by my body. Reading and writing are ways of maneuvering through the experience of the body. I want God, I want the truth, I want to jump. But I am imperfect, failing, falling, afraid. I have experienced change, through grace, through the relinquishing of my self, through luck. There is more to say, maybe. This feeling, here, this moment, has driven me to write. I write. I cannot say. Only try to point and have the pointing itself be the direction to go. I give up. I hope to one day see it all clearly again. But I am sure it will be different then. It always is.

For now, I am new.



The Son

I live in the basement of the house. There is a small window. I watch the trees sway against the sky.

You forget what your body has buried.

*Swim out the window
and into its eyes.*

I am the wrong kind of nothing.

(I squint, the light burning.)

Without you I know only fear.

(shovel
leaned
against a tree)

Surrender!

I emptied my pockets on the desk.

“Light heats.”

“No. Light lights.”

“No. Light looks.”

“No. Light lands.”

“But how does it fly?”

“It doesn’t. It only arrives.”

“Here.”

In my window.

He is beyond a door.

His eyes are shut.

He does not see the darkness.

He reaches for me.

He opens his eyes.

His eyes are open.

He opens his eyes.

His eyes are shut.

I had to leave.
You went to find a body.
It was not a home.
You were not supposed to survive.
I didn't.

(At night I walk for hours.
Televisions light the street.)

By morning I'd forgotten again and was nervous.

It was nothing – it's gone –

The room lifted, tilted, then rocked back and forth, like a cradle.

*Clouds
falling –*

*Crows flying
into the sun –*

A red haze spread across the sky.

*People –
alone –
looking –*

Down they fell, into my hands.

At night the sky is somehow bright.

What did you see?

“Water rising.”

(“I hid secrets in my chest.”)

*“A tower rising from the water.
Hands reaching out the windows
to catch rain.”*

*Throw your hands in the water. They’ll float.
Then walk across them to find me.*

“A good concept self-destructs.”

(“The shell of the nut is the boat.”)

I am a fish dreaming of land.

Give me back my hands?

Never.

In the shadow at the edge of my bed.

Pressed up against the house below my
window.

Just as it comes apart, I remember.

I try to write it but it is gone like a fist of sand.

I climb the stairs.

There's no one left to say.

Who will say?

“No it's not no one.
It's some one and
He is not me.”

What did you see?

A hole at the center of my sight.

Where I look I cannot see.

Practice looking up.

Make a hole in the sky.

“You think God is fragile?”

(Here – in the stomach,
afraid of being swallowed.)

My son says: "Thank you God for giving me trash."

We are making a town out of cardboard. People are bigger than houses. The sun is square. Clouds hang by string above the chimney.

I try to look at him. But his face is a mountain.

I was sleeping when he arrived. My face grey in the light of the screen.

A book there, next to my bed, like a weight.

(I had resolved never to read.)

(You were trying to explain?)

Yes – but without sound. I wanted to know
the words before they had a mouth to be in.

*“A trail of shattered mirrors followed him around the
neighborhood like a dog.”*

I wanted you to know that I knew it all to be
just so.

Is it just so?

I am sure.

Then why write?)

My son looks back at me. We construct a plane, hanging it over his bed with thread and masking tape.

Then a rocket. A cat. A bus.

(No one here.

“The nothing, in me —”)

I can almost see.

I hide my face. I have shoulders, torso, neck,
legs.

“You came looking for you.”

When did I forget? I’ve forgotten. This is the
extent of what I have remembered.

“You misunderstand. Now you speak.”

(I stood behind the words pushing them out a
chute. The phone weighed a thousand
pounds. Outside a man threw rocks at my
window.)

One day you will fall through the phone to a garden.

I will be there dressed as a gardener.

There, I will have to give back what I am.

“But whose shit is this?”

“That keeps our eyes turned down.

“That keeps our feet stuck.

“That makes us chew our teeth until sunrise.”

(He
in my stomach
and I
in His.)

Things run through me.
I am not a cup. I am a drain.

You are a place.

What sort of place?

A desert at the top of a tower.

At any moment I might fall.

(“As if!”) (“If only!”) (“The ledge —”)

When the voice is overtaken by static.

When the hand recedes into the sleeve.

When the light at the edge of the door goes out.

“Beware of understanding.

Let it collect and disperse.

Like storm clouds.”

My son
under a tree.

The rain hits the van.

I light a fire.

I walked the train tracks till sunrise. I never
saw a train. The sun came up. The light did
not kill me as I thought it would.

Then came hunger.

You were told not to eat.

I was too light. I would have been carried
away.

You sank. Below the meaning of words.

No, I was buried in it.

The ground broke open when you called out my name.
What is your name?

(out my window –
snow and light
and dark)

Winter. On the beach my son
builds a church out of sticks. He
lines the walls with shells. The
wind.

“Can you breathe in
space?”

“What do jellyfish eat?”

“Can you come live with
me and mom?”

“What happens when
your body dies?”

(coat frayed threads dragging in the sand)

My son draws me. In a mirror everything is backwards. God sees in reverse. My son, the split of my shadow, tells the truth. I have little to do with it.

*“I fell through the floor to a field.
Clouds. Grass. Birds.
The sun.”*

“I pretend to know as you know. Then I speak.

“I do not know. When I did, I didn’t.

“Now, I refuse to.”

(I drove all night
and when I got there
it was morning.)

They didn't know.
"I blamed those who blamed."
They were children crying.
"I couldn't hear."
I judged those who judged.

A coin, rolling down the street.

"An eye is nothing but sight.

*The light of God,
before God sees."*

The coin
crushed by a train.

What I hope is that when you end me I am whole, not entirely identifiable, my eyes empty, clear, open.

*(There is no need for freedom –
I am everywhere.)*

A tree fell in the yard.

“I open my hands to hold you.”

I have only lies and questions.

“You are for periods weightless.”

I weigh the same as the earth.

“My arms are tied to exploding stars.”

(“But where, Dad?
Where do we go?”)

My house holds up the sky.

When the house falls, the sky will fall to meet
the ground in silence.

There is the field where I am trying to
remember.

("Am I right?!")

(I am nothing if not right.)

("Then I am nothing.")

A flower grew out of the top of my tv. I could no longer watch. Water soaked the walls, which softened and crumbled. The room was a pool. There were fish. I swam.

The flower is God?

The word is flood?

And what of love?

The kitchen.

The oven.

The bird at the window.

The meal.

(I try but –

holes
in my pockets.)

“Take whatever you want.”

“Can you hear me?”

“Your chest is numb.”

“His ‘chest is numb’, he says.”

And the empty room is quiet.

The first time I noticed the trees was in a movie. I couldn't see them without the screen.

(there
a light
at the foot of the bed)

Wake up!

*("You go.
I'll stay here.
Your hands will be safe with me.")*

Summer. My son and I sit next to a river. He
throws things in the water. I write things
down in my notebook.

No, you are the river. Jump in, or starve.

I will try to bring my notebook with me. It
will get wet. The ink will run. The words will
be indecipherable. The pages will tear.

(A framed photo of a mountain on a wall.
The house tilts.
I slip out the back to the field.)

The river, the river, the river.

And the boat.

Footsteps on the ceiling.

*“His medication –
Who will be left –”*

*“Without time –
And asleep – ”*

Who decides who gets to know?

Who decides who sees?

(my parents

the tv
loud)

The wind carries away what isn't nailed
down.

Meet me there? In the field, where it's quiet.

("Not yet.")

(I wish only to sink honestly.)

The shattered bits of mirror melted as I
pulled them from my feet.

Everything is good, making good, toward good.

I am home, going home.

*("I can't tell you. But it's not a secret.
You almost know. You already know.
You are pretending.")*

A tree grew through the house, lifting it
toward the sun. It ripened, fell to the ground,
rotted.

You want to grow a future?

No, I want to plant a seed.

You want to go home?

("Could we? Not to the tree, but to the seed.")

("To the dirt?")

("To the source of the dirt.")

(heavy –

I hide

in the basement)

My hands

are His.

A flash of light.

"Did you see it?"

Telephone poles
like crosses
along the desert highway –

*(A silent meadow
where I cling
to whatever
I was.)*

*"I tried
but my eyes
would not open."*

My father makes a list of the books he has read, with a few comments about each. He speaks to me of the future.

“We are outnumbered. Things must be saved. Our home is comfortable because we have none. Our fathers had nothing. Our Father left us.”

His hands are blotchy. None of us have time. We have things. He’s eating soup at the table. The rain.

He showed me the desert.
But I could not see.

("He is not me —")

*The son
of the son
of the son —
my son.*

Trees sway like blades of grass.
His eyes open.

("But can you see?"

He is not me —")

Or me.

Or me.

Was it you?

Was I yours?

Was it where I could not go?

Was I where you could not see?

(the boy and the man
walking down hill home holding hands)

Fall. We're alone at the playground. The
wind howling. The rain. I write something
down. The ink bleeds.

The boy is a place.

The father is an older place.

(on the porch
I cut his
thin white hair

it blows away in the wind)

3am. He sleeps in his chair.

Up the hill
once more.

(somehow –
the sky)

In the woods, he asks me questions. I make
up answers. We carve our names into trees.

“Here,” I say. “Here is where we can go.”

“Where?” He says.

But he hasn't yet reason to leave.

When we got home, the basement was flooded. I wanted to swim in it but my mother sent me to bed.

("Who should I say is asking?")

"Tell him: I think that I am who He is."

I hear breathing through the phone.)

I slept in my clothes without dreams.

(toys floating
in black water)

A shadow without an object.

*A moment stretched so long
its particles glow in the light
of my desk lamp.*

*The reaching of branches
toward my shrinking window.*

("How alone?"

"Don't worry.

This much —")

dead end

a car passes

(forever here
I'll wait –

“till then!”)

*“my only hope
is this window*

—

*that it will stay shut —
that I can pretend to be
this thing*

—

*that no one will notice
I am gone
until morning”*

"Did you? –"

Something makes a face behind the glass.

I pulled the blinds.

(how bad is it?

don't lie to me

my eyes are closed

I try too hard

leave me here
forever

to retch
in love)

I carried you like I did when you were small.
You used to fall asleep on my shoulder, miles
from home. I would ease you into bed, careful
not to wake you. You would talk in your
sleep. Not English, never English.

Last week you wrote a poem:

*“A son and a dad sit in the Japanese Garden.
The son is eating chips.”*

I carry my notebook, like cigarettes.

Who are the notes for?

*The earth is curved –
(They say.)
The hills roll around it –
(I know.)*

(Pssst –

Heaven has no future.)

“What use would God have for an afterlife?”

In hell there is only the future and the past.

(“In the future I have a son.”)

He has a nightmare.

His eyes open, asleep.

“Get away.

Get it away.”

Where is the pain?

I have no knife to cut it out.

(Between
the sky
where things
tumble down
to touch me.)

(“Help!”)

(I cling to my notebook.
Through it, the past rejects me.
With it, I destroy the future.)

I thought I had something to say but by the
time I could breathe I was rotting and, soon
after, soil, and then – smeared on the hands
of an old gardener.

Death says,

(in the garden between forwards and backwards)

“You are a house.”

“I demand bliss.”

But it's too late. There's nothing left.

*"That
is in there
and this
is in here."*

*("Then I'll hold
this
as close
as I can —")*

(The sunlight dies.
The birds fall.
The oceans are deserts again.)

The door opened.

“I am coming home.”

(The door shut.

I was nothing.

“You will not ever find me.”)

I belong at home, near my window.
I have come back to warn you.
I was not listening last time.
Then I was right to lie.
Give me back my eyes?
Never.

(Full moon.

Fireworks
over the canyon.

I turn off the van.)

We don't have any meat. Or clocks.

Upstairs
he's coughing.

The door is on the floor. I roll toward it on my side. I fall through it, into my stomach. The door shuts behind me.

No one can hear.

Or:

I am unable to say.

(I am no longer concerned with being articulate.)

*If you looked you would see that
the sound is brighter than the sky.*

*You ask for distance
then complain about the desert.*

(“No –

it’s not no one

it’s someone

and He is not

here.”)

(I am no longer concerned.)

*A bird can fly over the ocean
but you can't get out of bed.*

I am asleep.

There is no bed.

Only the floor, and a spine.

(Rain chips away at the lie. Like static on a television.)

"I no longer wish to be right."

The boy wakes me up in the night. He stands next to my bed, whispering my name. How long has he been there? I am awake.

In the morning he reaches for me. He forgets
my personality, and wants only my flesh.

“They try to teach him the future.”

“I worry they are teaching him to worry.”

There is always a place to go.

*“They taught me to go here,
into my chest.”*

I show him. Does he hear?

I tell him. Does he see?

“Who gets to see? And who hears?”

(Who would listen?

If I spoke.)

The plane takes off. He looks out the window.
Above the clouds, three mountain peaks
break through to the sun. We pass notes.

The seatbelt sign dings.

(Even the words go.)

(somehow
cities
below)

“He is not mine.”

“Whose is he?”

(My father, asleep in the chair.
My boy, asleep in the bed.)

“Whose is he?”

(At night, waiting.)

(I will say: "The liquid is warm."
The light eats away the words.
I will say: "The words are gone."
Yes, the words are gone.
"So are the things."
Yes, let them go.
I will say: "I am letting them go."
Now you cannot speak.
"Now I cannot think."
Now you remember.)

The sound of the train.

Go home.

I am home, going home.

Stay.

I have no weight.

You always knew.

I did.

You doubted.

I did.

You contracted.

I did.

You bit down.

Yes. On my tongue. On the tongues of others.

And salt, blood, tobacco, meat, stories.

(Walking the tracks.)

Here – take my hand.

Where is the door?

Everywhere. The knob is warm from the fire on the other side.

I am reaching for the knob.

Look at my face.

I am on fire.

I see your face through the flames.

What do you have?

(The train stops
in His arms.)

I was there. What was under.

I was what is left.

Having untied it I am nothing, I rise.

Belonging nowhere, to nothing, with only a
thing.

No. Without even that thing.

To go where we won't need it.

As if you could see light itself.

As if.

"When was I made?"

"Before you were born."

"It ruined me. I became nothing."

"Some stories need to be broken."

(burning

the trees reach
across my window –

my mother's footsteps on the ceiling)

I blow out the candle.

"No one tells this story."

I join them in the silence.

"The field?"

The dirt below.

(He climbs trees. The sap sticks to his fingers. Mushrooms grow in the shade. Pheasants run from hunters. The sun bends around clouds to meet us. We squint into the brightness. Too much to see.)

I listen for breathing.

The boy moves the coin a little further down
the tracks.

He spins around and squints at the father.

The light of the moon swallows the light of
the stars.

(The light of the moon swallows the light of the stars.)

*“I am nothing.
I’m becoming nothing.
I come from nothing.
I will return to nothing.”*

*(“No, you are lover and beloved.
Both of you in love.”)*

(To always be in love.)

Those were
my hands
floating
in the river.

What I mean to say is I do not wish to determine my own future from here, as I can see so little from here, now. The mountains, the fog, the trees obscure the distance, and these things are also beautiful in themselves and it seems wrong to always be trying to look around them. These things are also not things at all but feelings and sensations. These things are my body. It is my body which I have been trying to look around.

When I let her slip away I saw God where she
had been. And she, as God, in the distance.

I was thread for the needle.

I turned to face the mountain.

My nose bled in the dry desert air.

God is always a new idea.

To be wrapped in the warm wool of it, like
laying in a palm.

The house sunk to the bottom of the lake.

I swam out the window, to the tower.

I climbed the tower and jumped into the water.

*I could hear the mountain humming.
Though I could not see its face.*

I will sit still in this darkness as long as you like.

His hand out the window in the wind –

He reads me to sleep –

Up the mountain into snow –

Whose is he?

*“My Father
My Father
My Father
The Son”*

(day moon
hung up
with twine
near the sun)

(My son falls asleep.
I put down the book.
The light shines
in the cracked door
from the hallway.)

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