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Vintage Anxiety

Bradford Pearce
Virginia Commonwealth University

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VINTAGE ANXIETY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Directors:
David Wojahn           Gregory Donovan
Professor, Department of English  Professor, Department of English
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Abstract

VINTAGE ANXIETY

Bradford W Pearce, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at Virginia Commonwealth University.
Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014.

Directors:

David Wojahn         Gregory Donovan
Professor, Department of English  Professor, Department of English

Poems.
VINTAGE ANXIETY
And since now I know I can see, I look upon the vast objective metaphysics of all the heavens and with a certainty that makes me want to die singing, ‘I’m the size of what I see!’ And the vague moonlight, entirely mine, begins to mar with vagueness the blackish blue horizon.

—Fernando Pessoa, quoting Alberto Caeiro, *The Book of Disquiet*
Miltonic At the Dinner Party

One plans to dress as the angel called ‘The Softener.”
When we will leave too soon.

Real Danger. Monetary dispensation unimportant.
You’re cordially invited.

The skeleton crew will be there seeking another in the shower.

The sheriff venting next to the refrigerator,
thinks of the heart inside, the spleen.

Lycidas, my friend, he was a good man, he could not make it.

Among the masked the lady/fellar with the cosine mustache,
(we will be all shades in the bad light, wld be thrilled

with yr ad reference) Time for dinner! You didn’t know this
about Thomas Jefferson. More conversation like:

Of course we’ve periscoped landscapes,
before that court blokes writing interiors, whom, well,

what do you believe in heaven or hell?

Smoke some/ take pills if it feels like there, where the mind
is its own place and like falling off the edge of a picture,

berserk to think of so many suns and just the one,
I would I were a weaver I hear fish dance the weather,

to answer the questions in stock footage ways,
begin asking the questions in the manner of the best ideas

read in travel novels, to find the depth-charge like a rumor
of razors in apples on Halloween marvelous night for weeks,

that we’ll leave much too soon, so let’s watch, another,
backwards, springs to heaven

play it like this, slow this one down.
Prophylaxis

_In memoriam D.F. Wallace_

“I’d like to tell you about
“There is this very good new pill
“It makes your dick/clit bigger
“And will slow the heart.
“Will make the birds in your
“Chimney sing madrigals, just so
“Rather than get some two-bit
“Self-eradicating actors to tell
“You about it, late at night, with
“Regard to its virtues, attendant
“Chest hairs, may allow you to,
“In fact, swallow your own hearse,
“With dromederial wishes for you.
“I, Dr. Phillipe Mercurial Vapor Sands
“Diodorus, creator and user, would
“Like to tell you about it, you should
“Purchase this product, pronto
Dear Slim,
like a tinting our laughters
paint the inside walls.
If it weren’t for the line
around the corner,
trailing past the club,
billy club & irony,
we’d go on forever
with the rest of the gang
past the moon in: Our
Foam Booth of Laughter.
Only problem is—except
for the laugh line, talk line,
cry line, bread line—
is the phone rings sometimes
& it’s the Pope!
tear icicled on eyelash
calling from his white lace
latticed fallout shelter,
voice beside rusty moon
& he’s got a joke
(“it’s ‘round here someplace”
—there he goes, searching
through parched flowers,
papers, headlines, rot, pine
shaded school days)
& he wants us back.
Aloha Mercutio!

(with refrain by Neutral Milk Hotel)

Dr. streetsquare may or may not be a humanist.  
In the aeroplane over the sea

M. calls the heart a dirigible;  
meaning they’d rather have it straight

-ly, in the aeroplane over the sea…  
pedicures then sleep with no socks on

over the continental shelf, cool, I jump  
through the hoop in an ad for hoops,

filament on flickers off  
the window, now calabash & moon-time

not either the garden or desert

not volcano straits rocks not quicksand,  
eye contact with the good steward

who says ‘I didn’t want to get involved.”

O sun, lord of the waning year.  
Let’s watch a comic film. At any rate.

Meanwhile Mercutio on his cell,  
and one day we will die and our ashes will fly

(…krushing the bent furnace dime,

O sun, because both of us listen like amateurs)  
from the aeroplane over the sea.

When we get there turn fallow fields,  
when we see the city at the side of the moon,

when we get there, to grief, from an aeroplane…

when we get there worship weird trees and fruit  
say she’s the sea’s laugh, the plane, leaf’s vein.
Small time

“The tragedy of violence is that it erases its own violent edges, so that we may erase the first act of violence as trifling even though it was decisive.”

—Helene Cixous

The slur beats him there, from Columbus
your man, greysuit, in a late fedora, (Off rime)

high hat, in his father's duds: too big,

could not say if it were a Cutlass or
Skylark, though he's pretty sure “the bug”
is rigged. Now's not the time for complaint,

there’s much lucre enough
for us all & something we have, they don't:

large manners and time and space enough
to unfurl them. The Chattahoochee isn't
a line that divides the mind,

that music flows on water, the paint
they serve and she's her mistress, kind.
thought-riddled your man got slew,

checked-in, nothing like a corpse so refined,

…Who knows when they'll come again,
those Picts! Cannons we’ll turn on ourselves,

make new dis-ease, learn how to say Phoenix

(line size) in a syllable or three, crank the dis-
sonant music through the floors, export silences.

For then we’ll know what we love.
My poetry

explaining nothing barely itself
ignorant of hierarchies,
weak on justice, here-
by translates
the order in which Lewis said:
Love despair hate
as Little dog night,

tries again
leaving white-
space for its own ignorance,

…

with small letters this time,
maché doves clipped on a clothes-line,
next best with kids,
acknowledging
the four universal forces,

concedes the bad tournament
like the third generation
of an English-
man deteriorating in the tropics,
it’s the heat the stretch of voice,

instead draws
the urban plain shoebox club
in sight from the Megabus stop
in Charlotte
the family glass ghost,
passes the note with the pen.

…

takes shame as the nature state
dipped in commerce wit
lubbocks w/the essential no
gets lost in episodes of dark water
writes brick throws at a brick window,
dreams unto nothing to do

extends an image slowed
(vs. the generations) in a sand speck
of the public laughter mandala
turns to sneeze at signs
to an unrushed nightmare t.b.d.
Ballad; Miniature Golf

The plaster clown’s acne, his silent smile.
Gone rogue, the gym coach hits hard downhill;
(Scene: abandoned course beneath the highway,
bad lighting, wind through unkempt shrubs)

Girl says: In the part of the city like Paris,
the model-type falls out of a casket.
In the part of the city that floods
a house falls out of a failed one.

The boy says back: the bully the bully
buys the fool, as a rule the fool sells his logic
to buy the fairly new, why ma,
the news reminds me of a sit-com?

In the scree of the dusk-colored mountain,
another hides, waits for midnight, The Great Cleaner;
another, Lockjaw-the-reprehensible,
takes the attic at the Antietam bed & breakfast.

When …the grown folks, when will they…meanwhile…
maiden, roan, soldier & the Minotaur, sons of privilege,
let out of the basement,
one scar. In roach motels, they pass advice,
decide to keep doing these and other drugs.
The study of light takes many forms, a glass
of lemonade holds no less than the grid,
hold them up, smash the purple bulbs.
Newsmen for the girl

Cancun:
been a long time since we’ve heard good music;
The amp’s pitch snaps like myth in a deep wood;
I left her to die, the name of the chapter
in which we face leaving spring break for a space
choose-your-own-adventure, to page (empathy, confusion) choose, refuse or make an entrance.

Drone Mel:
Handsome Lake, sad Deidre, lack interest
In the ad that promises the inside of music;
there, there was no time to look for empathy,
If I could have those years back yes I would
tell her father with a knife that his space
ends by the path by the barn and his chapter

Cancun:
went to extremes which I felt still in Chapter:
Killsheet; every exit, indeed, also an entrance
to well-lit places never seen, inner space,
man, set to a slipstream and dark, human music.
I left her to die, so what, under woods,
wherever folk gather I lurk I, Empathy.

Drone Mel:
At least the dirge left us empathy,
at least someone believed in our chapter
that the reasons the speaker gave would
make sense in the air and have human interest
that Colophon, said Deidre, saw his muse sick-end;
at first did we have slightly more space

Cancun:
for the true? tho I say keep up this pace
go fast like an abstract word, see, Empathy,
we’ve waited a long time to hear music
seen the green siesta hips jell-O shots, that chapter
of men and they knew us by each entrance,
code hand shakes out of the, aged in, wood.

Drone Mel:
The best we can do, edge finer wood
repeat the speech, occupy thy lighter, space
good words until the lover’s tower give entrance,
proffer at a rate her empathy,
be in the rose, with prose, a chaffer & settle down, & fail, beside the good music.

(Together, now, with innocence, play funk)
Glassy age but a wood me, pimp-a-tree
outer space to open one more chapter
in a trance, pocket full of inflated music.
Chemical Fire Poetics

These small towns know discontent, know
gossip when you want the fire
and a rumor; not the man in the picture,

the smoke: ‘plumes of grey,
white and green’ a noir rooster,
crossing, signified, wished on,

that it stops traffic. No employees
were hurt that day,
batches of chlorine lost, like

the grey ionic romance you wish you could read
with the moms at the pool,
read faster than a not now not hiring sign.

Than a dictionary for swimming pools,
an ear infection argot, that tender,
when you want a sidewinder

beside the fence pushing blades of grass
back in place, dealerships when
you’d rather cars that speak: boom (Da

portamento) that gummy music swerves
in heads that want to make pretty talk
into the bars, churches, motels.
Cuzco Recalled in Plasticene

The workers carried the weight
by several paths, each stone imperfect
but found in shapes close to the next,
fitted, the map of walls conjured in lines

from Machu Picchu and the three corners
of empire, the crossing roads before
the cross of Spain; Spain, loam of liquid
speech and steel, built on top of the Incan walls

and quoin arches, through the water shined alleys.
Paths of sand of stone of wall, city, in views
parallelogram like televisions dance
through oranges, pinks, blues, Christ-bright

red, white, browns, murmur of self slowed
to form: the fevered pressed
mouth to heel against the abstracted;
germin & return, like that, where the poem starts.
Blueblack/ Redblack

(Las Manos de la Protesta, Oil on canvas, Oswaldo Guayasamin 1968)

He comes charging from
the blue black,
blueblack, himself,
straight teeth,
lined tongue
& his cheeks
shaved with
chiaroscuro;
larger, his hands
frame the skeleton
of his face
finger bones
turn twice, nails
trimmed, but sharp
cupping something:
air, this time,
neither lust not rage.
Fly into Quito,
try not to miss the latest
in Honduras;
see the painting,
it is enormous;
get the postcard,
put it on
a bare wall,
look at him
there, the colors flex
unstable,
hands grasping
a blank
fingers longer
than memory,
blue imagined.
Originality

The new man/ that’s him there/ yes it’s that/ sewer pipe/ which lets through/ everything.
— Tadeusz Rózewicz

Originality, another word for you’re doing it wrong.
— from the internet

My favorite color, it’s called originality.
— rap lyric

This is not rage. (I am not that beautiful!)
— Amiri Baraka

Let’s talk, it’s cheap, I know
the metal wire of a creek on a map,
after expressive rain, an undercurrent,
the better series that might have been.
Gloss the motives after the fact, they
meet you with dark rhymes.
He, or should I say the extension
of his gun, like church,
yet the cloister with stained glass
across town, with another.

Take a picture.
As if
Edwin Land somewhere made policy,
how one shows up
invariably between the colors,
his band
in galleons of the image, brokedown,
never a place to start
unless
the words get thrown
up. Take a picture,

throw the voice, the feeling
(thar be the danger)
some great idea so far from
its shade.
(the Hide & Jekyll dropped
barometer.

Like a sewer requires a storm.
Son of A.
I know my own mind is wired well enough
to say it lets very much of anything in,
the question remains if it’s better to leave out
that which sticks or keeps
coming back.

Let’s lean here on Kenneth Patchen:

“What did they say when you told them
*Where bright angels have trod*
They said O”

(Originality,  
Origin  
Orgasm  
Orient  
the big pill.

Take two
for the feeling, to stop the mind whenever
that needs to happen.
Bananananafofama, Cyclorama

I. South

In the rafters the spectators inch around, steady like the erosion of sentiment. The biggest oil painting in the world stays still, diorama at its base, has the battle just north of where Atlanta burns. Made in Milwaukee, mural and machine, transported by carnival along with farm animals for the zoo.

II. South, South

The audience turned by crank and lever soundless, seamless. Patron and artist painted in. Four feet of Clark Gable dead at the base lampooned in union blue.

III. South, North

The leg of the park extends east on Confederate Ave. Real people I know lived there. Some time.

Elsewhere, time time time, the next great spectacle was the moving picture.

IV. South

Back again: statement, parturition:

History has history has sentiment has us. *The General*, locomotive and film pursues history in a line of plot, busterkeatoned under a hat of Circumstance & Redemption, time & time, the solitary and mute train runs down an audience.
Sometimes you wake up to the whole world as bad advice.

Back then we were learning to talk. ‘Be Cool’ Q.C. said and I drove off. After work “decompress” “recompress”:
watching the fuzzy cable cartoon sitcom infomercial.
Things bouncing in his brain like the English parliament on C-SPAN. Like kangaroos. He says “I ain’t shit”
after dropping a string of associations I couldn’t hear because I was driving, J. was shotgun talking
future plans, R., quiet, thinking about girl-friends, earlier at the bar in brogue on Palestine,
“It isn’t right.” Another night some guy shoving him in the back for no reason, a third guy at our table
who I didn’t know had a brick waiting. Two others

got me the job, before that I lived with my parents,
thus what I was saying about roving,
meaning going backwards, plus mastur-
bation.

The neighbor I remember would fix our cars for cheap,
he moved, the owners renovated the house, so nicely
we wanted it, toilets from the future.
The dog bit him, each of us, except the baby (the Baby!)
Little dog was our spirit animal, he grew up.
Neighbor moved some place with less peace.
He said this like outkast, waiting on a better story.
Paper Airplane #2

(Love Complaint, Arena)

_Lord knows_ whatever might finish this phrase. I wanted to get the tattoo on the side of my neck like Amare Stoudamire, _Lord Knows_ in cursive opposite _Black Jesus_. His Suns playing my Hawks, this a last date, her Suns. _Zaza Pachulia_: the seven foot center, bruiser for the home team; I kept making her say the name like the announcer. _Zaza..._ Lord knows it was a bad idea to take her. _Her Suns_. I must have been expecting Nuggets/Supersonics ’94; so very gallant, the teleology of the underdog.

The whole thing _went south_ after the kiss-cam: quick shots of couples on the jumbo screen, a good show, everyone is in it.

The game itself turned into a less lopsided defeat than we’d expected, was like a scene from the English novel where the character sees the other character for the last time at a set of boxing matches, before she runs off to America with another character, the collector. _Lord knows_ the enormity in the crowd that night, what was said, while they watched a stringy fighter fight a bulky one, at the lean time of the night when they had to find some poor guy for another poor guy to take on, the smoke and light riffing through the ring and past concrete pillars, up the rafters.

We knew the show gets brighter and better, with pyrotechnics, circling advertising, a live hawk, throw-back jerseys, fat guys dancing routine, _Lord knows_ written on the skin, the crowd spilling out to the street, _Lord knows_ the skin written to some end. A delayed exit. Lord knows it wouldn’t last forever, Amen.
…Where every night was art night, the waitress so famous she was painted on the tarot card table, I felt like a fly in her Miro, wanted to go down smooth like tequila class añejo. My cousin sold there, another guy, Q.C., who I met later worked there after I did, taking acid before a shift, the Sweetwater fish coming to life. Learned how-to touch a crowd, touch off it; learned money, more about what you had to wear than anything else, money an exchange like anything else.

Good stories, good shows—most ridiculous, the Dixie Chicks puppeteer —i.e. he’s in the middle, two puppets beside—ridiculous to think he wasn’t queer, that he didn’t take the space. Good job to leave, weekend trip to Hilton Head, head against the window through South Carolina, Pat Conroy’s, yet early Auden’s dismantled landscapes play there too, those riparian tobacco fields, *The Water is Wide*. Both brought *The Globe*, yet what’s the first beside worlds of *Gullah*. How I was seeing, receiving what they were saying. Then there were the men, another bartender nodded, with the escorts; I couldn’t see it, was like language. End of the shift, nights lost in space, when we polished off house liquor, played cards, made it home for the stories, the accidents— to count money took us outside of things, of thought, the numbers say *far.*
Radio voice like throwing pencils at people. Day traders & duck head/tales/hunt, says that

A man climbs a cell phone tower, one week later says another man does the same; same story, white male thinks on flight for the metalanguage apologies here comes everyone? ??? perhaps the quicker headline after they talked him down. (intermissions with the song you really shouldn’t like) with the song I really shouldn’t like, let the record state it more clearly: man A gets run by man B by man C, the buck stops tough to say where, whether the 80’s song talking about a field of control & the one way out has it in mind bringing us back again from the commercial; back then we wore structure polos, now the news team wears red, for the prom-oh. Saying, then disagreeing that he was most weary of becoming an idea, something else?

So, even so, most of what you’ve heard is true. Now he says don’t say I did it for the publicity, or that I felt like a Picasso lost next to a Cézanne, that I could not conceive of entering a church again, it’s become, well, a family joke; might become a voter, think on bankruptcy culture… new girlfriend reminds me of the old one plus daffodils & such; only thing is the mistakes stay, the details. The time I ended up at the city’s most banal Starbucks, did not realize the problem until a Hummer pulls up, leaves his lights on for like… was like someone stole the outside, put it behind this, then again, that’s how it goes, maybe it’s the caffeine blinds you, there’s a room where the light…
Closing-time crowd outside the bar. Call the inside Bardo, (curtained off from night, half-life swimming.) The trouble that night was your sister took a wrong door, to the wrong side of the strip mall; if not technically squalid, the walk back around was overrun with ferns, dark in tones, required an introspection that takes on the lie, now, or then. Her shoulders were narrow, she holds herself in. Like that, the way you paused before speaking takes on the dream where I’m falling through a video-game. It’s been too long, I forget sleep; so like now (how?) show-biz graft, telling what’s right. Back then we took turns playing the dirty gray matter uncle who saw more than the easy one. The lines that said so. You sat there for years. Pass it back.

Another night, earlier, block party, theatric harmonica, helicopter, fine light like needles.

Another night (different you) playing the same half-optimistic tune on the jukebox over and over: “Take Me Out” They didn’t like the joke, don’t they know, times get dark Hermes is the first to go, throws himself into the river. Another theme, one that stutters: Armageddon, the wide-eyed feeling from childhood, the vatic boomerang with views that suddenly drop, smell. The underside of what the track means to someone else. The trouble, the thing we walk in front of & get stuck in, not saying the words, the reasons that hold closer, what you meant when you said “I’m going home.” There, the fridge sings at a low pitch, drips blood, here makes it a mural unfinished.
Idlers

Noon under the trees, daytime half-moon like science fiction. I took the train I wanted to see. The great outdoors, the badlands museum. Sign about a break from the battle.

Three men waiting on the west train, across the platforms three boys waiting on the east. The station smells like trees, censer of graffiti swaths health and school ads. Life is killing me—you (takes one second). The first kid loves, his mind a tent next to the mansion next to a river next to a chorus of rivers.

Like a basement with no house, tennis balls flying over, the second steals. The third kid reads, his world a mansion with a drunk butler: speaker of panic in the past tense, constantly tripping over the future.

They disembark. If I’ve looked too long at art looking for nature, then maybe one swims in the other. “Elephants,” one of the men says. “Elephants have great social memory because they don’t have hands.”
Village of No

*after Levis*

1.
---The cook smokes for most of the year, saying he used to own the place; committees for card playing play at home now, past a blinking billboard: “The World As Wallpaper.” As solid grandeur. Levis paints the cook.

---It's been years since the war, by which they mean now it’s war all the time. In the throat of the valley, purple-tinged cancer awaiting the bigger isotopes.

---In the valley between her thumb and forefinger, the mighty little men gather;

2.
---Tonight, carnival begins, line-dances & fire-eating, the crops planted, the colors of earth, & the gods on mantles in the skin of their jokes.

---The one about the boy who would not make it home, told by the Janus who never left, cleaning the streets, he looks back, bereft.

---The poet paints a different kind of cook.

---Further down, the mountain becomes itself to a couple, they smoke cigarettes, drink red wine, their speech grows older as they climb, they watch the traffic, noir in flat country, outside the wire fence, beside the lawn store.
After Katrina

The radio saying about people coming back
to start co-ops, how it didn’t work;
how the first to leave were the black students,
the students were, four years back,
teenage stagehands pulling clouds.
(The radio said,
as if.)
Like spilled soup,
thy Crescent City.
Spike Lee’s other films
inside the new one.
Like the themes get smoked,
I’ll try to see—one finger in her mouth,
(what does she say?)
her other hand releases
a Parliament to the scaffold dark of I-10.
Nostalgia-hyphen

Of the courthouse that looms over the field, field above a police station, tract houses that say

Let the buffalo roam, or This is not for you, or Good News! Gone Bad; that they take the town in stride.

They, like a father and son thinking “tuxedo”, of a memory for when one needs one, the summer that needed an interruption. Of the son among the kids laughing their way across mid-field, organized game in progress.

That the steeple waxes on glass, the bronze couple holds on the park bench, the wigged colonial colonel, his bronze cold, thinking “headache like I went missing from a coin.” Some advice is open: follow don’t follow them home.

Fireworks second lives dig into the lake, cars lacquered, the picture waving with the hand on the grounds, resold.
(Years ago I had dream where a speaker was enrapturing a crowd and yet making no sense, gesticulating wildly with his arms. I made a move to call him out, but then everyone turned to look at me. I wake up in a panic. Maybe this is what I say.

Alternative title: Clouds looking like pencil shavings drawn by villains)

My friends, stories come with frames, like cars
come with windshield wipers; here’s the story:
when you’re young your parent’s friends’ kids
are your friends, next your friends are your friends’ friends,
at some point one chooses one’s own friends. Yet the feeling
that most folks are friendly remains only to the point
that one’s circumstances are not unfriendly. The opera
was never so much trouble as when they took a scene outside,
which is a mixed reference, and so I’ll change the subject.

Shriners of the Old South, this here was a very bad mountain,
my friends, it was no walk in the park,
was that which sticks in your eyes and your ears.

The Klan gone to Hollywood, if you were to search the grounds,
good luck finding what I mean, yet the structures
remain. Not so far from that, our go-to song was by

Third Eye Blind. I read an article & think of Marx
as an advanced loafer with a diamond mind. There’s a syllable
I don’t use anymore that would burn a hole here. Terribly sorry

but “thephonethatsrevolutionizingphones” cheapens
what was left of things, reminds me of people saying too little.
Limitless freedom don’t say too much. In the house

we rented, the dead professor’s office was untouched,
his formula for Southern Lit. was taped on the wall,
gave a menagerie of relations that ended and began in the dirt.

I didn’t mention the long skies in his Hebrew Love Songs.
The park also has an oversized statue of Tupac.
I would add that the men who carved the mountain loved

granite and the dead. Like those days, the many other ghosts.
RPG, Brundisium

The series of ums he left on the dresser
no less because January

the kompressor faster than through the fuse
half-time the sun-

light comes on; prices in Colchis, taste of metal in water, flat, bit tongue.
D'Youville

The world, a fugue-set-in-hospital, we knew
    would happen to us, not how but when
without reason but perhaps a cue,

    the nurse, ET cetera, the waiting-room tube of light,
chatter, an accomplice who says: begin
    not time, quick in mammothbone, we knew

travel by county where a cleft impatience grew,
    the carnival left the yard a white elephant
without reason but perhaps a cue;

    big city deals, corn stew, semblance, labor, graffiti
law on n.p.r. special weed tech. excellence
    the world lost time, neither cousin knew…

the long cut, streets untitled & wrestlers who
    in personal information, they say fin,
tank lines: the subur-villains in J neck crews;

    spider celestials, begats, a taste for the new
cavalier and tonsure, this quest, again,
    & cool time, flash in analogies: who
knew the reasons or even if to wait for a cue.
Monument Avenue, Richmond  
(Streets Unlimited)

…Other boys and girls were pushing or pulling carts, where statues nodded and swayed.  
—Yves Bonnefoy

1.  
See Better Bones and Gardens,  
last month’s  
easy-living  
local news  
for what pictures do  
when they leave  
the room, where texts'  
missing pages go  
then, again  
the world for show  
(Gilligan cut, pg 51.

2.  
The blast men falling  
off the table  
on the wall.  

The windows watch  
on Y street  
they watch  
at least more  
then the statues,  

3.  

tho underwater  
cameras tell  
less of live fin,  
baleen, coral reef,  

tho a number,  
like a name, grows.)  

4.  

Meanwhile…  
Diver searches
couch depths wait
-ing for the man
at the door,
a former self
or an athlete friend
of a friend of hers
from college,
the Swedish strong-
man-child who
funneled forties,

5.

down he goes there
the rabbit-hole

6.

—that week they were
sober, gone
up for air to see
themselves
the enemy, like letters
sent home, the heat felt
through the door.

7.

My dearest
Cecilia
The farm is not a
Farm it is not ours.

The house is soaked
in line with the
street as the bird
flies—to see
them, the past,
to push it back
less birch shelf,
closed books,
bottled ship…
8.

My dearest
Cecilia
I cannot
Turn the
alarm off.)

to the end
of the avenue
where Arthur
Ashe readies his racquet
to swing
at children
(nature of
the statue species)
past the others’ post,
mere esteem.
(Ancestry
ante-bellum,
e.g.
“war is
the extension
of prose”
—Charles Bernstein)

9. Not satisfied with your run of the mill funral plans? Try Neptune Gardens! Th on and only servic
that will bury you undr the ocean! From the dpths... Lif. Locatd 3.25 mils ast off Ky Biscayn in
Miami, Florida – GPS coordinats N25º 42.036’, W80º 05.409’ – Neptun Mmorial Rf™ is th
largst man-mad rf vr concivd and, whn complt, will hav transformd ovr 16 acrs of barrn ocean
floor. Th Nptun Mmorial Rf™ project is nvironmntally sound and mts th strict guidlins and
prmitting of the PA, DRM, NOAA, Florida Fish and Wildlif and th Army Corps of Enginrs. Th
Memorial Rf™ is also a mmb r of th Grn Burial Council. Our compltd first phas is an artistic
rprsntation of th Lost City, 40 ft undr th sa. Thse structure hav producd a marin habitat to
promot coral and marin organism’s growth while crating th ultimat ‘Grn Burial’ opportunity. A
recent marin study conductd by th Department of nvironmntal Rsourc Managemnt concludd that
marin lif around the Rf has gone from th zro to thousands in two yrs. A Nw Tradition of
Visiting Lovd Ons. Boat activity at th sit is brisk, with familis chartring boats or taking thir own
to snorkl or simply b at th site. Som family mmbers actually bcome div certifid, nabling thm to
visit th sit, to s thir lovds ons and monitor th Rf’s growth. Many of our local familis div th rf
on a rgular basis to visit thir lovds ons. On family, in particular, has bn out 5 tims in as many
months. In addition to providing a prmannt lgacy for those who lov the ocean, the Neptun
Mmorial Rf™ is attracting rcrational scuba divrs, marin biologists, studnts, rsearchrs and
cologists from all ovr th world. Th Rf is fr and accssibl to all visitors.
10.

at large,
mouth open,
the dead
tereat dinner,
sluice confetti
& these
graffiti stickmen
with e.e.c.
not one
million statues
for the
time most
everyone came
home, again.

11.

In two words:
stone brow
self-made
lake down,

left-right, left
no quarter

no truck
small-fry
hands up

Dick mono
Diver -mellow
Official Voice
gone subtle,
Long snap:
just one:
recession?

each one’s
poverty drums
band name:
fake problems
loch ness
heart worm
teen sex &
loverly story
Doctor Doctor
Give me
The news
short sell
my bad,
shogun,
samurai
& just folks
dirt farmers
& car dust,
not settled
not done
III.

O, but for a draught of vintage!

—Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale”
Elf Shonnet

The drive opens up to beach house Q.
I'll talk for an hour, then it’s yr wheel,
M. went blind, his letters ran small,
they made no deal. If stranded on
lettered streets, turn, again, on the new.
The sky breaks out in wild catastrophe,
the bight shallows for miles, the sun buried
by the sea, back again: characters who leave
the field: the snitch, the stalker, hot spur,
imps, focus groups, brazen hopes, mud & fears;
I see the moon & the moon sees me.
The moon I love reads like she’s fourteen,
turns scythe, to strive, to seek, to fiend.
Love Complaint, Interstate

From El Dorado, head south, if they let you out, & by-pass Damascus entirely; when in Rome, imagine the unfreedom of the propped-up buildings that lived tongue dispelled, then whistle a route into the catacombs and someplace,

where I, I am the wheel that I break myself upon, she is the wheels, she walks away or rather, desire, in several frames of her walking away walks away;

where, the man within a name, tunes the mellotron of mystery.

Where the music that moved my parents was heard, then floats the commercials. Falstaff at the bar, another & another on tv, another in the audience of a seedy theater, in a shroud of satisfaction & cigar smoke, speaks.
Near Romance

Cocoa Beach, 1998, Floridian hills are of the mind.

Walking the beach a mile back to the hotel, Skyy brand vodka in hand, thinking donned like the sweet word

Lakers, clouds falling over a bluff, the sea a hill

that stretches wide, that this other world is a blue film
giant’s hotel with paper thin walls through which (saying)

light conversations, overheard seeming complete like

speaking to the concierge (French for he won’t knock on your door.) Walking past Ron Jon’s Surf Shop

(this is a tournament the boys took their mom’s suburban to the strip club) stop thoughts thinking

‘s like raw swimming Byrons, the concierge is saying:

“It wasn’t just the local flavor, seeing her leave, then in a dream like 1915 & love the giant the crowd in fast speed”

…telling me how that was the time, how a man ought to throw

an idea of himself over the rail before he throws himself. Saying he meant imagination,

part of any credible three-word hotel, thinking to say

“there are limits” and you have to choose, I mean I do & then the scene, her father, takes her back

with what you want, another generation’s dreams

gone either way, seen briefly, I say and knowing not always to do things based on how this feels.

Tomorrow will be different. Where from, saying now.
Field Couch

Let me tell you of one or so yards of my boyhood. Possible screen names: Scorpion Kick, Hawaii Five, pretty good so far, Tap-Tap, the pencil onto the screen—so far, the backwoods argument, the law school kids at the university portico saying, I’d swear at it, “then to get in good with the good old boys.” Let’s not think we’ve come so far. New setting, farther back: field couch, stars on bars, chaw of tobacco for the weekend life. I’m sorry, Daniel, I was there and then. Where you grip her love like a, a driver’s license. Let’s talk some more about the climate; I’m the ingénue, let’s confess, you go first. Daniel, one was country one quiet, gone or broken, like a day ago, left my wallet in vomit behind the dumpster, you can find me there. I was Super Kool, splayed out, honest, in your parents den, I was there and then I weren’t.
What amazes me is this. Your body is falling apart
But your voice is strong.
—Don Delillo, Budge, “The Day Room”

His head sprouts in the desert. Indians in modern dress have gathered & sit in a circle of blue plastic chairs. It is a ritual serious as defeat: Dan mute, young in the face, pale, not yet sun-burned or tan, one moment affable, the next stern, sand-crusted his neck and hair. The natives discuss. "He is a bad citizen."
"No doubt, but he often tells the truth and I imagine him to be a fine husband and father." A fat cloud in the flat sky presses down on the scene, high-altitude thin air, nothing but cacti & reptiles for miles.

The youngest ponders, "Thrifty breasts, salvation of western man." Further, "Beware of women who fall in love with your weaknesses." Another, "I find that reading him is like shaking hands in an abattoir with a three-armed man." Dan the head winces, turns aside. Everything is videotaped, played back in a wilderness of screens: Mass drama, mass politics, mass dread; above ground: various choked heads: Lee Trotsky, L. Harvey Oswald, Steven Dedalus. They leave him there, blinking, & take the big blue bus screaming to the book depository in Dallas.
Dog’s View

Across the river
from the personal
nouveau factory
a great light chord,
I follow the hand
high tea cooling
amidst the trampoline
of images, bark
theirs in grown.
Touching down a bowl
bland steel mirror
the flying gestures,
there is no time
of day here
for the promotion
of silence. I’m close,
I’m far: rain-
swept hills of her words.
In the garden rank
with the past,
I make water,
I say body, remorse-
less, sure as
this day a mirror,
a river—look
some stones, turn
them over, find
self, say
thanks,
bark, bark,
seize the day.
AFTER LAUGHTER
(resampled)

The stage such church, his look
Over heads set Apache and Hopi, better leave a trail & before
We’re not sorry—Super Tuesdays’ false Friday—
Take the job from Magic City
Clean through the suburbs.
The ecology club in high school lost 2 of 3,
Past, present, future,
The usual suspects.
Club aquarium; tread softly,
Less fear of tisane, no go-go dancers, just an easy story,
One Mic, Drum Machine, & he’s
Playing it naive like Peter Lorre:
   Girl have fun tonight
     You don’t have to act grown-up.
When they take it to the parking lot,
Count the cars, bass from inside, out, go deep
& back to the surface
Where someone’s drunk chum,
Flunked-out driver pedal to concrete
Not a day goes by when he doesn’t
Think of stealing something
Pop music something less than a prologue,
Jumps what I feel.
Anonymous in the rearview mirror.
Only a good show if he thinks enough to follow
You home or wherever you are from,
Or else we remain yard gnomes.
Still, each one pressed from far away,
After (what?) laughter (right) comes every tear.
I’m guessing

I’m guessing that somewhere the credits roll
like the moon
pulls the water’s face,
offshore (I’m guessing)
the set a dirge official bonhomie.
There’s nothing so debauched
as thinking; you can’t see it,
they left it out of the gospels,
the good-go-spells.
I’d rather not watch, yet here goes:
If you think people cannot survive extra-
ordinary circumstances, ask somebody
from somewhere else, people from
a magazine fleeing bad weather,
someone stacked
in the house next door
there’s windows but we think we use the
television. Luckily,
there was a girl I did not invent the bridge
we went under
from the bus it looked like tinsel,
for nearly a decade
when we lived with our disciplinarian
Uncle Incredulous.
The little other consolation
than that he was simple,
that the words
we found there
were matured threats,
the basement-dank currency
of intuition, the long kind,
yours and mine.
Silenus, Imaginary Dentist

At his house, false wind-up teeth run circles, chatter their proofs through an enfilade of rooms.

The waiting crossword terror in art magazines: Treasures of the Forbidden City:

Building of Luminous Clouds, inside: the Supreme Chamber of Cultivating Harmony.

The spit in Tenochtitlan; Baudelaire said, where can one go? Call thy name, clean machine.

Not only the assistant’s breasts brushing against your boy but math in opened ground,

his imaginary prisons. Lime lightning across the yard, now here’s Rothko chapel, muzak, new reason:

plier of word, closed mouth black. To my holy dentist, grave stones in rows are teeth.
They said “I am Troy Davis”

A painful case a painful case, front page in the colony
Sunday Paper writes it light side:

ba rum pa bumpum its only laughter when a smile
breaks, the news sliver:

tereus tra la luf ttwaffe the complex drama sir vannah,
merci, the killer goes despite counsel’s plea, loose,

the sentence, like a frigate on a summer day, slid
off the ocean’s cataract edge, the body flails,

not knowing when’s the last time you’d see the Atlantic,
ferry me, enter Kieślowski’s Decalogue

the apartments where you know the folks you know
know those you don’t, that law could change these natures

& we’re watching on the couch, say powerless;
that I will not see my father’s hands, then the tones

of Polish dusk loosen, takes twelve sent
to make him walk.
Last Rhetorical

*Ah, shock and awe. Fear itself comes down to production values. War, troubling yet awesome.*

—Dominic “Gods Mack” Synch

At the Cantina, loud and wild like a backyard where fraternity men bark, bole to set the terms of a fight, we sat in a booth against the wall, listened, conversed, ate. Music is sound and feeling, certainly. Pulsed in the silent cinctures of cliché, I decided later “You only hear what you want to hear.”

We were a party of five, four old friends and her new boyfriend who was in between tours in the war. Inside, Biff Dilligence leads his acoustic set well known as “The belligerence,” plucks at strings of taut mandolin and low guitar. Tedium allowing, “You only say what you want to have heard.”

Our trivia name was Wham-Bam-Thank You Ma’am, Listing the presidents in order:
Harrison, Cleveland, Wilson, Harding.
If some of this were true, I would have tried to weave York Harding into the conversation and like a pundit in the fifth hour or circle of television inferno would have said, like I did,
that because the enemy didn’t dress up, then the Geneva Convention was quaint. His foot taps mine under the table.
The heat is mostly unbearable and the fight has less to do with videogame or cartoon violence than with getting paid more while you are there and there is the waiting, which is awful. Tough to say how to feel about it now, but at the end of *Patton,* George C. Scott stands with his bull terrier on leash, looking confused yet proud underneath a windmill. Less quixotic than ambiguous. We’re left to imagine his “you”.

As it is heard, “you only fear what you want to fear.”

He liked us better than her grad. school classmates, who were cocky and always belonged, he said you could tell by their shirts. Imagine here obituaries for the Americans dead, read by the actor who played the President, who pitched insurance. He would begin monotone and if he felt like it he would sing.
The Third Man

_after the film adaptation by Carole Reed_

She walks away without a glance at
‘The Lone Rider of Santa Fe’ leaving the author
trouble for a future picture, another director
suggests to Carole that he put the camera

on something level, yet no-one’s in control, here
“death is underneath it all”
the zither says so too,
like an amp on some crickets.

Vienna’s an occupied museum; a shattered waltz;
all’s fair in adventure stories for the boys
a different world grew up around.
Things tending to the Ferris wheel.

Black and white and so far away
from life, perspective spills color on
the promise of a staircase
down from the mind to where
the non-light takes the kid’s ball,
the balloon seller, bright smirking Lime
through the prism of fact and fiction.

Another light switched on and the cat finds him
above ground, between funerals,
in the sold, consoling,
flickering name of good & evil.
Comes from people.
What were you expecting?

The big ideas comeback with better names,
not just banal, impressive, slowly driven,
cars & tanks, lines of people.
Sunrise. The Ferris wheel circles, silent.
The zither plays itself.
New film idea

1.) At five o’ clock the executive’s son unplugs, staples to his arm smeared, in ink, on the free will astrology, “I cannot smell my work.”
2.) The challenge: to not go outside for a month.
3.) “Nearly everyone hates hotels”—George Orwell
4.) The theatre’s mostly empty, up front, a love story, two natives, one recently undead. “Like a tourist leaving behind binoculars or a body tattooed beyond recognition I started to think that the eye is what’s truly awful.”
5.) her hunger will grow stronger;
6.) somehow not surprisingly
7.) a man named history walks on screen dropping epaulettes, empty like most change
—Does it matter if you stop putting quarters in?
8.) another allusive field: azaleas, half a million, an acre of trillium, roses in the courtyard don’t smell like roses, from so far away, pretty much the word:
9.) roses. One pulled, like underwater, close:
10.) a ship-wreck belly up.
(beat)
11.) No one predicted the ending at the Hotel M.
12.) The stand-in says “this feeling of leaving, had it all my life.”
13.) Like the document landslide means believing,
14.) never to arrive at a not for-sale reason,
15.) locks on the future, bad dream breathing
(beat)
16.) Next, the scroll of inky sea, the drip of waterspout on the horizon.
Melodeon for Good Fortune

Nobody pays attention anymore, not quite, to where you go when you leave: the Thou knocked down in library refuse for a new building. What we do is build; what we’ve done is built. How the view blocks what was written before. My friend Walt lives in an adult home, they steal sodas. refreshing sodas, it’s petty, & pretty soon everyone’s doing it, then getting along again. Walt wants to move, so he moved, the new place is pretty much the same; his music is slow then dazzling. I also like brass bands & mandolin chandeliers & wherever the saddest songs end up; the floating ampersand performed as spoken-word at the bookstore, where it landed. Driving later I saw in neon in a shop window: everything disappears a sign, perhaps, for an idea not closed yet the contrast of the darkness palpitates upstairs, felt like a knock on the head something like a broken leg. Nevermind the rumors, Walt’s OK, got hit by a car, they gave him a ride home, bought him cigarettes. If he gets lost I’ll go look for him.
No one's what they were.
That sign in neon,
this one's a paper boat
named Pardon Me,
this elegy for those who wander,
for these and other drifts & gulfs.
A Dent & a Scratch

after Thom Gunn

A dent & a scratch on a piece of metal, framed, takes up a section of the wall, the aim of the party less to show than to mingle; couples get made, lost, looking for a single thought in common, then they move on. Freely, we run our mouths, but like snails in the larger else of a stranger’s castle, the pulse & armor feel foreign, the slowly changing played against the swiftly changing; breaking bread & eggs in the all night diner, the talk runs like cars sometimes forget, the sameness of fault in mutual friends, the homeless moved beyond the highway bend: mermen haunting the stoops of their former lives. When you come to visit me here, the dive that burned, will be rebuilt, with half the sky & skyscraper to your eye, stilt cranes of ash & dirt, dotted lines, sign the times: hawk and plane, the stake not of blowfish but on Third Street & corners, speech like from the sea, headlight floods underwater.
Neighborhood Clocks

The candelabra in the window in the weird house across the street never went out.
When you read for a long time you get older.

Maybe he boiled the bones of chickens, thoughts longer than twice because nothing’s as scary as the glad hand enormous or kids shooting arrows outside. His heart he buried in the garden, two laps down, got his toothbrush at the Goodwill, left his broken watch on a park bleacher, between times.
Midnight Choir

They come and go in the deep nave, mostly women, older, and those with young children. It’s Christmas and everyone glows with the year’s deepest sleep. “Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.” No one repeats better than the drunk.
Four rows back, tenor, he moves to the next song and the choir follows, though they bristle after at not quite getting it. Funny how you forget to move, in doubt. After the service he excuses himself from pleasantries, takes the long way home, hands in pockets, leaning with the night, steps around shattered glass, down town stars, whistling brandy at the stopped bullet moon.
Stand-up

“Custer that”, she said, meaning more than one thing, but mainly to leave but to give it one last shot, to extend the lark lines for the lovelorn, Sweet Christ, desperate and afraid, they mean-mug next to you in your prisoner-pyramid form, like dogs make roads in backyards. George Armstrong Custer makes not the errors. And so, this is an old yarn…

The last electric people turned into smart glass eaters, left there poles for lamps, crosses, many shows, plays, Dakota diorama dilemmas, poem readers on the edge of cliffs, lost the long low angle shots. From the battle royale to last royal rumble beats, there’s no escaping summer unzipped by the parking lot’s ripped, tan, home-sick bicyclist. His love big as India, night ridden on top of trains, montage of classrooms, red rain, teaches the imagined no child,
these things happen again on film,

…until then, teach one each one-
self, a word knocks him off some horse.