

LIQUID BABYLON

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HANGING GARDENS

The sun burned a hole in my hat the size of forgiveness.
35 miles in one day. Feet swell up like flat baskets. My
fingers bloat when I walk like this. "It follows that actions
are the proper object of poetry" -- Gotthold Lessing, 1766.
Metonymy dogs me. No Ambrosia Creek. Arbuckle Mtns. manifest
as prickly pear cactus & rattlesnakes arranging for sun.
When I set out, gala flags shattered horizons
and other symbols, silk streamers insinuated this breeze,
the sheets were on sale, the girl next door flossed her teeth
to an old recording of a violinist playing Fritz Kreisler's
Liebesfreud (Love's Joy). The vinyl is scratched,
the needle skips. The scratches and gaps make a mirror
of the mind of the girl who is listening. But the technique
of this poem and of the girl listening to Liebesfreud --
are more than sampling, random juxtapositions.
All collage, repetition, dialogical interweavings,
polyphonies of voices, sounds, experience
play with time and space.

My footsteps crunch the gravel of Oklahoma Highway 77
rubbing out tire tracks made by my parents hairpinning
in a car with chrome, fins, and a big back seat.
Skid marks drag me into infinity. Time compresses.
History's construction mutilates itself under the pressure
of autobiography. Music from the AM radio: "Just
give it to me one more time." It's all repeat performance,
step after step, prints in shifting time.

VENICE IN FURS

She lies on the beach in a modest 50s swimsuit,
a beauty baking under the gaze of men smoking pipes,
fanning themselves with leaves from rubber trees.
My sandals stripe the daylight shadows,
her inevitable death by water.
I think this is prosody imposed on the moment.

Her lips.

**The history of a body
predetermined by the body itself.
The scars anticipate the injury.
The injury self-fulfilling
the prophecy of scars.
Mother's Day.**

**Good tubes to surf the body's regrets,
sand-patterned volleyballs for eyes,
gulls & terns that look Pacific.
She fashions dialectic
in a Victorian giftshop
to front the margins of Cape May.**

**The falls at the edge of the cliff
rumble themselves blue with waiting.**

**Caves, no doubt due to their hollows,
mimic narrative before causality was inserted.**

AT THE MALL

**She bites off the price tag before she speaks.
She leaves unsaid the obvious -- her compulsion
to hurt herself may be the finish of her.
A woman with gold sand-dollar earrings
glues pennies to her glitter-painted sweatshirt.
I hear my own voice turn into an old canvas sail,
tearing and shredding in a stiff gale.
My backpack is concealed in the plantings
so I can sit here as if I carried no baggage.
She does not manage appearances so well.
Her hands are chapped, not by inclement weather
but by holding on too tight. Her eyes are lifelines
attached to nothing. Her voice drowns
in the sound of the wishing well fountain.**

THE POORBOY CAFE NOBLE, OKLAHOMA

Men smoking Marlboros lie about their cattle,
their wheat. Only the linoleum floor
claims an absolute, a lower limit. Yet dreams persist.
An Oklahoman drawls clichéd narrative --
the charm is in the false bravado.
Meat on the grill sticks pancakes; sausage gravy
imposes a layer of salt over unbearable grapeness,
you're seeing me drink coffee
or some another sad extract of desire, here I am
still, despite neon & oilcloth, my hunger is sticky,
like apple jelly smeared over mortality sunnyside-up.
You order homemade peach cobbler.
They microwave it into limp acquiescence.
I think you might burn your tongue
after seeing so many Poorboy patrons strutting
their bootcut, official rodeo Wranglers.
The waitress is wearing a denim shirt
sequined with the head of a cat. The lurid
eyes inject green & sparkle into her corner
of the cafe. Ketchup-red vinyl booths deflect
sequined cat-eyes trained on my every motion,
my trembling hands buttering a biscuit, stirring
something sweet into my coffee. A pickup truck
backfires, a Stetson-hatted hunter starts talking deer.

CALLING

I wonder how & why geochemical patterns in my body
take harsh longing into night where I, even I,
cannot give up -- I call your number one, two,
twenty times & it's still busy; don't we
wonder why we persist in assigning meaning to this,
to all abnormally high values of iridium, cosmic
dust, & desire to explain ourselves & our
existence -- impact of large extraterrestrial object makes
me tell you once I thought I was Barbara Stanwyck on
Big Valley, but you saw me, diminutive, sad, Oklahoman since
birth, you listen Edith Piaf broken carbonaceous wet
worldwide dispersal trajectory playing tract & pain &
beautiful voice I am ranging overpowered know place me
(cancelled stamp signify establish w/now) randomness
speech & hand holding mine -- it all means less than ever...

no answer

MR. BULKY BUY-IT-IN-BULK CANDY STORE INCORPORATED

I buy pleasure by the pound
at the lowest level of the mall.
In a what-you-see-is-what-you-get reality,
semiotics construct more than identity, more
than self. Seeking transcendence with a court order,
the owner changed his name to "Mr. Bulky." He's
thin, nervous, but growing fatter with every visit,
every trip to market, every quotation. The week
before Halloween they stocked up on wax & candy skulls,
and Mr. Bulky began losing his hair, his cheery jowls.

For Muzak, Mr. Bulky plays Chet Baker's rendition
of "My Favorite Things" he recorded two weeks
before his death. WE MAKE IT EASY says a sign
over a balance, a scale. I once stuck my head
in one of Mr. Bulky's "pick your poison" candy bags.
Tonight I chew candy-shelled footballs
filled with gum as tough as loss --
my first real lover since my divorce
revels in tearjerkers, gummi snakes,
licorice jelly bellies, and red-hots;
the snakes ball up, denning,
eggs dropping sweet yet unhatchable
into a tight, polyethylene seam.

"What did you say?" I ask. My voice
unsticks just enough to punt a big wad
of false ennui into this scene. "Where'd
you find that Dallas Cowboy stuff?" he asks.
I shove my scoop into a brighter bin than
"America's team." New Orleans Saints.
The NFL gumballs roll like eyeballs. I'm under
the spell of fleur-de-lis & I'm oblivious
to confession. He laughs at my pathetic rebellion.
"Hell, the Saints are dead already." He scoops
tearjerkers & sourballs into my bag. I think of
smearing a chewed-up Cowboy into his hair.

In the parking lot, static obliterates football
& all other games, broadcasts, and ads for Mr. Bulky.
Voices fade in and out. Stats are indistinguishable

from over-the-hill players pitching beer. The car door
slams on the hem of my dress. There are no nerves
in that material, so I feel nothing, not even when
my blood congeals sticky chocolate
and my head rolls out the window.
A ripped plastic bag of thoughts
spills little barren candy eggs, words, syrup &
text I can't swallow whole. Shreds of reason,
a box lid in the wind flapping
"URE PLEASURE." Mr. Bulky kicks
the engine into gear. He chews a "Saint,"
blows a bubble, snaps back, face
turns skull. He echoes my hand.

GOOD FOR BAIL

Call her collect again he could never without costing her nightmares, fear, \$200 for bail at the Montague, Texas County Jail. The bait: they trick you into thinking you can make out a check for the act itself. (As if vindication or regret were actions not states of being.) In the lie resides the art. In this case, ignore Oscar Wilde's *The Decay of Lying*. He claimed he just had to get back to work and pay off people he owed, but that would only take a couple of weeks. Then he'd pay her back all the bail money. How many others did he feed the same line?

She was half in love with the way she thought she could control her own paradigm or archetypal imperative.

Story-writing remembered scraps and ragged colors to be teased out in the structure. I posit victim dialectics into tensions between rescuer and rescued, I make life a dark dream only of the latest. She was inscribing her life in a pattern of her own choosing: negative, bleak, enthralled with playing margins of acceptance, fascinated with absolutes like jail and money. The very idea lying in jail where representation fails, her words inadequate to express storms surging in her veins at night.

The text, longing for her, unable to touch her. Spend flesh like cash.

So, she made out a grim little flourish, the check. Self inscribes self-conscious, self-aware forging small link. Know the manner. Know the sign to sign endorsement. Forge another link in the narrative you construct of your own life.

What matters is the containment of the act itself.

When she was a child, she had lived on a farm west of Ardmore, Oklahoma. In the shadow of the Arbuckle Mountains, Viola limestone cropped out, fossiliferous and textured with evidence that life takes indelible forms that time does not erase. She marveled at how, even in decay, the original thing maintains its form, recognizable at an instant to the observer, even when the object has deteriorated into its final stages of absence. It was much like the fence she had to repair one winter -- with boards falling from their nails, paint peeling.

The fence no longer possessed the capacity to keep anyone in or out, only the capacity to affix the mind.

You learn to keep the mind trained on or in the idea of original form, but you deny the individual the opportunity to posit or propose an alternative shape to the thing. The fence defined and delimited the mind and all the meanings associated with it. She never questioned the existence of such a fence, or whether she should in fact start tearing down such barriers and constructions.

She rebuilt her fences. She destroyed something thrashing, sweaty, wild that foamed to jump or crash against boundaries of barbed wire and warped boards.

Injecting heroin reminded her of nailing used hubcaps to a wall. Her check came back from the bank endorsed and her account drawn down. Life was habit that kept him tethered, numbing out shame and staving off withdrawal. Why didn't he call, at the very least? She pictures a hubcap not in its natural syntax, covering a wheel. Language is a natural chemical that plays best in open field, intoxicating like scent or color of a poppy. Someone decides to detach the hubcaps from where they belong. Can you separate form from identity? Instead of leaving things alone the sentences are nailed together.

I nail logic to a wall. It rattles and shines, garish and loud in beams of passing traffic.

Detached form can be strewn along in single parts suitable only for those who are rebuilding their own narratives. Those who have eyes may have eyes open for scraps to take for themselves.

I nail illogic to hubcaps or to a collapsing vein. The acts themselves rip apart constructions and prevent a car or body or the desire for transcendence from functioning as it should. I construct the history she provides to me as building blocks of motion.

She refuses to tell me sequence.

I impose them for myself:

She drove, continuing on until she could drive no more, tears or the blinding sun of misplaced compassion impacting her vision. She could call him, for once, if she knew his number, but she didn't know his number. She thought she'd write him a letter, address it to his mother, put it in the same sort of envelope she used for the \$200 check.

As she thrust her hands into the pockets of her favorite, slouchy mohair coat, made familiar with its lingering scents of her Chanel #5 and Opium perfumes, she smiled, not with joy, quite, but with the sense of power -- however illusory, that accompanies the inscription of words on paper, ink on a check, or a narrative on life.

WATER SHARD NIGHT: EDITH PIAF IN DARKLING SAME

I.

I hear December trembling; cold & lonely sleet
 master sculptor moments, you hear songs -- why on & on
 pain still represented serene -- Smile on my youth;
 you unscrolled my life, my voice, with tonalities
 no more shaded than abstract -- woman sweeping sidewalks
 passes me & does not smile -- what is this vision so fauve?
 ragged narrative of smoke & dripping eyes, Paris seems
 so autumnal asymmetrical gasping Fauré's "Après un Rêve"
 or why loss stamps embroiders stylizes misunderstandings
 between us & air-raid sirens howling in the night sharp
 brick, mortar, journalists searching diaries, children
 starving blown-up attics; Clodion (1734-1814) pigments
 my last card, I want to tack my heart to the wall,
 somehow make my room a museum of a mind preserved not.

II.

Under wish Dancing Nymphs I am not Sevres porcelain
 though equally crazed, all fingernails chipped
 around the edges, rough like you, like me --
 it's a fictive construct to say there is such
 a thing as survival in wartime -- Diva!
 Schubert lyric lies dying; self so crystalline, geometrical:
 You, perfection, smile for me -- project blood running down
 whites of our eyes -- still, I feel your lips cracking; Sad
 I could not help, not even with throat catching throbbing
 choking holding -- I place my had piano -- I accompany

intent or your heart's myth "eterne in mutabilitie"
change meaning love feels like abandonment even in
Spenser's "londe of Faerie" now my heels click good-bye
pavement "griesly shade" harbor sweat of what cannot be --

III.

Your eyes depart, my lips tear "my love so cruelly
to pen" while my love "cruelly penned" in agonies;
fin-de-sièl in Saint-Chapell, my voice maudlin receiving, they pour
out the cherabims from heavenly folds -- my need for you
gilds field armor bright & cold, but you'll never guess,
even your hand when swirling scarves about my head,
Poussin's Birth of Venus (1635) or full moon or glassy
cool dreamscape of bare trees & wondering -- yes I wonder
why love is abandonment, Rousseau's Carnival Evening
ice on sweaty cheek, nostalgia bares false meaning
hazy perfumed memories of first time placing steps
you awoke drenching tears in sleep not dreaming
w/death-knowledge cold on clouds & childhood
filled with pressure threats going away badly
boiled tar in my veins, absurd aphrodisiac
laughter rage dark black skies sleepwalking
begging wings pigment oils sky dawn random collapse --

IV.

And now, here I am -- singing chanteuse, smoky palm room
Paris quiet architectural passion, filigreed erasure
whipping eventual defeat, dark black cars carousel
take me every night another performance; Sing, I, sob
charm, glisten, Renoir's wretched lies of a pastel life,
all I see glisters false sunlight & teasing rape-fantasy --
You remember every word, I weep at the recording ...
memory or passports or lava burn on sheets of glass,
hope & single notes picked out on abandoned Steinways,
from the jaws of a bombed city, you gave me roses --
Did you think we'd fall apart so soon?

V.

No one warned decision & whispering reversals -- some love
spurting color of glass cutting wrists or phone ringing;
and yet applause rings out a self-destruction, more flock
crave long-stemmed pyroclasts Vesuvian myth undershadowing
best side of humanity made into ash, excavating sunset

symbol "life in wartime" mode -- minor timbre perform
 (or don't forget) bijoux-tableaux dainty pedestals quiet
 mimesis in shaded voicings sanded support high-heels grip
 stage of oxidizing stretch of lace into treetops,
 pine trees tense as stone my throat tightens poetic
 despair, seeing you vin-de-table viscous hurtling blank,
 self seated off-stage, white cloth on the table,
 I miss you.

VI.

Unblemished by cigarette or exudate of denial -- I am
 paid to sing like this, every note reminds me I've lost you;
 under paralleled spaces in our roaming, desiring gasps
 phrasing not music pearls beryls sapphires agates
 mixtures of unprecious to inlay ceremonial life-in-
 wartime -- your eyes flutter down drinking wines
 too long lost, cave where secrets begin to understand
 gold, hordes, spilling under my woman's form draping
 to say curves differentiate me from the angularity of
 aggression, & yet we know denial -- if you hear me, only
 record yourself the way you think you have always sounded

VII.

You will hear not you, but the ruptures -- the distance
 from your expectations -- crisp white paper folded twice,
 slip notes words prosody true meaning sleeping betwixt
 purple ink from your Waterman fountain pen -- "don't
 leave" -- I can't bear your walking away, silence into
 ruptures, quick Parisian taxis darting into day & blue-
 gray tones of Louvre & emblematic Eiffel turned absurd
 when dark voices howl madness open ironworks decadent
 illusions Rodin & gates of hell more Parisian
 than engineering; in refined torture of fashion & cliché
 the note slips out words unhinging dragons of air
 & another night singing requests,
 I, yes, clawing the night
 for the feel of your warm skin
 awakening blood like memory.

THE SCHUBERT PAPERS
Lace Oval Back Heart Coming Home

Like Winterreise strike without flinching
 heart-like ultimate dark not truth, my eyes
 guarantee inherent meaning, simulcast like
 Summer Olympics & anti-theory neon lights
 melting walls & my scarred rooms save I,
 like you, weep whereupon done with all dreaming
 yearn with me upward gold pyramids filigree, inscribe
 executioner hemisphered running memories & blood
 shine, my faraway mountain, hold me vision
 or treasure, or fresh-cut cane dripping
 pulp & sugar & wet -- howl brilliant
 not forgetting childhood & other luxuries;
 science & mechanical efficiency icon
 into chunky discs of quartz & silver
 all 1937 deco'd real sunshine w/my tremolo --

THE SCHUBERT PAPERS *Beheld Untoward Coming*

transient advantage you can sit outside, boots
 neat & patent -- satirical calculated w/heartbeats
 brave poignant my loyal silk, paint friend
 illusion delight genius yours a mode of knowing
 & I Vienna sorcery distinguish resistance & eyes
 stinging self like sweat skin hope, and still
 you say LOVE ME, DON'T EVER LEAVE by no means
 stopping there, keys minor locate postlude
 bleak fists, smelling exhaust a too-travelled
 highway, Texas notice Vienna ultra-automated
 annihilation, antiseptic slaughterhouse of dreams --

THE SCHUBERT PAPERS *Palacio Gritful Ink Without Mark*

space like porcelain starlets, moonbeams
 in castle library, easily receding paragon
 you insist convey me vogue not like fashion
 but magisterial, sing throat modular grid
 modest & subordinate & chorded while my
 pulse heaving proof of civilization, let alone
 promising so skilled sumptuous hundred-year dirge
 Mondo Mickey & yellow outdoor umbrella plushings

chrome the countess & L.A. & Century City shopping,
we wander freeway, auberge, say my name Dresden blue --

THE SCHUBERT PAPERS

I Die Syphilitic Young

holding hands, this is my simple satin crazed surface
we watch Coppola movie *Life with Zoe* overwhelm
emblem glue on rhinestones & paillettes & sequin
you festoon me woman as logo, want violent grapes
or aubergine or pigment bruised named love & texture;
timeless safari or tweed embody our together times
for where "Some Day My Prince Will Come" sing
Snow White for the Other & so Disney I stay awake
sticky-bronze mechanized, brooding "Heigh-Ho"
yearning clear for a hundred playing hands,
twisting all together, a single lyric
I can't imagine except radiant, holding you

PALEO-FLEA

symbol of consubstantiality or vector of plague;
Pieter Bruegel's Triumph of Death in skinny leg
& lumpy hunched body -- woman wearing mink stole & lips
drives Cadillac dripping red into cosmos, this highway
scars like arms, legs flung into open grave, unmarked
by tags or right-to-die, the skins of her need to conquer
drape her neck, memory of her late husband & she whispering
"I love you" into princess phone, wind whistling
"Ring Around the Rosy" 60-mph through Arizona Petrified
Forest or another Painted Desert -- rattus rattus nipping
hindquarters; here nickels, dimes, quarters coagulate
in laundromat as if inert mounds of money could exterminate
urge & behavioral imperative; Wash, wash the stain
of flea & humanity & then wear it smeared on flesh
like waking dream or Yorick reflected in Hamlet's eyes.

TECTONICS-DRIVEN EXTINCTION

gradual dyings-out, horror of civilized anthropos, we'd rather "go out with a bang" than evaporate in feeble gasps every inch more isolate & small -- continental landmasses breaking apart with no word or land or strong beat of wings to bridge a lack of food for mouth, thought for mind, jetstream for migrating flocks -- flight a sad metaphor self overcoming miles & separation -- see Icarus's wings melting from flightless arms, respond we, wise, w/forced causality fling carnations on another grave of one who dared breach that divide; this slow pulling away like interior basin evaporating to salt -- rifting object of desire recede w/cold, airy kiss adieu -- such knowledge gained on Icarus' waxed-stained feathers I glue upon my foolish, lonely skin.

NIXON IN EXILE

I.

Deny my life, my thousand once-cheering masses
break narrative largely confine, my wife
delicate vow confining grammar, define
the six-foot-four obvious, transcend fraternal
National Ballet of Marseilles in Roland
Petit's Cyrano de Bergerac scale the space
palaces where worth takes rocket speed
pictures famous nice to be so dressed, why
China episteme filmed subscribers claiming
historiographer perceives of fear or nothing
bullet -- speak another Wall, Great,
the color Red, Populace, Square, Archipelago
unforgivable this pulsing, this death,
this wall of flames motif --

NIXON IN EXILE

II.

helicopter blades revolving ideology --
they say identity, code w/mask
students burning erasing self, another dialect candied
bared artifice the banners, could be National
Ballet Theater, trembling camera
text on visions unerring panic I will not

remember despite all cold flags
waving, we will divorce or grow ill
easy turn Blake's Songs of Innocence another
so-called our working sad Marvin Gaye holding tears
the amputees, the Algonquin Bible, I am not so hard,
and yet I see myself dispersed on television
& Newsweek merely cheapening guilt
Aristotelian categorical impugn;
project on a poor man sweating
breaking in the rage of arbitrary hap --

NIXON IN EXILE

III.

abdicate this, my churning insensate nation,
where decades make paradigmatic, sullen
speak Watergate, never uttering charm, there view
waters transgressing over subcontinent erodes negative;
I see my own eyes there in that shot -- Rolling Stones
on the radio; I am doomed, my place deftly tasted
isolate, hot -- I am the leader the people chose,
and now I am imago mundi, island ungenerative karst
someone advised trade signify my landscape,
topographic despair one tower after other, collecting
faith, watered color on rice paper, yet this pigment
tries effort, not mine; such is shame that will not fade

PRINCE OF ANTIQUES

The wiring of America a cruel laboratory
experiment, vivisecting privacy, surf
bamboozling sand grains into offshore bars,
a rod drawn through viscous fluid
representation of inside; of the random
no one can know the places my brain insinuates
raking sheer form unwind reproach;

triple-chocolate rich bittersweet dusted cocoa
could I have imagined pleasing, homely
Festspielhaus in Salzburg, birthplace of Mozart --
I substitute diligentia, obedientia, justitia,
humilitas -- in a sense the final silence

has more meaning than that earlier phase,
 when a kiss & a single red rose awoke her
 a spritz of Chanel #5 relax champagne poured slow,
 disordering equations bright breeze rock kind.

Mainly the fifteenth-century open-air fortress
 packed chiffon drinking Eclipse Barbados Rum
 this Teatro Alighieri in simple word/matter
 Bacon's stasis of the edge, when you promenade
 like so many Secret Service, you look, the brand
 name cannot be repeated too often / the color RED
 is perceived by 56.023% of Americans as both
 hot and "genuine" -- single-malt blood mild.

label crystal lead percent not by-product
 my love following obviously withdraw -- determine;
 on flavor any reference to heaven scores high --
 West Indies abundance repudiates individual
 a flag cut bright cloth crackling like breeze;
 Ich weiss, dass ohne mich Gott nicht ein Nu kann leben:
 Werd'ich zunicht; er muss von Noth den Geist aufgeben.
 ("I know that without me God cannot live for an instant;
 if I perish he must needs give up the ghost."
 Angelus Silesius, 1624-77, mystical poet)

heat flux distrust between the sexes; thermal
 boundary syntax netsuke, lacquer & inro jars,
 mere subtlety may qualify you as a skeptic, read
 lovely real miracles of survival, skin pinking
 toward symbol, taking significant to mostly up,
 why I weep in my stars and Atlantic, place
 hope somewhere numerical, tell it all different;
 general in Delftware Blue-Dash chargers (1680-
 1720) with Royal Portrait, Oak Leaf, Tulip,
 and Adam and Eve designs; convecting surface.

Another evening Boca Raton, I enter despair
 like a charming fresco of Roman views largely
 generous, means, moving, showroom fold sweet
 bright odd, unworthy dictate of reason --
 variable inspire my hands gesticulating
 loopy trails of smoke -- take order wherein I pray --

Assure my strongest & best-known coin, memory
 gravures objective aspects of aesthetics --
 Carrara marble denies the original ebeniste,

my doubt not delighting repair, failing
 footsteps ascending stairs & tapestries
 visage rapport writ large, clusters of
 thick torture never quite become jewels;
 this is my life branding disruption of scale,
 my heritage surreal sticking out a belt
 caprice, night sky flying animals like circus;
 more certain Goya's The Sleep of Reason
 Produces Monsters (1799) -- relentlessly
 capricho, I am paint to smear canvas; hear me.

holding two courts in one, belated convert
 chaos marking Enlightenment Femme parfum
 by Rochas, where I buy "la truit sauvage"
 shaved Rayleigh waves where convection la loi Guillou
 interdit my toys & planets & brushes drizzling
 shadow my face, my eyes -- garnets time-dependence
 saffron leather foie gras produce this series
 again and again when alone, night liquidations
 infinite clays of prestige spiral collective's
 claim bitterly mathematical population silk
 parameter with fame my mother's tears, a woman
 turns to me with lips tight-pressed, wilting
 lashes for profile overvaluing simple word.

POEMA IN STARLIGHT

All oilfield geologists know extinction.

The deal-maker drives Guthrie, Oklahoma
 iguanodontid Muttaborrasaurus metallic, gold.
 All I need now is a warm-blooded Corvette.
 "Drive-thru, please." Another eighteenth-century
 male throbs like locusts at an August barbecue.
 Turrets, statuary, iced watermelon slush pinkly
 red through my snow-cone eyes.
 I melt for love if it's sweet & green-rinded
 like memory & play. I fish through cypress foliage
 & my pockets for change. The drive-thru window guy
 smiles with eyes of pure night vision.

You are my intrigue, a gold-hinged bangle
 .52 ct of diamonds. Anne Wharton died 29 Oct 1685
 at her uncle the Earl of Rochester's house at Adderbury

Vast favorite of court & crests, she lived inking
folio sheets: The abuse of wit ("How many aim
at what so few can hit?"). Mental fauna will process me
or the best part poetic.

Every weekend, supervise
the vineyards, gamble the trees.

Despite environmentally-panelled narrative,
nothing preserves creatures like large hind legs.
The beast with hands small, isolation large
creates rare art. "Air to that Bewitching Face"
makes me think form precedes mimesis.

Embellish the walls of castles
with confusion pure and eight-day travel.

This is the tragedy of incurable urge:
Rochester dying & Wharton elegiac, slain
love & love's chalk-white death.
Annus 1680 replanted in the millennial imagination:
I see love's great slaying.

Today sweats into my pores, tearoom & myriad drawers --
topiary makes text of my need to combine wine w/Fragonard,
travel sapphire or turquoise into the night.

The road to the drill rig is pure clay,
dry clods depress my beliefs like ice
crackling ferns in Jurassic extinctions.
I shiver skeletal like December.
You shake my hand -- cool firm greeting this time --
I browse in the wilderness a size like sheep (it could
hardly be more casual).

I weep at denouements of verisimilitude.

The tail-end suggests student.
Warm water gushes from the kitchen faucet.
Downtown is dust town. Your lips arose biped & running
muscular despite oblivion. We're stuck
in a red velveteen Mediterranean
rococo theater while Sunset Boulevard
supervises my true life's work.

This poetics is a connoisseur's calendar.
 I collect the fits & starts of any writer's need.
 How do I popularize the state of staying
 behind? You give me dreams of extinction.
 On the screen, her words are invisible,
 your words are stipulations & swans. I see them
 detailed & sullen, like unintended beginnings.

LIFE OF DIAMONDS

Crater of Diamonds State Park, Arkansas, man & wife shovel mud, they gamble w/muscle & sun, press sublime upon Nature. Self is a technique of categories. At depth we introspect what we dig up: sweat clay kimberlite mortal sparrow nickels cans 7-Up -- list Anglo- Saxon catalogue poem formal intricacy at twist end ironic or not. At literal, require one mimesis level for symbol function -- man & wife dig fail value falling fast their technique not clean not neat but w/malodorous sticky they anger up turn up nothing but time passing -- "ha!" -- we're lucky we're not alone -- dialogical w/sun & smirking Park Ranger bullhorning "The Park Is Now Closed -- Please Purchase Your Permit Now for Tomorrow" as if all had such faith in continuity, sequence & words "later" & "better" -- she feels weepy -- this diamondless landscape infinite & sparse, sky glittered w/implications; our expectations are reversed not flocked w/doves they're barren of long-stemmed roses & inspired invention of text this hot August dusk not Valentine's, cicadas not violins, meandering streams not Niagara Falls; here light refracts in mist, this painterly surface watered in mental construct; illusory however visual and flat-lying, symbol function persists in they who deny depth vision whatever shackles paradigms partition emotion; he turns to her hand empty & she tenders not with diamond but caked dry w/muck & still his eyes suggest words "I love"

FROM THE BLUE

voice curved words I wonder how & why pure will-to- power echoes hunger only & not much more; do you begin to place me in timeline of your hello? hey no, confession resound simulate like angst or any other science: me 'n' you 'n' Raup popularizing extinction as if death were a new concept (don't you see through frank so?) I am either/no, universals continuum of absolutes -- Marilyn "my husband likes me this way" zaftig (or fat) my breasts "Some Like It Hot" & some prefer Nietzsche nylon thigh / suppress last distortion dollar magic bag parachute asbestos dreams on daylight molded Heidegger bars-cherries-lemons, so no tide pulls jackpot erasure underneath longing result VCR in win/lose configuration Spam I crave not more Steiner chlorinated sweat like woman pulling death or doubles, can you help this or not? I miss you! boundary reaches not much if inspiration fails, please why

Habermas think love this absurd blood? positivist question figure not, I don't know how I can say good-bye, can you? wondering what you look like, really, beyond all this talk & disclaimed libido, I don't have anything to confess but what I want from you...

CONSTRUCT FLESH YES, UNDIG YOU

mother, no one will want me, I remember against my better self -- do you see how words contract a life for pennies nothing horrid your see love heat blind reduce all sad, I'm so lonely so I hide; symbol we are not much more tears shimmer sweat underneath all gold-flaked as if I could pawn "crazy li'l thing called love" but thigh not fatter'n 3 a.m & you know I won't stop pumping iron whether ring or tears or Rune-tone sunset Cadillac w/fins in my head worry you describe (Hegel) consequential me I'm not scared buy more candles, light describe all symbol content w/ repetition we are not much too go for even if J. Hillis or Agricola borrowings lightning flash me w/out power love heat reflux of need or persist body long, hunger wide, legs flickering mirage of satisfaction my leg trembling aerobic if not sterile we blind benzoic on love's alchemy even not pardon how negative shapes more like poem Nostradamus precedes Spenser by dragon & Errour's cave & more filthy maw swell succinic toxic reducing bone w/ash I am armor w/death & rot w/ history I aware I terror..

POEM 3

Rediscover my name
please, since somehow
lost I have done it;
Lost my name.

It is more difficult to garden than to love. Imagine
fourteen beds, cultivated, with genus & differentiae.

Think Carson McCullers. Think Joyce Carol Oates.
What they have in common can be stored in a box
labeled BOXING. Me or She, this organism inexcusable
is here. Nightfall resides in my fingertips
plucking dead blooms from poems.
I fall down ringing. Tomorrow I'll see myself as fossil:
poppy, anemone, wild iris, and circumstance.

Gardening gloves tape abandon to her face
like sin to specific tokens. Designate anatomy

if it's necessary to describe a body at all.
 Words blink taxis into her
 best synonyms, word uttered Quechua in Sucre,
 Bolivia loses relationships between vehicle & tenor.
 Wander I now in palaces of words' oblivion.
 I waylay epiphany to insure myself against loss:

Even cold is love, true is a flower -- wrap me now
 singing prayer in a voice like tidepools in dawn fog --

In tones epic, biographical, I am spared knowledge
 of bodies. So underknown my species;
 a woman I am wearing Day-Glo
 plastic strips down on wrists & breasts --
 my breath is as quiet as dawn.
 Here in this Texas truckstop, a woman
 with baroque hair, gargoyles for eyes
 contemplates whoring. She slicks dawn colors
 onto her hopes of the future.

My inhalations mimic my full-moon mesquite words.
 Whitetail deer chewing on oblivion suggest my art.
 In your eyes, the wind ruffles Adirondack white-water,
 your smile flushes me stylish with spray & lilies
 left in the rain --

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS WITH BREASTS

Nova Police uniforms grown spandexy & tight.
 My cuffs are polyphonic. My eyes are fleshy
 and all-seeing, no longer the hard
 telescoping addiction-scanners they were before.

I woke up this morning metamorphosed.

Not a cockroach, but a Woman.
 A Woman with breasts & a
 Naked Lunch talking asshole routine.

I've barriered a gun in for verbs.
 I've got a trigger saying "This Is My Head."
SORE THROAT
(3-D Version)

I've got a cough that breaks my heart.
My fears are balloons expanding into stratosphere.
The doctor's touch is as difficult as glass
and I'm cratered by ears, nose & mild
swallowings --

Dear Mumsey,

You've given me an idea about patchwork -- I know why you collect it -- antique calico, gingham, paisley printed cotton fragments lashed together -- they seem to suggest order and design. They also suggest the opposite. The unified whole can break into chaos at any moment -- fabric fragments bursting apart on the coldest nights to leave the sleeping body shivering under fluttering scraps. I admire the thread. How can we find a thread that will hold? How do we find stitches that will allow the pieces to slip away if the pressure to stay in the pattern is too great? --

I read the papers, I listen to CNN. The presidential address reminds the old and the sick that they are old and sick. Flipping channels, the nurse paused when she heard Vivaldi's "Four Seasons." She decided not to suffocate Mrs. Wyndham with a moldy pillow.

For the past few weeks, I've been annoyed by dreams of naked Adonises telling me they long for me. It's absurd. I could be their mothers. Dreams leading to night panics. Forget age difference. Forget dignity. Forget Harold and Maude. My loneliness awakens transformed into pale violet acrylic. These nights have netting for hair and pearls for stars. Can anyone say why the body is frail? Why Thomas Malthus still appeals to economists & social reformers?

The face knits, the body approves -- I love your new trompe l'oeil wall with its prairie expanse of wheat & vast horizon. The paint pulls the concrete into the world of illusion. Behind it all, conversation fills the crevices with binders. I can't imagine a world without Mozart. Do you remember Thanksgiving in 1979 in Houston? The Armand Hammer collection was in town, so we paid homage. So sad thinking both mother, father -- gone --

love always from your granddaughter

Gone like dreams an ache
in my throat I lavage like self
medicated to go walking on
the trompe l'oeil surface of life,
an American Primitive I collect
in spurts of nostalgia.

UNBORN (Title of an Unwritten Screenplay)

She gets her best visions from cheap anxiety poured into wondering why nothing ever turns out how she wants -- this started out as a dream I had one cold file cabinet of a night in Wichita -- images probably induced by gulping 6 glasses of water to stave off a hangover -- I hadn't meant to drink so much -- Friday afternoon in the aftermath of a Western Lit. Assoc. conference I wandered into a western-motif bar as close to a clean well-lighted place as I could get by walking & besides it was the designated rendez-vous point where I would meet my friend -- yes, he was my friend (what else to you call a lover you've started to be embarrassed by just as he's starting to refer to you as his fiancée? blame it on my own fears of intimacy, of being invaded, taken over, possessed, devoured alive --) Anyway, I ended up kicking my heels for an hour at the Chisholm Trail Grill -- I was drinking an indifferent cabernet sauvignon -- he breezed in "Let's go to where we're staying -- it's open bar for guests until 7" -- so I gulped enough from 6:30 until 7:00 to make him think he'd gotten himself a real bargain. I have no recollection of dinner except that I ordered coffee. That night I dreamed of a woman who started seeing visions & having dreams of her mother's death -- what everyone had thought was accidental was really murder -- a twist on Hamlet's father's ghost & a standard revenge tragedy -- anyway, the daughter was not in a Danish castle but in New England autumn woods, walking down Vermont roads, eating apples from trees near abandoned farmhouses -- she comes across an old family cemetery, brushes the leaves gently away to reveal an ancestor with the same name, who dies at the age of 35, her own age -- it's not a Yorick scene, exactly, but there are resonances --- it was an icy Wichita morning when I awoke to the shouts of Right-to-Lifers picketing an abortion clinic across the street from our hotel.

DRIVE-IN MOVIE ON VIDEO

She doesn't smoke but she lets him go through a pack of Marlboros in exchange for companionship. There are high ceilings in her house. They are most evident late at night. She realizes she doesn't know what companionship means. How is a companion not the same as, say, Nutrisweet? She can say the word, "companionship," but it implies more action than a twist of lips, mouth, tongue & vocal chords. She's glad she's not pregnant. She prefers celibacy. She wants freedom from desire. She wants to send cheery signals to the world, like yachting motifs in a Marina del Rey boutique. He says he wants to read her writing. The very idea makes her want to weep for joy. Could he possibly understand her, relieve her hideous isolation? If he read & nodded & said "yes I like it & I see what you're saying" would his words reify her, give her a chance at existence? She wants construction, she wants language to build a machine for her to inhabit. The reader can build a self for her. She prefers to write using a persona because the existence of a mask suggests that something existed before she thought of it herself. Can she borrow the beingness for awhile? When she wears out the persona, and she's used

up the mask, she wishes he would call. Of course he doesn't. She writes a letter to him & imagines presenting it to him over a glass of merlot. She blushes when he says, "what chaos, what joy, what dionysian abandon -- I feel it too I feel reality that way too you've got it exactly & I understand what you've been trying to tell me..." The idea that this scene could possibly come to pass embarrasses her. She throws her Marlboro smoke-saturated shirt & jeans in the washing machine. Stale smoke hangs to her fibers, the threads of what covers her nakedness. Is this the smell of companionship? She opts for therapy instead. At least the commerce is more overt, the negotiations expressed for what they are.

CARNAL DIARY

Day 43: Halloween

Your sly thoughts teleologically impel me to destructively churning clastics, turbulence that manifests as submarine canyons, deep marine flows mappable only millions of years later, when the sediments have lithified to rock -- the models no longer hold, let us slouch toward Bethlehem, as the gyres scream apocalypse and birth and the idea that once more, our thoughts can fall out of suspension, the bulky and dense ones settling first to populate the stream bed, the lighter, finer, more sialic ones coating the surface -- can we inform ourselves with the model of rift? If continents are rifted, and either pull apart, or become subsumed under another (subduction zones), it necessitates margins -- areas along the edges of what we can see, touch, feel, and know -- Why does that explanation compel in the late 20th century? Your continent, your landmass, your body becomes my mechanism of explanation, my way of knowing myself. Do we understand that beneath it all is an elaborate system of differential cooling and mineral aggregation and disaggregation - - that the molten core is slowly cooling as the earth rotates on its axis, affecting the spin, affecting the speed of rotation, and above all, affecting the crust, the surface -- how the core cools determines how the convection currents flow through the mantle, and how the crust is subjected to pressure -- suddenly a current of more liquid, more molten mantle passes under a continent -- under enormous pressure, rifting the Atlantic Ocean, where molten lava emerges into the spreading sea floor, or compressing the wrench-faulted California plate, now being re-melted into the core. And yet you write...

SELF-HACK ASYLUM

Although my "Arabia-ness" seemed to hit suddenly, I knew it had been a long time coming. The stigma breaks my throat, most human of illnesses, ex-brother-in-law's dog following me four-deep in yellow pickups spattering like deep-fry in my mind's drawer of abandon. 12 hours staring at the west wall of a mall. "At safety I placate the state of waking late." I sort hallucinations by expiration date.

In a take-away of sharps, the nurses ordered plastic forks at Taco Mayo. A minimum-wage drive-thru guy in Armani suit shrink-wrapped a CD player to fit the box they carved in my throat. Compact disc circular saws serrated the solitary cup of pico de gallo. My voice grunged in prerecorded jams. Raw silk is what I wear on my drill-fish breasts and pharmaceutical sales-rep spine.

This lane's got women "the city's so GO-GO-GO so how's your life" for fur to be not inner skin but cousins coming from Joplin. Estimate age of Cullen when Dee's had phones.

Too many funerals slow the rhythm of how alone I feel. It is alarm's nature to be internal, the way sex is carried around under my skin. She was too young to die. My hands tremble Christmas. Flowers lose their roots in my sing-for-sad what no one expects. Having IVs more "Jay says it's because" -- and me I'm 90 miles of flesh running down I-35 in fields stacking brickward ways of coping. I'm losing my fitness to feel family.

I do not dream my place in crinkled plastic. Inhale the traveled moment. I fall in love too easily. Bolivia's acrostic foams insulation into another set of lace thigh-highs over my garage. In the mind of the Ray-Ban raped, I'm screwed into thinking. The last green card went to a gargoyle from Notre Dame. Volleying with the limp hands he had air-expressed to me, I preclude my humors to utter burn, my bare back gritted pink by Bon Ami mon ami the scene we esteem more cleanly than me thinking my arteries too blood-bulged to keep me lean. I swung three bats at impossibility. Love's easy thinks are quieted by the wipe of an eye. I'm swollen with cloud. Aloud.

RECOLLECTIONS OF HUNGER

Most human you are, I am taping the moment in my mind, recording & remembering your look -- pain having me, my words couldn't represent sense of blood on pulse, place on plastic -- my kiss is afraid & quiet, never believing -- yes this is more & not necessarily about you but the generalized model built of the psychiatrics of experience -- this urge is a long time boiling, it knows my resolve, my insistence -- I pray for something to take away the pain -- writing, inscribing, announcing how I cable on to wishing we could be more than impossible, more than coded -- you see what limits you can push, I see what places death might manifest -- I love the violence of wavy, darkish smiles -- your touch on my imagination replaying the moment I dove into Donner Lake one August -- the depths put cold on my never-so-needling heart -- who & what are you? am I? my defined self is filled with men but lonely in the middle of every conversation -- why do I wish someone would understand me? tied up, lashed to my pen your image floats luminous -- I resolve to attend Mass -- speaking so too vulnerable I am -- you still hover in my gut -- a woman is stocking a store in the mall with too many postcards, a man thinks

suffering trendy so he labors over it like salad -- your hands are gentle California --
I bruised myself on your first kiss -- I played roulette for your lips -- I pretend not to
notice you in case the roof is playing ornate.

FILM FOR AN ABANDONED DRIVE-IN

He rings the doorbell. She's on the phone.
It's dark, not late. Last week's lunar
eclipse was pared thin by chrome & the brittle
December air. The scene determines the action.
His cap is pure calligraphy.
Her fringed boots are wild with longing.
The hairs on her arms are spiders
erupting from an egg sac.

He constructs biography by erasing
autobiography built into his narratives.
The poem about his childhood is not truth.
The script he has written for himself will hurt her.
She responds to the emptiness by playing out
the generic expectation. Eros laughs.

The skylight disguises the darkness pouring
into her house. Outside, the holly needs pruning,
her words need stringing, festooning, draping,
arranging, ordering. With hands glowing,
music & space precipitate synthetic
heat. Her fingers twist worry, fear, earrings.
To make sure she regrets,
she listens for her words disappearing
like footsteps out the door.

SILENT SCREEN

Paralyzed by scripts and triggers,
Joe Gillis floats face-down. Once signification
claims remorse, the images waver.
Sunset Boulevard must lock the door.
She directs. Time compresses.
Her face unwraps, she returns to glory.
Entryway still barred for complicit
winks, nods, tangos & gigolos --

Norma Desmond asking, preening, begging
the question: "When is Locke's conception of mind --
ideas and images combine & recombine -- when is it
not mad? not an actress?
not a manic "flight of ideas?"

Logic clips wings, the script she is writing;
hearts deform like patriarchy
the devoted pet, a servant named "Max" or
a chimp "He loved to poke at the fire
with a stick."

She considers tautology.

Max is purchasing an African gray parrot
to repeat, to prompt, to ruffle facts
in all offending brains.

The shoot begins on time. Dolphins
fly through hoops in a foul-smelling
tour-de-force of water.
Extras clutch ephemeral selves.

Under pressure of flawless diction,
identity is made to gape at the great DeMille.

The context suggests Miss Desmond's upholstery
is worth hiring. She drives herself on desire.
Under hot lights, women in tight stockings gloss lips
fix themselves into mirrored camera-
ready stares, each glass mirror

a square
an image
a belief

to concatenate like sangre de cristo
or foothill lakes, or HOLLYWOOD on the hill
their features glacial,
a star's own self-regard
sunflowers bloom like old tango & Valentino
sliding into yet another block-
busting rape fantasy --
"even starlight objects
to film & its discontents"

so let
me know
Who
will protest
when aging debutantes of silent screen
are forced (because of their age)
to play cold, old castrating
narcissists?
one day she will be cloaked
in refund fame -- Draped
into an overly sumptuous casket.

But burial is one-way,
its publicity unenjoyable,
unexploitable -- she always said,
"Only highways pretend
to flow two ways." Pure will-to-power
is as excruciating as a madwoman scripting
her own return, rotting
what joy there is to be found:
a man staring from a garage window,
counting the days to his escape...

AFTERWORD

Words scratch my hands. When they draw blood I think of apocalyptic narrative. Belief is a two-sided street. Conformity is that same street with false-front buildings lining one side. The facade of the Oklahoma State Capitol should have been spray-painted black and gold to suggest absolute power. The police sell defective car alarms at a local flea market.

Freud's pleasure principle seems to demand law-breaking.

A poetics of law and legality takes the form of definition. Identity confines itself to a tight cluster of words. Poetics of frozen ontology asks you to forget that language is loose & wandering. Language's fluidities rupture, but not in the obvious manner ascribed to by some writers. It's not as obvious as the culture may have you believe. Say the words aloud. Silk flowers bloom & do not fade. Someone glued a plastic Memorial Day wreath to the star of the Oklahoma State Seal. No one would accept what that meant.

Behavior which is rewarded tends to be repeated.

Behavior which is punished tends to be repeated.

Not again, I said to myself last time I thought poetics & longing went hand in hand. My heartbeats are stuck like sleet on cold metal. I'm looking at the way I never stop mirroring my childhood night-terrors and abandonment anxieties. I groan like a shade in Dante's wood of suicides at what probably lies ahead. Sometimes it takes me a year to be able to endure, get over my longing for what I can't have. I want words to mean. Generic expectations are built on wishing life were predictable and that human intellect can organize reality. But, the poem, in the end, is doomed. It is as doomed as my body.