

An abstract painting featuring several vertical black bands that resemble the spines of books. The background is a complex, layered composition of red and blue, with some areas appearing to be torn or layered. In the center, there is a drawing of two hands clasped together. To the right of the hands, a small, stylized figure with a large red nose and an open mouth is visible. The overall style is expressive and somewhat chaotic.

YALE SERIES OF YOUNGER POETS

SEAN SINGER

# Discography

foreword by W. S. Merwin

Volume 96 of the Yale Series of Younger Poets



# Discography

SEAN SINGER

*Foreword by W. S. Merwin*

*Yale University Press*

*New Haven & London*

Copyright © 2002 by Yale University.

All rights reserved.

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, including illustrations, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publishers.

Designed by James J. Johnson and set in ITC Slimbach type  
by Integrated Publishing Solutions.

Printed in the United States of America by Vail-Ballou Press.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Singer, Sean, 1974–

Discography / Sean Singer ; foreword by W. S. Merwin.

p. cm. — (Yale series of younger poets ; v. 96)

ISBN 0-300-09362-4 (alk. paper) — ISBN 0-300-09363-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

I. Title. II. Series.

PS3619.I573 D57 2002

811'.6—dc21

2002005728

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*This book is for Sarah Jamison Gallogly*

*L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles.*

— Charles Baudelaire

*The desperation of trying to give shape to obsession.*

— Joseph Cornell

*Where the sword is the book is not.*

— Talmud

# Contents

<i>Foreword by W. S. Merwin</i>	ix
Acknowledgments	xiii

## 1

The Old Record	3
Photo of John Coltrane, 1963	5
Ellingtonia	6
Silver Gelatin	9
Scintillatingly Armstrong	10
The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly	12
Robert Johnson (the film, the car ride, & the ghost)	13
“Musical shape is the memory of movement”	15
Who Can Stay the Bottles of Heaven?	17
Billie, Later	18
Frida Kahlo	21
The Fine Satin of the Eureka Brass Band	23
Lena Horne and Billy Strayhorn in Her Dressing Room	25
But Beautiful	26
The Clarinet	27
Inside the Keith Jarrett Trio	28
Transference of the Blues Dynamism	29
Susie Ibarra as a Butterfly	31
False Love	32



## 2

The Garden of Delights	35
Singer Finds His Own Name Among the Dead	37
“But truly I do fear it”	38
The Tiger Interior	39
Goat Moving Through a Boa Constrictor	41
The Exact Diagrams of German Professors	43
The Golem	45
A History of Ota Benga	46
Loss	50
The Burghers of Calais	51
Krekhtsn	52
Dear Singer,	56
S.S.S.S.	58
Bouquet with Flying Lovers	59
The Noise	60
Poem	62
Poem with Memories	63
Home	64
The Emotional Content of Inner Organs	65
Self	67
The Gift	68
A Significant Poem	69
Finding Love as an Equation	70
A Soul	71
Loss	72
The Vocal Fabric of the Soprano	73
“Dear heart, how like you this?”	74
It Moves So Slowly That It Does Not Move	75
Poem with Groucho Marx Refrains	76
Singer and Circumcision	77
The Sweet Obsession Bleeds from Singer	78
⌘	79
Notes	81

# Foreword

Sean Singer's restless, roving demands upon his language, the quick-changes of his invention in search of some provisional rightness, convey through all their metamorphoses an insistent ring of authenticity that seizes the attention and may remind us that the true sense of the word "original" has to do with the origins of a work and of the talent that produced it: with those sources and impulses that are at once individual and universal, unsounded, irreducible and undeniable.

We may note this at the very beginning of this group of poems, in "The Old Record," with its jerky, arbitrary typographical breaks, its fragmentary, arrhythmic and prosaic direction of attention to the making of the record merely as an object,

100 grooves to the centimeter,  
calling it vinyl, midnight candle,

leading us on to the recorded song itself:

*Baby she got a phonograph  
and it won't say a lonesome word  
What evil have I done  
what evil has the poor girl heard?*

The poem, which appears to arise out of nothing and to unroll and conclude according to a determination of its own, alludes to most of the thematic strands that run through this collection. To music, both as an art and as a symbol of emotions transmitted

and transmuted from the past. To the urge toward utterance and the ceaseless realization of how much is never said. To memory and desire, the mingling of passion and pain that has been described in Buddhist texts as “honey on a razor.”

The ancestral figures that return through these poems arrive out of music, out of the agonies of Africa (Ota Benga, a Congolese pygmy brought to St. Louis in 1904 to be a display in the World’s Fair); they take the forms of a goat moving into a boa constrictor’s gullet, of Giordano Bruno, George Jackson in solitary at Soledad Prison, John Brown, John Donne, Groucho Marx, of Singer’s own imagined self:

All the passions of my organs  
Are soft doorways. The garden  
Turns inside out. One dream  
Is white as a sky, one black  
And crowded as trees. Each  
With a door, a rude odor, a reed.

His forms range from typographical broken fields to variants of the sonnet, a tense, nervous blank verse, a spectrum of un-repeated prosodic patterns. What consistency holds all these together? Late in the collection he calls it “the sweet obsession,” which apparently is synonymous with a projection of his own evanescent life and his music. Whether we think of that obsession as his poetry, his playing, his saxophone

engraved as a tiger

lily

or the tenor of his days

making up

in depth for what it lacked

in brightness

the words are charged with the irony and the raw energy that run through all these lines and inform their beauty and their wit. He manages to employ the shell games of surrealism without losing the thread of that urgency, and his surprises are even

funny occasionally, as in the “Poem with Groucho Marx Refrains,” in which some of the laughs are his own juxtapositions:

People hold tightly to habits, and their buckets collect the sap.  
*I've had a perfectly wonderful evening. But this wasn't it.*

To claim the ice-floe dancing of his own self-awareness as the “sweet obsession” infusing his music and his poems might seem at once too bare, too audacious, too unpeopled, were it not for the way Mr. Singer manages to include within it such an astonishing range of refracted moments of other lives, rather as a novelist may conjure up a cast of characters related, in some way not apparent to themselves, to a single theme. Their evident appropriateness and the vividness of their occurrence are indications of Singer’s continuous, tumbling, innate current of invention, which clearly is indistinguishable from the welling up of the poems themselves, and the variety of their forms.

That flow of invention turns multiple exposures of central images into facets of a single metaphor in poems such as “Goat Moving Through a Boa Constrictor,” with its “obsessive” subject of solitude, the terror of the solitude of death as it occurs in the eyes of the dying goat, in Giordano Bruno at the stake,

my wafting tongue,  
a pink swing worming inside a flame

and George Jackson in Soledad Prison answering,

Think of the word  
*soledad*, loneliness, blowing a groove  
through a man, a man blowing into a bird.

The groove, then the bird, in this sequence of poems, at once become part of the continuo, the obsession with music, with what is recorded and what is unseizable and lost.

The richness of invention in this book is such that I was led for a while to wonder whether the author’s name too might be a fiction. Singer indeed becomes *Singer*, one of the personae in the sequence, and the name is used as an implied epithet,

Singer as “the singer” with a Jewish self, a black self or several of them, a performer’s self or several of them, and many others, and so the name too becomes part of his invention.

Since Singer is a poet, it is ultimately the quality of invention in his language that is the base, the heart and proof of all the rest, and it is one of the continuous striking presences throughout this book. The inventiveness, the singularity and apparent newness of his language are recognizable through all the variations of subject, form, tone. It is what conveys his projected representations of the obsession that is his theme: its sweetness, its momentum, its solitude, its terrors. It provides the consistent, disturbing authority of poem after poem.

This is a strange book and, I think, rightly so.

These are fleshfold songs . . .  
Thy flesh is thy clothes. . . .  
And who would believe happiness.  
Roll on sudden passion.

It seems to me to be true to itself and to a surprising and highly individual gift.

*W. S. Merwin*

# Acknowledgments

Some of these poems originally appeared in the following magazines, some with slight variations:

*Callaloo*: “Ellingtonia”

*Cross Connect*: “The Tiger Interior” and “The Garden of Delights”

*Double Take*: “The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly”

*Generation J*: “The Clarinet” and “Singer and Circumcision”

*Harvard Review*: “Scintillatingly Armstrong”

*Iowa Review*: “The Golem”

*La Petite Zine*: “S.S.S.S.,” “Poem with Groucho Marx Refrains,” “Loss” [“The worst part is when I think”], “A Significant Poem,” and “The Fine Satin of the Eureka Brass Band”

*LIT*: “Home”

*Lyric*: “It Moves So Slowly That It Does Not Move” and “X”

*Notre Dame Review*: “The Gift,” “The Vocal Fabric of the Soprano,” and “Dear heart, how like you this?”

*Painted Bride Quarterly*: “Loss” [“There is loss in the world”]

*Pleiades*: “Singer Finds His Own Name Among the Dead”

*River City*: “False Love”

*Slope*: “The Sweet Obsession Bleeds from Singer,” “Transference of the Blues Dynamism,” “The Emotional Content of Inner Organs,” and “Robert Johnson (the film, the car ride, & the ghost)”

*Tin House*: “The Old Record”

I also wish to thank my family, my teachers Yusef Komunyakaa, Carol Frost, and Carl Phillips, the Catskill Poetry Workshop, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Academy of American Poets, and W. S. Merwin.

**( ( ( 1 ) ) )**





# The Old Record

rolled out of the hot machine  
the Scully Automated Lathe,  
covered in oil,  
rigged to the metal ends,  
dying of spin,  
metal on black,  
back to back thimble weights, diamond  
and rinsed  
to a new shine,  
lunge and pull into circles,  
100 grooves to the centimeter,  
calling it vinyl, midnight candle,

drops onto the place  
with the push of the nidifugous chirping needle,  
a bell crank leadplant,  
resting in a red scissor over  
the lumps of steel,  
then rising  
with  
throistle  
smoke,  
jazz dust,  
rumbly with the Blues,  
the old rumormonger taking us  
to the juke,  
(the Bambara word that is  
wicked  
!)

bouncing resin polymer lost to the racy sough  
of *"Baby she got a phonograph,  
and it won't say a lonesome word  
Baby she got a phonograph  
and it won't say a lonesome word  
What evil have I done  
what evil has the poor girl heard?"*

## Photo of John Coltrane, 1963

Otherworldly and outreaching,  
A Parnassus of noise with a serious  
Glint of inestimable  
Worry on his face,

O Coltrane what will ring  
From your pious  
Gleaming Antillean Euphonia, so capable,  
Swift, with no trace,

No trace of stillness? The blur  
Of the gray-gray and *gris-gris*  
Flows hornward to the black bell

Of the saxophone, a cylinder  
Of joy, an empurpled sea  
Of heaven ebbing into hell.

# Ellingtonia

*for Edward Kennedy Ellington*

1

. . . And the lamp caught fire  
after he put a blue cashmere sweater over it.  
Subtle as a Nance obbligato  
on filmy violin—two brown curves *en passant*,  
purflings ease sound out of the stank of violin parts:  
    belly, waist, chin rest, rib, sound hole, pegbox,  
    tailpiece, rounded shoulder.  
Ellington was an expert on them all.

2

---

libretto

holy writ: Billy Strayhorn would wake up,  
compose for four hrs. Would wake Duke

: *Blood Count* or *Ballad for Very Tired and Very Sad Lotus Eaters*  
for example, & he'd bring his golden torso up,  
& finish off the rest of the composition.

In the morning, after composing  
all night, Duke would open the closet

[Full of blue cashmere sweaters]

& His Orchestra was playing the next morning:  
Plucky, plugugly, pozzolana, porous, & perfect blues.

3

Daffdowndilly Ebullience    Daibutsu Ear    Damselish Ectogenesis  
Dardanelles Edge            Darksome Eiderdown            Demonax Ellipse  
Desirous Empire              Doughbelly Eohippus            Dovetail Espalier

4

Salieri eavesdropped  
Mozart playing a word-sex game;  
just then the creamy, squeezing oboe  
exalted-unbolted *Chimaphila umbelata* plumbed beautiful  
music  
the color of blonde night: red plum jam  
on pumpernickel: a Puerto Rican hermaphrodite  
putting on pink lipgloss.

5

Wednesday night, Ellington, who  
could forefeel the slightest discolored saxifrage  
leaf easing between two rocks, heard  
through a catnap & a halfdozen chewed  
pencil tips, the babygreen, sweetpea Billy  
exhale.

6

Blue, through blue dukedoms passed on to accept  
That place which comes to each of us alone.

# Silver Gelatin

Bellocq photographed me yesterday.  
Nothing is left out, not even the smell.  
I go naked to pick up the Raleigh Rye.  
He has a staccato voice like an angry squirrel,  
a big waterhead, and is only five feet tall.  
I look at the flashbulb like it wants me.  
I draw a butterfly on the wall and think  
there's a myth about what unfolds from the pupa:  
Southern Jezebel, Painted Lady, Sara Orangetip.  
Those could be any girl in Storyville.  
Tonight our street is a wet, velvet shade,  
the girls smoke cigars, and I have no money.  
My form rises from the bath in the reddish light.



## Scintillatingly Armstrong

No trumpet after lights out. The nuns say quit playing  
And wriggle marine into your dream like a lioness  
Touching her wounded feelings. Behold the brand

Of scarlet on the brow of her Promised Land and not  
Feel the pink one in his own damned cheek. Trumpet  
Goes back in its cardboard. Whites & yolks. Sensitive

Morning. Peachskin calico. He dreamed greatly, weedhearted  
Winged genius, framed by love. *Our music*  
*Is a secret order.* His shaft of lighting was brass, valves

Bleating. No wonder Lil took to veils and she descended  
From that he-goat, that horizontal pupil, the blues  
Chewing fat, chewing. Nightclothed scoundrel. The blues

Is a goat in a sea of red clover. Lil loved him onetime.  
Such heavy vintage, such an heir of shadows,  
Etching solos & minstrelsy. Hazelight into the dowry

Of heaven. Louis: beholder of moldering irises,  
Too foul for hell. A kind of forgiveness swelled  
Over her. Pacing, holding a pillow in anger ready

To launch it at his head and on the street beneath,  
Laundresses, thrushes, straight hustles, brothels,  
Applause. She throws it as hard as she can.

Just feathers! Just feathers!  
Pale palisades like goldwhite bells, floating . . .  
Tropically meaningless. Indeed, thought Louis,

Our hero, To funk is only Louisnatural  
Its daring fears divine. I love to look at you.  
I love the dusted licorice of your spitblack hair.

# The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly

*after James Hampton, folk artist*

I read the gospel and heard it call  
me to build up them silver pulpits,

to cast out witches and devils, done  
with nothing but these two hands is all.

As I were building it up an angel  
talked at me from the stairs since I's the son

of a preacher. I collect foil  
and bust up furniture in a tangle

from out back. Bible plainly say: a fool  
ignores the word; wicked won't work

for the Lord. I got some warning. I might  
be a janitor, but I see through dark.

That day comes I'll sure be right  
since the spirit call me to assembling

these thrones. It tell me like fire: "Sculpt It!"  
as I almost caught my ghost trembling.

# Robert Johnson (the film, the car ride, & the ghost)

“. . . over 10 seconds of grainy film footage surfaced somewhere of what may or may not be Robert Johnson. Nobody has seen the film, which apparently is being offered for \$1.5 million, but everybody has an opinion about whether or not it's of the blues legend.”  
—from a magazine article

—Roll camera:

Iron-colored homburg, burr of cigarillo  
dangling out jook-lips.

A spider light behind spider-hand,  
& fliptop flimflam

of the thumping thumb on the green guitar.

:Lights on—

In each Mississippi town during the car ride:

Friars Point:

A terrific echo tango filled the Terraplane: yowl & powder  
red in the air from his *well, this is it* girlish voice.

Midnight:

“Man, be careful! My wife's *percolating*.”

Itta Bena:

H. C. Speir ran a music store in Jackson.  
All the ladies knew.

Nitta Yuma:

. . . *the blue light was my blues and the red light was my mind* . . .

Rena Lara:

his mattress was roughage & provender,  
his shoe was a queen of spades,  
the Gatling gun of his wet blue heart  
was like the dead shrimp on his floor.

Some little places that didn't even have names:

Thin blues from a steel string  
Reel brothel mouths.  
It would put your kidneys to sleep.

Resolution—:

Slippery jass: our needle-thin man  
died of poison & general dissipation.  
Never mind the *Strychnos Nux-vomica*  
or belladonna in his liquor,  
never mind the broken seal,  
but the film! First the gray-yellow tape  
clicks through the numerals  
like a peeling tangerine,  
then that devilment, minty voice  
like a jack-in-the-box singing  
Chinese opera. O the dark steeple  
& the peach falsetto are one.  
The dog & the mosquito rough  
it up. There is a terrible cry  
doping doing all through the grape night.

## “Musical shape is the memory of movement”

He could peel the marks off his arms.  
Blowzéd russet drippingly down.  
The shack habitués saw the stand-bys.  
His nod-offs.  
He was out with Moose the Mooche trying to score.

He took his shoes off and put his feet on top of them.  
Brown suede. Goof-snuff. Yen pox. Varèse and Wolpe.  
*Klactoveedsedstene. Klaunstance.*  
He blew an echoic mad-bad flight.  
A girl screamed. A waiter spilled a scotch on someone’s lap.

Moa. Teraphim. Altostratus. Fever therapy. Hoopoe needling  
a tree.  
High foot-lambert luminescence.  
Hypozeuxis shotgun house porch preaching. Shofar.  
And the name stuck. Alchemy.

Chan’s almond eyes turned into a pretty melody.  
The bandstand lifted up from the floor.  
The thing that consumes the Bird was mostly Bird.  
Don’t try to lie about it.  
Did Buddy Rich smile when Bird drank iodine?

Bipunctate. Vertigo. Geechee. Piccaninny.  
They called it “Jass-jizz. Bray of the sackbut. Be-Bop.”  
He called it “Modern Music.”

Monsieur Sax died penniless in an institution so his  
Ghost was booing Charlie in the back alley,  
Smoking Kools and horrified at the tools:  
Gauze-puffs. Rubber tubes. Angel-puke. Spittle-wisps.  
He hated his self, his tincture of desire. Chan had to clean up,  
Scrub down the scruff-dross in the lacquer tub.

Oh man, his sound was a whirlwind, a whine,  
A cycloptic ballyhoo fat lasso-hoot.  
People started to squirm, weary and bluesed-out.

In the rumpus that ensued he accidentally  
Thumped his nut on the corner of the stage.

Bird blew a Dahomey hornblower all-reet  
Root song and night turned blue.

# Who Can Stay the Bottles of Heaven?

Loneliness is a rising music of  
A space I can only go to without  
You. The love-god says she'll devote  
A moment to make it up to me, move  
Me back to your dance of spells, then above  
To your pincushion eyes of light. She doubts  
Anything can be done soon, she's not about  
To change her schedule for one lousy love.

I miss your cello voice, your midnight lows,  
The color of your hair, and dancing blue  
To blue-violet. I miss your until tomorrows,  
The shape of your wrists, even the way you  
Say loneliness can be cured with just two  
Things only you and the love-god can know.



# Billie, Later

1

Wounds etch themselves above and below  
Drink sober lungfulls of hush.  
Bloodsoap & will, the threadbare  
Noises of an amber tube and a bird.  
Welcome to the district of snow-loneliness.  
My list: a towel for redness,  
Taboos for my doll, spasms of Amen.  
Something emerges from a chord—  
A pigeon egg, snowsilent, resilient, secret  
Holding its hand toward you,  
Holding its pink spotlight,  
Finding a Roosevelt dime,  
I wake up to a new sun,  
a clear and tender quiet in each bone.

Billie blue as mama's  
chinaberry tree  
ain't greased  
since the big bean  
collared a nod  
in the early black  
back of the club  
so thick with smoke  
& lady up front blowing blues  
till my hair hurts  
spurts of shying sometimey  
trouble you know  
in the black fracture of night  
she's back hopdog cutie  
killer diller  
face like a brown egg  
beg in the black  
like jack the bear  
there lady baby  
color of a chocolate dress  
juicy lucy that  
shazam doowah  
bang bang outflow  
sensation called yes

I had too many husbands.  
 Last one beat me black and blue—  
 Then he was out the door,  
 He said, Baby better me than you.

I got good and drunk,  
 I couldn't even see.  
 No matter how much money I make,  
 I ain't never been free.

He used to stay out late,  
 Now he don't come home at all.  
 I know by that,  
 There's another mule kicking in my stall.

If you don't like my ocean,  
 Don't fish in my sea.  
 Stay out of my valley,  
 And let my mountain be.

Let me be your rag-doll,  
 Until your china come.  
 If you beat me ragged,  
 I've got to beat you some.

If he walks out the door,  
 He won't be gone long.  
 I'll be up on the stage,  
 In my needle of song.

# Frida Kahlo

A hummingbird fell  
in a pan of heated  
oil. Purple-crackle  
& glitter-sizzle. Frida  
picked it up, three inches  
of slender feather, brushed  
it off & in a luminous  
whisper repeated:  
*Look if I loved you,  
it was for your flying.  
Now that you don't fly,  
I don't love you any more.*

Frida was split  
by a metal trampipe  
& onto the blood  
they said spilled  
a piece of gold.  
Marvelous gold landed  
in her open body,  
a red orchid-goiter  
& all the people  
stood staring & saying  
“La bailarina, la bailarina,”  
little dancer  
shaped like a keyhole.

Look through the hole  
& see her knot of monkeys  
rumbling around her breasts,  
touching her ovaries,  
their hairy fingers spread  
like a Japanese fan,  
& unlock the keyhole  
into a Mexican zócalo,  
a Mayan girl selling  
fried grasshoppers in a basket.

# The Fine Satin of the Eureka Brass Band

1. Your hurts are iridescent sea slugs.
2. You wear those reticent pink fringes.
3. Coils of light warm my face.  
    Something lopes easily through the trees.  
    Your voice is the radiator steam.  
    Orange bodies of earth float to my nose  
    and I taste you, a thunderstorm of sullen red.
4. Touch the paved hole of their noise
5. which more than I can, moves  
    by the Ebony Lounge  
    infused with faith & thin tuxedos.
6. They weren't *that* thin,
7. The music in 1961 was not austere  
    or clusters of silver like fish on ice.
8. This song is a jointure, as the half-cow girl  
    eating feta cheese
9. knew she was heavenly all night.
10. *Whatever the self describes describes the self.*
11. The green water of loss was like that day.
12. There is a sole sapling with its Irish perfumes.
13. One moment, my arms were the vessels & solar leaves.
14. Strange Singer stood on the shore,
15. where foam will draw his prints into the full harbor.
16. One man's tercentenary umbrella  
    in a warm glove.

17. I love the parade, its brass grasping.
18. *Vita brevis, ars longa.*
19. at last, dogs eat their breakfasts,
20. at last, the river of the brass band moves, everything  
tender, dark muscle contractions under the sun-peach  
waves.

# Lena Horne and Billy Strayhorn in Her Dressing Room

I'm afraid.

Just as the water kept running out of the tub.  
They were elegant creatures with  
Wet pressed eyes.

I was talking to his eyes.  
I want to put my hands up to his face  
And hold it.  
His heart is a cave, things glued to its surfaces.

My heart is fine glaze on a jug, pouring  
Red air.  
O Sweet Pea, I feel empty.  
Silk streams from her abdomen.



## But Beautiful

Silk thread  
pearl mountain  
cello scroll  
smooth notch  
fluttered valley  
supple muscle  
fingerboard  
taut soprano  
baby plum  
stay.

# The Clarinet

All the klezmer bands used it,  
When they eased themselves down from dark,  
Down down down down.

Prospero broke his black staff,  
And vainglorious light beamed out:  
The fairy-light, slave-light, chalumeau blue

Music foot-flatted in the New Englander barn,  
Moon-thin and rumbled bass yeses and linnets,  
And sounded-out vanilla sugar;

Quavers of coloraturas  
Made tintinnabulation and allargando,  
As the valve trombone and guitar

Hush hush in the background  
And got cool-quiet and waked the blues,  
Listen listen and the light come through.

## Inside the Keith Jarrett Trio

The bronze smoke in the trio.  
Already incense, license to make homespun song.  
Already sealed at night, humming under the salt  
He hums the echolocation of a whale.

Dark majesty of whale,  
How does a hollow bone in your head  
Trace clear, purple wavelets from waves of pain?

# Transference of the Blues Dynamism

1

There is one known, battered copy.  
The girl's letters go down my throat—a tablespoonful of cherry.  
She lived in a cottage by the sea.  
It was in Nova Scotia, and she sang her world:  
a brush, fish, bristles, trails, tonnage of stones.

A midair radius of clouds: humped fields.  
I put down the letters. Rescind, decide, ease, erase. Who was she?

2

She did not sing about slivovitz, *le Juif Errant*,  
or theories of heredity. She was not a Jew.  
She did not see the sin in Singer. Who will sing, like Dock Boggs  
with his hellbent banjo, of the liquidation of the Lwów ghetto?  
The Ossolineum Institute is sewn into the sky.

If she cannot bend the gods, she will unleash herself.

Unleashed, even the blueblazes of that pain travels  
from her to Dock Boggs, to me, to some sleepwalking dressmaker  
or tailor in Europe, drinking dry, colorless wine.

Dock Boggs, feeling it in him, wailed:

*Have never worked for pleasure,  
Peace on Earth I cannot find;  
The only thing I surely own,  
Is a worried and troubled mind.*

## Susie Ibarra as a Butterfly

One day when she was practicing  
her eyes were the blackberry jellies in a Persian tapestry.

The ride and the sweltering hi hat.  
Hand-hammered ichthyo-linen

overlapping she played  
“When I’m playing music, I’m playing music.”

Then, wrists morpho blue flit-fling-gnarling  
into smoo-th-zooming-moon.

I wish my name was Tom  
so she’d hit me.

She has beautiful feet and skin  
the color of caramel machinery—: steam rising.

One of the solos is a Filipino worker  
at the Singer Sewing Machine Factory:

the welt, the vamp  
lapis and stillness.

# False Love

1

My hair is black and glossy but I am not Bessie Smith. Belting  
out pink sequins in the shithouse night, dying for sweet  
conversation

or a gesture. Who left this light on?

When, perjuring yourself and hating, a loom of moon,  
you break, you are a smooth ballast in a ship belly. . . .

You swagger

around, fat astral minion, a green parrot, soft emerald, trying  
to right yourself. When you laugh, your eyes narrow into a prism.

2

She was Sean herself ere evensong time.

3

I don't care which part of the triangle I am. Each corner  
blesses. Eventually, an edge, a gene, a sparkle dwindles  
me down to a bone. I enter you—your corner—ready.  
Poles of morals switch charges, losing clarity. A bear trained  
to a gypsy's flute, sober & tearful. Out there forcing a field  
of fire, a half-human sucking. The field glistens.  
You have seen it, black as shelves.

(( (2) ))





# The Garden of Delights

1

Swarms of birds as large as cats  
make a tuba shape through  
sandcastles. Cherry blossoms fat  
as plums line the prairie in an orgasm of blue.

A fury of gazelles grow  
into unicorns and drink water  
under a bracelet of trees, a sow  
pokes its rat head into a crater

of green trailing through  
nightfall. A jackrabbit rises  
between saw-grass, hushes a blue  
song by the fuchsia geyser.

2

Gourd, jaundice, jalapeño, oyster lump, pod, mallard, kuckle-  
berry, kernel, phalanger, skunk cabbage, gollywobbler, owl,  
husk, senufo, tidbit, agouti, fig apron, aqueous echidna, edel-  
weiss, spitoon, jojoba, ecdysial quincunx, spiny gurnards,  
llama, thrallldom, terpsichore, zareeba, pink whang, tuft, trog-  
lodyte, buggery, hurly burly.

Stitched to the smoke they slip away,  
the fat poured over the bodies  
into the charcoal river, darker  
than the girl's nipple, half-lit  
like an eclipse, a mill wheel divining  
pain & fire forming on the light,  
everyone pushed into ash  
with the stiff egg hatching a scurrying  
demon & the sky blooming with Zyklon-B,  
a fat arson-baby sweeping his mother away  
into a coal-dust moth, & nothing.

# Singer Finds His Own Name Among the Dead

*Terezín Memorial—Prague*

A mole sees Singer's big bones curling  
in the box like a carved ocarina.  
Perhaps he was picked on the ramp  
by a stolid Totenkopf for experiments.  
Singer's shoulder had the mark where  
he was grabbed and turned into  
a lamp. Shade and clamp are  
neatly stitched. His pure part escaped  
into the air, the other part turned  
to black liquid. It's all over for him.  
Another prisoner simpers like a donkey  
and opens his Red Cross chocolates.

“But truly I do fear it”

Ophelia is the skin  
of the moon spread  
out in the unclear  
river with her tongue  
around the reeds like  
a chorus drifting away  
her mermaid sighs &  
wide blue eyes are the  
belly of a mirror & in  
her strange water kingdom  
we'll be singing off-key:  
*He is gone, he is gone,  
And we cast away moan.  
Lord ha' mercy on his soul.*

# The Tiger Interior

1

Through a bank of palmlight  
Over the white-green surf

As if old women's hands  
Break the day into gypsum dark

Night is worn  
And night stars are worn  
To a slumberous newness.

2

Old women go the green ways of Florida, under the flame-  
Flung sun: formed beautiful with hymns and hymns;  
Cocoon-white little girls are folded inside their tender part.

Cometh the women in the forms of the old.  
Formed like flames are they in changing colors  
Of pink, gold, and gold-whites; The little girls sit

Inside the orange dark like wrinkled, soft balloons.  
They that left their dying women through their throats  
Float heavenward through the gold-black stripes of the afternoon.

Ethel Rosenberg flies over Florida and she is distant and simple.  
For this she was born. She is a tiger as big as the night.  
Her children are grown, and they know all she came to know:  
That she struggles in the humid air as if the hugeness of the clouds  
Was the hugeness of the chair and its shock  
And its shock and its shock. A thousand feet  
Beyond even if she never knew Russian or uranium.  
She keeps high, black sun, orange sun, looking  
At the old women, wordless at the rhapsody of her possible life.

# Goat Moving Through a Boa Constrictor

1

. . . eyes drooping knowing the end  
Is near. One said the sun  
Is our center, turned his head  
And then got tied and spun

Round a broken tree. Tongue  
Cut out of its hole, a lock-  
Stitch for speaking. He was wrung  
And quartered in full torque

As the red-seam on a chop  
Block. The other one shot  
From a tower far from hope.  
They never even shut his eyes . . .

2

Bruno to Jackson, Giordano to George:  
“The darkness was an utter blackness,  
in the Campo dei Fiori where I was gorged  
& burned before the adoring mob who would bless



the Pope of Rome, my wafting tongue,  
a pink swing worming inside a flame.  
I'm a brute climbing into his burning, sung  
by no one, a martyr's pyre with no one to blame."

Jackson to Bruno, George to Giordano:  
"We reckon all time in the future  
from the day of death, its albino  
eyes looking into you, one pure

long breath. Desperation forces love  
into hiding. Think of the word  
*soledad*, loneliness, blowing a groove  
through a man, a man blowing into a bird."

# The Exact Diagrams of German Professors

Here the stones cover the yard. They are white  
as if taken from a crocodile belly. No. Bones  
round and resting on one another as lovers  
one on top of the other.  
Each a chip of a femur or a weak whiteness  
torn from a head long ago so that  
one round piece re-fused to another and on throughout.  
Then one sinks back in its ground,  
set in the off-white, ash-blond square.  
From here the yard is an infirmary sheet,  
from here four corners meld into a cook's skirt.  
None is owl claw, monkey paw, nor rare  
Chinese coin with holes in the center,  
snowy, pus-white, a half-moon  
laid in a piece of nail.  
The boneyard, big and white,  
looks like an onward sea, half gesture  
mixed with glass, a flat slice of sawdust bread.  
All afternoon the exposed clavicle  
in the sun. The Black Forest is the center  
of the eye socket. The white part  
is a huge field called Belsen or Terezín.  
In a blink that someone suffered,  
a butcher flings chicken fat away,  
the sea goes on brilliantly, an arctic fox  
chews its white young.

“Why do you hold me so tightly? Quiet  
are you wrapping your arms around  
me. Is it because you’re afraid?  
Are we in Rwanda? Are we  
in El Salvador?”

The long chalkboard  
shows the stripes on the skull,  
like the inside of an onion, where  
we can measure the distance between  
Jew eyes . . .

“This little piece of chalk is a different  
whiteness from that white, or is it  
the same whiteness? Those clouds . . .”

The wide boneyard in the camp.  
“. . . like a scale-less, fatty fish, webs of dust,  
snakeskin valentines.”

An impalpable, translucent wall—  
a twofold mother, hot, unmentionable, raw;  
part-sea and part-desert. What kind of sound  
does it make when the boots step on it?

“You can see from the closeness  
of the brain-stem hole that this  
creature was undoubtedly a race,  
but not human.”

Bones never deteriorate  
on land. Dinosaur eggs  
half-shattered like sunlight,  
or a shark tooth on some corroded  
isle are nothing to decay. It ignores  
the bones. Rain goes on the bones,  
and snow, and pieces of ice,  
and only vultures chew out the marrow,  
to the ends, filled with sponge,  
on top of each other, one after  
the other.

# The Golem

. . . who killed the martyred man found reborn in silt and  
peat a fine tar-baby wrenched in a struggle his back curving like  
a little taut cello and a black rope around his neck his teeth  
battered as a worn-in porkpie fitted through the reeking smoke  
sounding out who killed me listen and hear his auburn strokes  
through the dragon-hail his broken muscle pink-black water  
over slippery fetus balls glossy as a fish in the longing play of  
the waves creosote resin sea singing who killed . . .

# A History of Ota Benga

1

“AMAZING DWARFS”

Like the soft skull of a hydrocephalic  
baby, the white mask sits on the shelf.  
It rests in a glass box; a pinprick  
of light in a camera obscura. It is the elf

face of Ota Benga. (Here in St. Louis!  
In 1904 he rode up in a fringed palanquin  
and chasséd out—some wife screamed: *This  
is a cannibal?*) He had dagger-teeth and red-green skin.

The crowds looked up at him like a skirt.  
They touched him like he was muskmelon.  
They rubbed him like a smudge on a cashmere glove.

Ota sat on the stool until it hurt.  
Ota wanted to die!— but had only been gone  
a week. Ota wanted his juju, milk, and love.

“OH YES, HE’S HUMAN!”

At the throes of the Kasai,  
 he saw his wife skewered, tied-down  
 and muffled by cholera and slavers. The sky  
 came down around him. A man wanted to own

a man. So: At 28, (4’ tall, 100 lbs.)  
 not able to recognize the rare meat  
 on the hut as his woman, nor her soft sounds—  
 the lull-flood woo-woe of her heartbeat,

he stood up and agreed to go to St. Louis.  
 He got on the boat after they killed her.  
 He used to send men to slay elephants with blowdarts,

and now *he* was in the land of *muzungu*—  
 the ghost-men. He was part of a larger massacre.  
 He was part of nothing. Of nothing was he a part.

“PYGMIES DEMAND A MONKEY DIET”

La Force Publique left a million sq. miles  
 of hands. Ota hated the Congo:  
 The tsetse, the pongid, the piles  
 of hands, the auction block, the sloe-

eyed Akoa, Batwa, Wamubuttu, Akka.  
 He reasoned: *There is darkness all around us  
 but if darkness IS, and the darkness is of a  
 forest, then the darkness must be good.* Thus



*"TIRED OF AMERICA"*

Lynchburg, Virginia: Ota Benga  
 came away from the mirror in a blue suit  
 and was "Otto Bingo."

"Ples cal me Oto Beengo. I pick yor fruit,

do smal jobs. I put the fire  
 in you if you get sick.  
 O eys that look! The fir  
 tre not like at hom. But stick

its root in you, I hel the wound.  
 Gon amoong the tribe am I. Lost  
 in the land of the gost. . . ."



# Loss

*for Rebecca*

The worst part is when I think  
I heard his voice . . .

or white wallpaper—raw air  
that smells of coffee beans.

Once I invented a room  
with silver skin—

translucent, tin moon for  
we are here alone

and it seems, almost—  
he wishes I were an onion,

so I can feel his thumb  
peel my layers.

# The Burghers of Calais

What of the hard, chained man in drab  
or oil-gray? Supplant his adamantine  
heart with a soft laminae heart.  
Who is weeping inside the hot metal?

*To leave this godforsaken slag scrub,  
I would unravel the blue twine  
of my aorta and spurt  
away. While the beast chews his meat, I'll*

*slip out of his ear into the snow.  
There I will see there are others  
gesturing, an alchemy of flesh.*

Wind making tremolo  
through the daisies—: smothered  
under a sheet of bronze, under a ghost of ash.

# Krekhtsn

1

White chestnut branches look as devotional as sails.  
We have all been feverish in a room,  
Warm and cold, in odd places.  
A heavy wheel rolls across my forehead.  
My nose fills with a ring of olive-colored rubber.  
A pile of unpolished shoes. The Polish suitcases.

People in choirs sing horrible woods, as if in a mirror,  
underground—figures filed away.  
Exiled white things.  
Glass things, green as copper plate.  
They are shaped like loose threads. The color of squid,  
swelling.  
Conduits of thick fluid, a gasping area.

*It is inscribed. It is sealed.  
 So as to form oneness within oneness.  
 Who by strangling and who by stoning.*

I was from Kaments-Podolskiy.  
 I was an orange horse hide, I was yellow twilight.  
 All my skin is a blade of grass. It is a puff of smoke.  
 Two fires, fair in the forested light.  
 Bits of newsprint, slices of dusk-headed smoke.  
 My breath is my wreath.  
 A death of heather & fever. Lines of figures suckling.

A world in your eyes.      Little castles, wrestling  
 Listless cantos from Polish bushes. Numb as cows in the rain.

I am numb from the fine purple silk along the seam of your  
 mouth.  
 Your mouth is a calm almond.  
 I wish I was still with you. All those glories of the world.

I was a furrier. The mink squeal.

Inside them, brown as dust, growing into worms—sham & sparkle.

Particles blown out like air. Deflated lungs, missing fillings. Warm as an uncurling palm. Maps of dew. Great tremors in the pinkish scales of my lungs. Mink with dots on their translucent backs. The process of sterilization. But when you look inside the wheeling freak, new shapes—

A cello case is hard on the outside, but inside is padded with dark velvet.

White chestnuts come apart in the cold weather. My avian blood is loose. Undress my wounds.

If this is biology, the mink is unseeing. Her half-human eyes are preserved.

This is the defilement of the Earth.  
 This is the constellation of the desert,  
     separate parts of the same tree.  
 This is a storeroom, lacework and *in flagrante delicto*. Meager  
     winglings. Yellow cloth.  
 Who created the palace?  
 It has filters and systems, broken vessels with 288 sparks.  
 One vessel is pure marble. One is a nest full of honey.  
 All-unending and indwelling.  
 A hidden acosmism of beautiful palaces in both.

The sparks mean: if we were ever apart, I would want a window  
     between us where we could meet  
     if we needed each other.

Loneliness is a strawberry. It is my only possession, yet I give it  
     to my friend.

## Dear Singer,

Into the hallway,  
Swelling and whirling dark,  
The boys found me,  
And I was alone and weak,  
And they were raging.  
Something was pulled over their eyes,  
As they went looking.  
They might have lost me,  
But I stalled since I was not suspicious,  
Part of the environment.  
They didn't expect me,  
But against the wall now,  
Part of the fluorescent hallway,  
I could be a victim,  
Or filled with fury,  
Or part of their story.  
They shook out my face  
Like a red shirtsleeve.  
Inside my skin,  
A tremor was rising.  
I wonder was their drunken vision  
Like my X-ray?  
The pale image of settled anger  
Like a cinder burning inside.  
The bones, and the bones of my bones,

Were wordless other than their pounding.  
The floor was the wall,  
The wall was the ceiling,  
My head lowered,  
Swollen with error and distortion.  
They could no longer possess their rage,  
So they put it in me.



# S.S.S.S.

There is something of a fascist in me.  
In me, punching & steaming, gray smoke  
Whips from the edges. Most of it like a bruised  
Fruit. Others like that, hunched underneath the grave man.  
He's in charge of all the dials, the murmurs & silt.  
One turn of the crank—such preserved marshaling.  
He is handsome, stiff, baroque. The morse of his voice  
Is a pattern. The line of force in a bird skull.  
The concussion and fissure. He craves efficiency,  
Dilution of a whale carcass on a shore, washed about  
Then rain-hewn, decreasing until it is only a simple  
White harp on the shore. This man demands things  
In his glossed hat, boots & snarl. He covets women  
With blue eyes. Why is that? All of them now,  
Pale as termites. Doubly sad, bold crease in his ordered landscape.  
He is in charge of what? Nightmares, ghouls,  
Handsome creatures. Once, brown fur and black  
Eyes were humped over a frau, thriving, grouped  
In darkness. He is a bulldozer, his unspeakable tool.  
Ice-shod, sneering, he is a shattered oak. He directs  
Other voices under the black hat: Old to the left,  
Strong to the right. Fingers along the neck of  
The beautiful slave. She tears at his shirt.  
Names sewn under his skin.

# Bouquet with Flying Lovers

Dearest Bella—

I saw a cerulean rooster under the bridge. He tells me we live in the same town. The first naked woman I ever drew was found by my mother, dark spots soaked through the paper. It was snowing, moon like a melon washed with rain. You clutch a bouquet: mountain-ash, misty green and pose for me like a round feast.

Bakst shows me his *Afternoon of the Faun*. He grabs my shoulders and says my colors sing. A night the color of crow's feet. Wind in the rye. You ask why did I leave the window open. Green rabbis, red Jews, peasants like violins, sacks of wood, ghetto-eyes, bread and sausages in my dreams. I open the door for the prophet. The chair moves like smoke. Joyous birches and suddenly, a sharp cry. Now we've seen all sorts of things.

Love,

Marc

# The Noise

1

Eternity begins with springs, hammers & felt.  
Feel of it—put your hand where it breaks.  
In the mahogany box, unnatural forests  
Heartfully drenched. Though contained in  
Hammers, the secret still is a secret.  
I said love is something like that.  
Now my music is healed of divorce, of  
Christine, of violence, in which I pour forth  
Too much to readers—sounds that flow from  
Singer shaken by the thought of the sudden  
Disfigurement there are for every soul  
That dies in songs. Such tranquilities.  
Such a portal by heaven's hull is a white music.  
There is a dark mystery in some hearts.

In Singer his dull head demands love, and proof of being needed; but in the hot hallways of the heart single memories are thick as air, which in Indiana makes you feel your skin is peeling away; and provides evidence that the present is past as soon as you utter it, and you never know what happened; that all the corners of certainty are suddenly resounding out as a trap drum set alone in a loft found by a young drummer who smoothes them with brushes in widening circles. The air, the drum, the metal, the skin, the pedal, the pits in the cymbal, all the same yielding brass-color, were in the same degree visible and seemed to him suddenly as imperceptible as memory was.

Eating wintergreen mints the color of  
Her hands. Yet air is trapped under  
A capsized canoe. Black fish dart; huge weeds.

One takes form from being full,  
One doesn't belong. One worships the other.  
An unbidden, most miserable presentiment.

Mumbling honeyed stars, guide me again to her.  
Her infinite wheels, the inside of a ruby,  
Indiana's unredemptive sadness.

# Poem

Wet streets, wet hive of passion  
Under chains of night.

From my throne, play harp to howling linen  
Deep roots, deep rendering. Low lamentation.

Bursting, I walked by the Citgo sign again,  
Loud serpents, sheaves of echo  
Near the bridge. You weigh less than a veil  
She is fiery, she is drum speed & blood.

Sometimes jazz is a numb lust, meshing,  
I can smell it, O rolling specters.  
I'll cast my crown and scepter

Into the Charles River, into the pulse,  
Apples floating. Thistles, umbrellas, bright  
Stones. Without them, I no longer jingle  
With broken speech. I don't immensely roar.

Beautiful girls in fall clothes walk  
Down the avenue, in the foam of morning,  
& beaming innumerable.

I am a bee, my stripes ravishing, in fruit  
Such sweetness overpowers dark places.

## Poem with Memories

As when, he entered the room, night-green,  
He heard a memory—cricket-song, enamor-echo: Sarah!

Memory is the alligator my brothers saw  
On the sidewalk. Did it hiss? Was it filled with rabbits?

And furthermore, Philadelphia vibrated. There was no wind.  
It must have been his remembrance.  
Fragrant viola, an empty purple dress, entailed phantasies.  
In Singer's memory, barnacles on a Gulf buoy represent  
Lillian's death.

The room at the Llansantffraed Court Hotel is a vast pink sea.  
Now with treble, now trembling. Almonds, flowers.  
Nothing can explain the stupidity of the Y chromosome.

I'm going to lay down my heavy load, going to spread my  
wings  
And cleave the air.  
His lungs are jellyfish, collapsing.

# Home

Sing-start. More of a wide  
rich-tree-cube. Floral-oil.  
Silver salve-tin. Hat-moat  
on the bottom of a shingle.

Loss is still *ours*; and I swirl down  
a euphonium, the shape of a kingdom.  
I get smaller through loss, circles, figureheads  
sobbing hillsides, fire figure, curve-hover.

I left the rim of the instrument—a wide leaf—  
refilled, a light moth,  
amber green, wing-horn, feeler . . .  
ear-heart, inside a wreath.

# The Emotional Content of Inner Organs

Pink as Annie, pink as an onion, pink as a stop,  
Pink as harlequin, pink as girls, pink as strawberry Napoleon.  
This is what happens when you look.

What is a spring dusk?  
You can feel it seeping out of the roots  
And you can see, cocoons of columbaria,  
Pink in the purring, bundle of confidence,  
A glass tear vase on a velvet ribbon.  
The wagon wheel outside my window rolls  
The ocean floor, with only a little color in the left corner.

But you can see there is a painting underneath  
The painting. There is a person under the name  
And under the streets, there is much movement.  
What is to become of the dusk?

Love, love, love.  
Flamingo tongues were a delicacy at Roman feasts.  
Or skin is only a lyric shell. It has nothing to do  
With us, flickering in the mine, aubergine vines in the walls.  
Forget what you know and follow the tunnel  
The earthworm digs, through the portals and fibers.  
Pale dirt, legumes as large as flowers, deeply.  
This is not the dark part.



Crypts of Lieberkuhn, antrum of Highmore,  
Former spaces, even pouches, with pale heather.  
The bow of the key leads people to the heart,  
Which unravels in wormy tang.  
The heart chews the wood, like the figurehead on a ship.  
The water is a belly.

Downpour of blue tablecloths, stars glowing softly  
Like exploding grasshoppers, hot tapestries.  
I'm touched by bubbles, large pink jars,  
Like the memory of a stonemason.  
Between the heart and the tubes around it  
Are linings, declaring to heaven. My love, why?

I hope to reveal to you, like dark brown sugar  
For the starlings . . . I am a collection of feathers,  
Just as a ballerina is not traveling in an arc.  
She is suspended in a series of fixed points.  
She suggests things and does not stretch her body.  
That is why you do not want to *name* an object.  
Its divination is its name, captured like the spoke  
Of a pleasing wheel. Here and there are sadder  
Features, plumes, plums, mulch, empty birds.  
Cold as a harp, she drifts away,  
Lost like in silent films:  
Menilmontant, Dreigroschenoper, even  
Broken Blossoms. Yes, it was that way.  
Her skin is a bell full of nightgowns.

Let us kindle a fire from purple.  
A huge vault like a planetarium,  
A machine rotates and shines on the pinholes  
In the dome. That is how I see you, my love,  
Pure cherry, pangs in the hills, on and on, full of opera!  
Dusk opens like an orange.  
The color and the color and the color.

# Self

Blue frequency, frequent beating  
The white core of my bones:  
O inflated tire, O bluebent demon.

One man, many women know,  
He is faceless, then laced with gesture:  
He thinks move, O the body moves.  
Her mouth delicately turns, inner & awe,  
The golden word! The mind controls the movement!

# The Gift

Listen, there is a place under my chest  
That turns. You know it. I saw  
Your skin, sugar moth, flawless  
Hymn, unfair nectar & the wish  
That you would walk toward me  
Would alone make me wait there  
Under the breaking elms, for two hundred years.  
You opened as tender powder, in a dress  
Cut from the blackness of black, motionless,  
& spoke: what brilliance in your mind  
Made me the man looking up  
At the colossus horse. That such beauty  
Saying yes would enter my kingdom  
& that it was forbidden, kind & boundless,  
Was pain, the black valve inside was pain.

## A Significant Poem

Let me see what is in the cold harp  
Of your heart, and its red bracelet.

If there is a compass turning  
Or an arrow points its wheel  
To your cherry motion,  
There must be a sea of sad things,  
Of a basin tasting your skin,  
The light movements of anemones  
And palpable consequences.

And the motions are dark as a salesgirl,  
And their aromatic mocha,

Instead of tender words,  
Which are thin paper lanterns with animal candles.

## Finding Love as an Equation

Dark grass opens after death into an arch-dark nature.

It is a nature unlike that of the air, thick with botany.

Plants are dim, almost yellow, and align their wakes  
along ghostly sounds.

Beautiful tables, plump veins, meadow instrument . . .

What orb, ourselves or none at all like ourselves,  
spun animal-like by its cables to become fertile glass?

It seems when you emerge from the world of snow,  
fluent and, like a teabag dissolving brown grains  
in water, you bloom into the world.

The hand opens—it is a female light—but not particular.

Finally one morning you are that nelumbo on water,  
on green water. It looks so black because of the reflection,  
and heaviness exits. Your glaze breaks away.

Less human, reaching by the windowsill with all your arms.

# A Soul

The Elgar cello concerto whirrs  
inside the car when I go home. Rain,  
a silver chain, a sliver of rapture.  
Sarah has been getting along  
alone. There, hot birds flap into a puddle.  
So everyone moves inside a bed,  
inside a house, inside something housed.

We live lives apart. We live partly inside  
one another, at nightfall, still wondering.  
Her room and the lavender quilt  
have a smell that remains. *Behold I have set  
before you an open door!* the smell rises  
into the black silk of my interior—cool, toxic,  
almost shivering.

We were in Wales on the trail near the border,  
me trying to wait for the stinging nettles  
to stop burning.

# Loss

There is loss in the world. I don't feel awful because lost  
people  
Took part of me. But because I can no longer give to them.  
He is in a coffin in a church in Chicago, or she is dating  
someone new  
And singing Schumann.

Great Tumblers of the Universe have done things: made me  
feel needed,  
Given me someone to embrace by a yellow barn, or,  
In an eastbound cattle train, let me reach through the metal  
grate  
To get at the delicious wet snow.

# The Vocal Fabric of the Soprano

                  moves from spiral to spirit.  
Its ripe mint of worldly unopened corners.  
What apothecary of sound! What pigeon-purple manors.

No touchingness, nor knives, vows, or rifles  
can take me away from this instantaneous lace—  
This precipitato.

Noon, none too soon. Another delight of affectionate doom.  
Beautiful horsefur. Amplifying maple. Efflorescent &  
                  threadbare.

Every once in a while I hear it anew. It is a salmon leaving her  
                  red eggs  
in cool waters. Aqua & ribbon. Wood, word, little doors.

The more horrifying this world becomes, the more her music  
                  becomes infinite.



“Dear heart, how like you this?”

Sadness is not permanent, & the black string  
Pulled around your waist, slender willow,  
Is prepared. Prepare it on your face, then transmit—  
You were sad even though I brought dinner  
& ironed your clothes. Maria Callas,  
In her song of the arising cloud  
Looked in the moon-mirror & devoured:  
*I have taken flowers to the altar*  
*In this hour of anguish, Lord, why is this our reward?*  
Some nights you need to be curled alone  
Not in the meadow going blank under milky light.  
I saw the lines in your forehead, weightings  
Of peach linoleum. The smell of the old floors  
Turn me that way too. Sad, sad, my poor girl.  
And sad in your cravings, you are a glass container  
For the chimes of seabirds lifting away.

## It Moves So Slowly That It Does Not Move

Both clear and unfathomable, and night  
the color of a horse, falling. Dark force,  
fallen color, the way I'm falsely at peace.  
A week apart grows heavily immense  
within. A drawing of a lemon is as sour. A melon  
ripens sourly, so slowly. I walk in a room  
and forget why I went in. The heart sends blood  
but knows not where. Finally, tonight, looking  
in the mirror into brown eyes and not blue.  
Have you learned anything?  
Two absolutely slow horses in a field,  
just as the night sky moves away from the earth.

## Poem with Groucho Marx Refrains

If you have been transformed by the fire,  
you have been like many; yet there are more traps.  
There are women in linen skirts, filled with blossoms  
or parts of blossoms, in enlarging gardens.  
*A man is only as young as the woman he feels.*

An owl, yellow as a ladder, is hinged to the night.  
Where is the place he carried from Paris  
like artificial fruit? Seeing through maple dark  
he dives into a fieldmouse, just poised in sweet opera.  
*Anyone who says he can see through women is missing a lot.*

So powerful was her presence I understood the meaning of forms.  
A form only listens to the bed, or to the light-green saucer.  
I give grief away; far too many belong to that.  
And I will make sacrifices to feel that again,  
soft as Vermont in the throat of a bird.  
*Those are my principles. If you don't like them I have others.*

O you tender wood platform, with a microphone  
strange as the figurehead on a ship.  
Or some chairs unfolded and enjoying people's legs.  
Although empty now, these seats have observed much.  
People hold tightly to habits, and their buckets collect the sap.  
*I've had a perfectly wonderful evening. But this wasn't it.*

# Singer and Circumcision

This is a good one: He sent a rainbow,  
instead of a flame,  
and it meant a *covenant*,  
to cut off the little hood of skin.

This is why the only ones who know  
who is a Jew (if they can't tell from the name)  
need to see us naked. They can't  
assume that the thin

little "bathing cap" is still there.  
One doesn't need zizith or zuchetto  
(a whirly beanie with the prop sliced off)

to be an honorary member.  
Yet gentiles need to "go under the knife" to  
enter their member into the honor. That's rough,

but what religion isn't? I still look into the eyes of the  
Tetragrammaton  
and inside sink back into an assimilated automaton.

## The Sweet Obsession Bleeds from Singer

Singer is dead today and in the ground forever.  
How astonishing, his blue vapor  
is seeping, not consuming itself, outward  
from his honey and body. He is buried  
in fine linen, in the old style,  
and his saxophone is engraved as a tiger  
lily. There was love in him.  
His love was not *a wild stag*,  
nor *fragrant oils*, nor *hills of cinnamon*.  
It was a light through the ocean,  
cool and content. He handed this poem to me  
and was gone, sifting up to the surface:

All the passions of my organs  
Are soft doorways. The garden  
Turns inside out. One dream  
Is white as a sky, one black  
And crowded as trees. Each  
With a door, a rude odor, a reed.

Remember him, darkest eyes,  
playing like hell in the mountains,  
love like that blue, making up  
in depth for what it lacked  
in brightness . . . We will not speak  
of love with him again.



These are fleshfold songs. The songs  
Of singing. Set down they  
Crowd. Set single garnets hover  
Like ashes in a chimney  
One everlasting window opens

Sweet dissolution. Thy flesh is thy clothes.  
As the songs rise, they reanimate  
That man, that is their accomplishment.  
And who would believe happiness.  
Roll on sudden passion.

The dead hear single grains of sand,  
Alone in the oceanic depth.  
For the ego, the particular, the I, set  
Down the songs are the eternity, a bone-fire  
Brass, ivory, and butterfly drums.



# Notes

“The Old Record” includes lyrics from “Phonograph Blues” (in italics), a song recorded by Robert Johnson on Monday, November 23, 1936.

“Silver Gelatin” refers to E. J. Bellocq, a photographer working in New Orleans between 1912 and 1930. He was an impotent hydrocephalic semi-dwarf who mainly photographed whores in Storyville and Chinatown’s opium dens. Roughly eighty-nine glass plates survive. Some of the photos have black scratches over the faces, possibly made by the photographer’s brother, who was a priest. Bellocq also took a photo of the Buddy Bolden Band.

“The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly” refers to a large folk art assemblage (circa 1950–64) by James Hampton (1909–64). For fourteen years, while working as a janitor, he spent hours every night building thrones from gold and silver aluminum foil, colored construction paper, plastic sheets over wood furniture, paperboard, and glass. There are 177 pieces in all. He was primarily driven by the imagery in Revelation and kept a diary about the instructions he received from an angel to build the assemblage. The diary is written in an indecipherable script that is based on no known language. One throne assemblage has the words “Fear Not” on it, and tacked to a board is an inscription, “Where There Is No Vision the People Perish.” The piece includes thrones, glittering objects, pulpits, crowns, winged figures, cherubs, and friezes in what art critic Robert Hughes called a “vaguely Assyrian style that defies identification.” It is in the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American Art, in Washington, D.C.

“Robert Johnson (the film, the car ride, & the ghost)” includes the line “the blue light was my blues and the red light was my mind” from his song “Love in Vain,” recorded Sunday, June 20, 1937.

The phrase “Who Can Stay the Bottles of Heaven” comes from Job 38:37.



“Frida Kahlo” includes lines in italics that are a variation on a lyric in her painting *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* (1940): “Mira que si te quise, fué por el pelo, Ahora que estás peloina, ya no te quiero.” [Look, if I loved you, it was for your hair, Now that you are bald, I don’t love you any more.”]

In “Transference of the Blues Dynamism,” the last four lines are from the song “Old Rub Alcohol Blues,” which was recorded by Dock Boggs in 1929.

“A Goat Moving Through a Boa Constrictor” discusses Giordano Bruno (1548?–1600), an Italian poet and philosopher, and George Jackson (1941–71), an inmate at Soledad Prison.

The title “The Exact Diagrams of German Professors,” comes from a line in “Theoretical Lives,” a poem by Jack Gilbert.

“A History of Ota Benga” refers to a Congolese pygmy who was brought to St. Louis for the 1904 World’s Fair. He was later put on display in an American zoo and set free by the actions of some black clergymen from Harlem. He moved to Lynchburg, Virginia, in January 1910, became a Christian, and improved his English vocabulary. He worked for a time in a tobacco factory and attended classes at a seminary. He committed suicide on March 20, 1916, with a revolver. A plaster mask of his head is in the History Museum in St. Louis.

“The Burghers of Calais” refers to a Rodin sculpture (1884–88) that was commissioned by Calais, France, and represents an event that occurred there in 1347 during the Hundred Years’ War. Six citizens volunteered themselves as hostages to Edward III, in exchange for his lifting an eleven-month siege on their city. He demanded that the doomed men deliver to him keys to the city and prepare to be executed. In the end, their lives were spared by the pleas of Queen Philippa, Edward’s wife.

“Krekhtsn” refers to a Yiddish term describing sobbing breaks in the voice in cantorial singing.

“The Sweet Obsession Bleeds from Singer” includes italicized words from the Song of Solomon.