



# Every Inadequate Name

POEMS

Nick Thron

EVERY  
INADEQUATE  
NAME

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NICK THRAN

EVERY INADEQUATE NAME

POEMS



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*This first one is dedicated to my sister, Robyn*

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...No need,  
he thought, to see the bell. It was not the bell  
he was trying to find, but the angel lost  
in our bodies. The music that thinking is.  
He wanted to know what he heard, not to get closer.  
— Jack Gilbert, “Haunted Importantly”



...Then you remember  
the necessary and sufficient. This isn't it,  
but you don't know where else to begin.  
— Sue Sinclair, “Roses”

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I

THE BLANK-LEAVED BOOK



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THAT LOBSTER HAS BEEN THERE FOREVER

I draft choral arrangements for tectonic plates.  
I'd forgot to mention a few important  
points: I was there at the gravesite  
but did not bring my shovel,  
I've never wept in a twentieth-century  
building for anything other  
than my own lost loves and friends.  
Please, don't tell the architects.  
Stones groan like a stomach ache  
when they move. Bones tick  
like a clock hand when  
you tap them with a blade.

I think I'll split a pomegranate  
and display the halves like dentists' x-rays  
to a patient, star-filled night.  
I think I'll diagnose the earth  
with an affliction it has learned to cope with.  
When I say, *I will never forgive you  
for letting it come to this,*  
you won't speak. You'll already know.

## HOW POP SOUNDS

You and a friend are listening to music.  
Pop Music. You know what Pop Music is –  
though you may not like it.  
Forget you. This is about falling in love  
with something dated.  
About leaving, losing touch, then years  
later hearing that same love skewed  
in a new band's blood. About turning  
the volume up, and pressing repeat  
until you're touched again.

This is about wave, new wave, and new  
new wave. How your first time lasted exactly  
two minutes and thirteen seconds –  
the perfect length, you thought.  
Awkwardness, elation, guilt, and confusion  
key to a verse/chorus,  
rising and falling. Anywhere  
and anytime. Over again  
and again and again and again.

*I'm sick of this song, your friend says.  
This must be the worst music  
ever invented. When was the last time  
the sugar wore off? The last time  
you looked him straight in the eye  
and told him how you heard this same song  
sung by a boy  
at the edge of a candlelit dock  
over the lake where his best friend drowned?*

You don't know shit, you want to say.  
You don't know how Pop sounds.



## THE COIN O'RAMA LAUNDROMAT, A DEDICATION

For anyone who's held the door open for someone  
with a particularly heavy load. Anyone

pretending to watch the weather report  
while a stranger's delicates swirl  
around in that first meeting between  
her Friday of lovemaking,  
and her Wednesday, say,  
alone with an *In Style*, munching Corn Bran  
straight from the box,  
and trimming her fingernails.

I am trying to finish a Russian novel,  
but this hum is a pacemaker  
and this is for anyone who has buried  
their hands into clean clothes and felt  
the memory of two mugs  
from last Saturday morning  
still warming the palms of their hands.

Isn't the temperature balmy?  
Don't all of our pockets call like bells?  
Doesn't pouring powdered detergent sound  
like the slanted roof that first day in spring  
when all the old snow fell?

This is for all the proprietors  
who close up late, know laundry is often done  
when there is nothing left to do.

This is for the Coin O'Rama  
after it empties. The last one there  
the Korean woman with slender fingers  
picking lint and old dryer sheets deep  
from the bowels –

how final the moment must feel

when she closes the lid  
of the trash can  
filled with clouds.

## MORNING ROUTINE, WITH SHADOW

Say, *yellows, greys, dark blues,*  
and dress yourself in them.

Say, *my bones are the fortress that will not fall,*  
and scrub-shine those teeth with vigour.

Say, *dry, unkissable lips,*  
and then balm them.

Say, *snow. Say, drizzle. Say, wind,*  
and condition

according to memory, to the image outside.  
*Voila!*

You are prepared for the weather.  
Say, *there will be subtle, unforeseen shifts.*

*Right shoe, say. Left shoe, say.*  
Double knots.

Remember to lock the doors when you leave.  
Whisper, *I am always behind you.*

## LITTLE COWBOYS

Like R, after throwing the metal pipe clear across  
the surface of the ice pond, bragging he too  
could slide it. His knees bloodied up  
in the breakage. Like C in the psych ward, saying,  
“Look, I’m holed up here, but you know, I’m not crazy” –  
tongues and their infinite variables. They rolled us.  
We couldn’t bring ourselves to tell A, the exchange student,  
that “Does a bear shit in the woods?” is not  
a common expression. We liked that he trusted his phrase book;  
the idea of scouring downtown haunts truly foreign,  
nuzzling the language out. Like me thinking  
I’ve a move or two down pat, till she says,  
“No hon’, there hon’, yes hon’, that’s where  
the song is.” Bears in a balancing act  
on the slick. Go there crazy, the foreign implores,  
just finish your sentence, your riff.

NOT PEE WEE

In the green petri dish of Experiment Football  
everything looks either cute or ridiculous; this  
depends on whether or not you're a parent

with some stake in the game; or, like us,  
are just suckers for chaos  
and helmets like snowballs, or skulls

from a species of fat-headed humans  
wanting no more from their children  
than to *kick some ass, bust some heads,*

*get out and do 'em proud.* Here,  
shoulder pads can't find any shoulders.  
Equipment blurs the line

between protection and burden –  
which a few of us up in the bleachers,  
in our own way, understand.

In the green petri dish of Experiment Football  
one little monster realizes he runs  
faster than anyone, and when it happens

he's weightless, ruleless, and the distance he gains  
is infinite yardage. He breaks the seam,  
the tie, our hearts,

breaks those things once,  
that's all it takes to tip us  
from green out to grey streets,

our spirits scrambling  
through these bodies we're given –

pushing the bones aside  
and every inadequate name.

## THE POEM YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR

The poem won't ever save the world.  
The poem won't even raise you up  
from your sickbed and make you feel better.  
But the poem is trying to do what it can.  
It is learning the fiddle, knitting a homemade scarf,  
riding a Bengal tiger through a field of ragweed  
and doing somersaults off of a bridge.

The poem has even mastered some magic tricks:  
one with a hand axe, a rat, and a cantaloupe, another  
with a simple deck of cards.  
It is satisfying two, no, make that three  
beautiful women at once. They can hardly believe  
the poem can keep on like this. You can hear them singing  
like honey and rivers and wine.

The poem is putting fresh, crisp sheets on the bed.  
It bought you a new pair of socks to wear  
every day for the rest of your life.

The poem is making an honest man  
out of a shyster. It is teaching your sister to read.  
It is planning a vacation: one week in Bali  
followed by three days gambling at Caesar's Palace  
and buying tickets for the novel, the short story, the drama  
and all of the poem's other friends.

The poem is walking on one bad leg  
with an injured orangutan slung over its shoulder.  
It is spending long nights alone in a room,  
digging its fingernails into the wall, and talking to ghosts,  
and reading Hegel, and beading a necklace  
made entirely of scorpions who have solemnly sworn  
never to hurt you. You're going to have to trust the poem  
despite its shortcomings. Word is, it knows a couple of secrets  
about life and beauty and eternity and grace  
I couldn't possibly ever hope to reveal  
speaking to you, as I am.



How to hold onto summers in Andalucía?  
Thaisma, I am still a young man  
with a mouth full of sand. I want the wisdom  
of old age early. To distance myself  
far enough from the past  
to tell you: unborn, invisible daughter,  
your father was playing at more  
than games. He went  
to the volleyball net and writhed  
like a beached fish.  
He kept the sun in the air  
with the last bit of breath  
from his gills.

## THE BEAR CLAW TUB

*Oh, and another thing, under no circumstances are you to ever write about any of this in your poems. — Anonymous*

Old-fashioned, dragging its bloat porcelain  
across the linoleum floor. A mythological creature  
left to decorum. Empty, it was where I imagined  
a child playing pirates. Full, it was where I entered  
to let off steam. The day's last hour slouched round.  
Nothing born. The sort of place suicides happen  
in movies, or where murder victims are found.  
The tiny hairs on my neck would stand on end  
when I came up from its warmth. Best on nights  
I'd return home stinking, sweating, having  
hurt who I loved most. I listened to the faucet drip,  
those heavy paws on the linoleum floor. I was no good  
at keeping my trap shut then. I'm still not. So long. *Roar.*

## EAGLE NEST

Driving through the outskirts of Calgary,  
I am suddenly lost to the Eagles.

A wrong turn on Eagle Trace,  
I end up on Eagle Rock  
when I should be heading north on Eagle Ridge –  
or south. It hardly matters now,  
surrounded as I am by the low-toned  
plumage and stucco –  
nothing the cashier downtown  
at the Stop & Go prepared me for  
when I asked directions.

Eagles perched side by side, three-tiered.  
On Eagle Lake, I saw one child  
pummel a garage with a puck in a series  
of well-timed slappers.  
I wanted to shout from the car window, *Run!*  
But where would he go  
except into the mouths of the Eagles?

Now barrelling in to a snow-blind west  
on Eagle Park, and no distinguishable feature  
to lead me to my aunt's house for dinner,  
where we'll talk about mortgage and credit,  
how life's moving forward, or just spiralling down  
into the gullet of an unkempt secret we figured

we'd arrive at one day;  
what it was like in new classes, careers;  
or stories from times before  
the sprawl of suburbia,  
before suvs, digital cable –  
feathers unwittingly followed here

to Eagle Nest,  
326 Eagle Nest –  
before we were devoured.

## JUNKIE AESTHETIC

Forgive these fat red flakes of snow  
backlit by the motel's neon awning.

The little dog curled up in the cave  
of a worn leather jacket,

and whatever else I may have  
at one time or another  
mistaken for the heart.

Forgive the moon, white cellular phone  
on a black sheet – I'd been startled from

the recurring dream  
where I am a cymbalist,

bare palmed, back row, and we're working  
through a rendition of Beethoven's twenty-fifth Sonata.

*Look Dog, I haven't forgotten the music.*  
Forgive me. I'm applauding the violins.

## II

### THE BACKWARDS BASIC



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## COASTLINE VARIATION #53

*I'd like to feed the parking meter  
a couple of more dimes.*

*I'd like to sit with you  
down at the harbour,*

*I'd like to take my time,  
I wanna take my time ...*



## SERIOUSLY, IT WAS THE BIGGEST CRICKET

I should have propped something else beside it – an empty can, or the last half of my sandwich. As it stands, the cricket's size grows in the telling, spreads like the news, years ago, of abandoned stacks of dirty magazines stowed at the creek behind the street where I grew up. When my bicycle tires edged over the lip, boys were already clutching the rain-soaked pages in their fists, the ink of my first glimpses of flesh were already starting to pale, to bleed into the leaves. Seriously, we'd say in the schoolyard, it was the coolest. Later, actual

clothing would melt off actual flesh; yes, melt, not just fall to the floor, because, seriously, she was the hottest. Then gossip flares up in the yard's kindled corners. When she finally calls up, crying, I don't relay how her *how could you*s clutched at my throat, pinned me to the receiver, silent, ashamed, because I knew I'd been the worst.

Then what? I left, took a few bum jobs humping rich peoples' luggage, spent two years in Seoul, Korea, navigating through crowds where, for the first time, I was the tallest, so I stuck out to this gorgeous backpacker

who speaks fluent Italian, recites whole blocks of the Inferno aloud, and moved in with her as soon as I came home, because, seriously, it felt like the real thing. Though I'm no longer sure

"real" is the right word, because it's years on, and I'm no longer sure of this house, or this town, or my job, and with her, lately, well let's just say this stretch has been tough. So I stuff the last three cans of a six-pack, a camera, and a sandwich into a knapsack, set out to hike along a creek where leaves brushing against my bare forearms still feel erotic. Rambling, I turn this corner to find

there, on a bare patch of dirt, the world's biggest cricket, this freakishly massive thing, and clutch at my mouth as the air fills with the orchestral swell of its legs, and gather myself enough to snap a single photo before it leaps so high I think it must be heading into someone else's life. *Shit*, I whisper further on, realizing my shot on the bare patch will show nothing of its largeness. Hear myself having to try to explain, struggling, because it was amazing, and, seriously, I've never been able to help myself. One way or another, I will have to try to tell her every single thing.

For the lucky few who knew Gurdeep from the beginning, the question on all of our minds was: what would be done with the jarred sheep's brain he kept in the dorm?

Swiped from the display case during a group experiment in Biology, the brain was tucked away under the crest of his private-school blazer. It glowed for months in the dull light of the dormitory fridge. On breaks from texts and tennis sets he'd let us pass it around the same way we passed around pornography, or bottles of Silent Sam. We'd loosen our stiff white collars and try to preserve some sense of a world past those manicured hedges.

Nuge suggested a projectile launch at the Dean's face during our weekly assembly. Andrew offered the steamed vat of Monday's caf chili – nobody truly understanding the decision was Gurdeep's, who, after a time, chose simply to place his brain inside the bookcase of a girl he thought was beautiful, to gauge where he was in that world by placing what he'd concealed, minutes before History, into another consciousness.

*She left her child alone in her crib, to dry up like soil in a summer drought, while she slaked her thirst for salsa dancing.*

— Justice David Watt

A dancer too obviously “slaking a thirst”  
is not dancing the salsa  
correctly. This is standard tempo:  
four quarter notes, one-hundred-sixty beats  
per minute. The overeager often waver  
between melody and rhythm.  
They tend to forget we dance this largely  
with our feet barely leaving the ground.

Too many turns in succession in a single direction  
will make you dizzy. Hip movement stems  
from proper legwork. The faster the beat,  
and it’s picking up now, the smaller our steps should be.

No forced movements, upper body rocking,  
whiplash. Mirror my movements. We’ll start  
with the “backwards basic.” Tense arms,  
pressure between us. This pressure  
feels good, looks good to observers. Makes it possible  
to perform moves that would be  
impossible otherwise – double crossed

holds, for example, our arms intertwined,  
or some of the freestyle fancy  
footwork known as “shines.”

## CLUB AMNESIA

Grandpa swilled the hard stuff,  
    trying to forget the black cough  
of a coal mine, the pang  
    of a bullet in his thigh.

But mine are lighter times,  
    calling for lighter drinks  
and Saturday nights at Amnesia.

He'd have told me I've got it way too easy,  
but I've been waiting in this lineup  
    for what seems like forever –  
a pocket full of someone else's money  
    and the need to dance. Inside  
we raise our glasses  
    to make a toast  
though nobody has anything to say.

Then a woman puts her hand on my leg  
and praise is due *to our good health,*  
    *and the condom machine by the toilet.*

On the dance floor I wonder  
    how Grandpa would've moved  
packing all that weight.

    But the bass line's loud  
and the strobe light's on  
    and things have a way  
of disappearing. At midnight  
    the foam guns spray the floor  
and we're all atheists, wet,  
    on ecstasy, sliding  
through each other's bodies  
    – angels at Club Amnesia –  
engaged in the art  
    of forgetting the absence  
of any real memory in us.

He walked down to the shore of La Linea and saw  
what the Levante had done to the coast: an orange  
split open over a stone, flies burrowing through  
the flesh. He tiptoed around it in silence.

To the left, countless oranges bobbing  
in the still, grey expanse of the Mediterranean,  
To the right, the Great Rock  
of Gibraltar. The narrow passage between it

and the top lip of Africa. Tangier.  
Beyond that he pictured the Atlantic Ocean –  
tumultuous waters – and sensed  
it was time to go, and although

he knew where, made a promise  
to love that place. Scatter fruit over the ground.

## BLOOR STREET

Bloor Street at sunset, easily  
the most romantic street in the world.  
Bloor is the colour of the sky, blue  
but with the hard “r” of a fire  
raging from the tail end of a day that drags  
the work world back home to the boroughs.  
I hope it is Friday, steak night, the family  
gathered around Bloor flesh, sinews of strained  
muscle, and wine like the blood they have spent  
all week to meet and laugh and eat  
and drink themselves back in.  
I hope there is *Scrabble*, and a child, bleary-eyed  
from an afternoon playing *Halo* (bodies  
Bloored to bits, the level completed) hits “grateful”  
on a triple-word-score, and Bloors his parents  
with what they thought he never knew.  
*Once in a Bloor moon*, the joke goes, and mother  
rubs his hair. Then she and her husband head  
to bed and make love. That’s “B” for the bed,  
“I” for the love, and the “o!” and the “o!”  
a string upon which they wish  
they could balance forever,  
but they know it is temporal  
like sunrise over the most romantic  
street in the world. The conductor  
saying, *Bloor Street, Bloor Street, Bloor.*



THOUGHTS WHILE DRIVING A STRETCH OF MOUNTAIN  
ROAD, LISTENING TO A TAPE OF PABLO NERUDA READING  
“LAS ALTURAS DE MACHU PICCHU”

*¡El muro, el muro!*

A grainy tape, as though he's gargling  
worried stones in his throat.  
As if he may never get any of this  
across to us clearly again. Stones within stones,  
that's one translation. Having lived  
in Andalucía for awhile, my grip  
on the tongue should be better.  
My driving should also be better.  
This is the same stretch of road  
where I once killed a deer. Veered too close  
to the ditch and had to crank the wheel  
back around, at which point you could not distinguish  
the driver's side mirror from its head.

*The bloat dispenser of this blood.*

That's Nathaniel Tarn's translation  
in the Vintage Book of World Poetry.  
Tarn within Neruda. Reading the text  
is like separating bits of broken skull  
from broken bits of glass.

It is like travelling the same stretch over again  
with his scratched-up voice in the deck,  
believing *that* would clear my head.

If you've ever collided with something like *that*  
then you know about phantoms,  
about memory cleaving – shrubs  
become deer, criss-cross in the dark –  
about the subjunctive-present tense  
to what's no longer there.

Driving, I often imagine colliding  
with Pablo, or at least some crude form  
of him. I could have learned a lot more.  
I worry I might be putting too much of myself  
inside this. Say, just let this one be what it is:  
a Lumina parked on the side of the road  
and a dead deer. A driver weeping  
into his steering wheel. Stone above stone above stone.

## AZUCAR

*It has been a struggle.* Mother meant trying  
to learn Spanish, but also listening  
to the dispute pulsing down  
through the hardwood floor  
of the flat above our heads.

Neither of us really knew what was up  
until an open-palm blow  
broke the language barrier, and Mother,  
who tries hard to do good in this world,  
marched upstairs,  
banged on their door till it opened  
enough for her to ask  
in a friendly, foreign voice  
for *azucar*,  
the Spanish word for sugar  
she'd made a point to learn before *bastard*,  
*prison, abuse*,  
and *asshole, you leave her alone.*

Though reluctant  
the man did find a little.  
But she said it took him more  
than a bit of time  
to search out the pantry,  
as she stood in the foyer listening  
to soft weeping from another room.

My mother knew the word *gracias*.  
Used the azucar to bake  
her world-famous banana bread: a recipe  
dug up after each  
of the moments she calls  
in our native tongue, a crisis.

That night she cut the pieces thick.  
After they'd cooled, placed two  
on a bone white china plate, and whispered  
through that beautiful silence:  
*they are okay now*

*to eat. Azucar*  
never tasted so sweet,  
was never so easy to swallow.

MONDAY IN THE WORLD OF BEAUTY

Staring at your stylist's black eye  
in the mirror  
while she struggles  
to make you appear  
beautiful,  
you slowly become  
comfortable with it.

Elvis on the stereo croons,  
*Oh Moody Blue,*  
*tell me am I getting through?*

He didn't. As to *her* significant others'  
whereabouts,  
you figure he's probably hovering  
like thick cloud  
over a cocktail umbrella  
inside some peeler  
where even flesh can't light the room.

She tries to sell you blonde highlights.

*Tsk*s your current unkempt style,  
and decides it would be easiest  
    to just go on and do  
what it is that we normally do.

Cold sheers trim the neckline clean.

    She promises you'll leave this place  
a brand new you.

    The jar  
of sanitizer glows.

    Electric. Unreal. Blue.



## COASTLINE VARIATION #19

Inner Harbour. A busker takes to the skin.  
A pigeon holds a corn chip up to the sun  
and thrashing (just wildly enough), works  
the entire thing down its throat.

You have a bag full of crow feathers  
and chicken wire. You're making wings  
for a six-year-old boy on the mainland.

In this light, the sea shimmers like foil.  
The reflection off one quarter can be so strong  
you'd swear the fedora overflowed with silver.

In this light, it feels good just to lie like that  
for an entire afternoon.

### III

#### EDGEWATER



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## COASTLINE VARIATION #76

Already at the end  
of a rail-less walk on the breakwater:  
Eyes closed, we slip through  
a frayed net of sea-kelp.

Oil rigs cross-hatch  
the places we've come from.  
Deep breaths of water salt-scour our lungs.

Who retrieves the antique harmonica  
from the bottom?  
Who lost it there?

In this fathomable darkness,  
I can believe  
we are one person –

lips to the mouthpiece, the harmonica singing.

## EDGEWATER

Upstairs, your great uncle is coughing.  
You are the creek that runs underneath  
this foundation, the creek  
you drove to with him  
through miles of dusty mill roads  
one day in midsummer, for a taste  
of the freshest water ever –  
one more reason a man might stay out here  
forever, or at least till he finds a good patch  
of blueberry bushes, and there is this stone  
off of the cutbank he wants to carve  
his address into. He's glad you're here.  
It will take two of you to lift it.

Picture your great aunt back at the house  
building a day around sunflower stalks  
and the snow globe collection,  
which needs to be polished.  
So what if his cough wasn't born  
of a dream of the desert,  
didn't bloom out from the industrial chuff  
of the city. You came back that day  
with four full jugs, blue blood on your hands,  
and the stone that sat so heavy  
in the back of his old pickup  
it set the steering column right.

Cough born of knowing a man  
has to struggle. Cough born of choosing to stay  
in spite of that; learning back roads so well  
there are no maps or second guesses.

Now that the creek is rising towards him,  
understand why he must stop  
the water from filling his lungs, his sleep.  
Feel how desperately he still wants to wake up  
tomorrow in Edgewater,  
how good that glass from the bottom  
of the fourth jug will taste. There is stone to be carved.  
There will be time for the flood of tears when he's gone.  
He will be carried away, and you'll miss him.

## ISOLATION CAMP, A LETTER

Windows open a crack, I recline  
inside the Yukon. AC off,  
we'll need all of the battery's burn time  
for the long drive out of camp.

M., the land out here is soft,  
and there's a few plots left to plant.  
Off-days I sit stoned with a mix tape,  
the choice cuts of Kid A and Amnesiac,

and slap at the myriad mosquitoes  
that sneak in through the slits.  
I pile the dead ones up on the dash. The ones  
still struggling for breath, I leave to squirm

in the cup-holder. I'm exhausted,  
been camped out here so long my dreams  
are mechanical – three steps, spike, pull,  
plant the root, stomp – even my downtime

is staked to the dirt. Great big holes  
in the mess tent tarp mark where  
black bears have made their daily run  
at what passes here for food.

The land out here is soft, which means  
I'll make bank; don't mind my conscious self  
temporarily lost. Not much point dwelling  
on the what-abouts anyway. It is *hot*,



and I'm bitten, and it's contract work,  
so no matter how fast I'm going,  
the crew chief still drives by screaming:  
*Christ, Nick, is that the best that you've got?*

(Alone, baked on some powerful  
B.C. pot, a bare patch on a brain scan,  
with one specific function to perform on one specific plot.)  
*Well, to be perfectly honest, it's not.*

Off-days are rife with mosquitoes.  
During the week I can't let their presence  
intrude on my planting, or even exist  
as afterthoughts. They swarm like memories

of someone abandoned, or a friend  
who disappeared figuring the forest  
that grew up around us had to be chopped.  
(I'm not here to moralize,

asshole, I'm not.) When the bears pace  
the perimeter, I fire two quick shots.  
That starts them running. Invariably,  
the mess tent still ends up shredded.

You're here in my thoughts.  
Contract's up in August.  
I'm sick of this, M. Write back  
when you're actually ready to talk.

Even the ecstasy is manufactured.

We've doled out our twenties  
on this coastline, pooling what little we know  
of constellations:

Orion's Belt. The Big Dipper. The small.

Exhausted, we invent the Trimsaw  
of Cranbrook, Karina's Slide Guitar.

Think for a minute about what our fathers have made  
of this sky. All that comes to mind  
is television: The A-Team, Mr T.

I make no apologies. We gather what scraps we can,  
rummaging over this junk-  
yard of stars. The end  
of our labour: an armoured  
El Dorado, our surefire plan to plow  
all the clear way through the darkness.

### COASTLINE VARIATION #3

A woman named Yael la Rose.

A handyman named Jesus.

When she swam that morning,  
the sun rose, a blowfish burst in the water.

He folds up a photo of five moored boats,  
pockets the coast of La Linea.

The name is a wake that the flesh leaves behind.  
The flesh is a visible shiver.

## THE IMPOSSIBLE OMELETTE

Never mind the seventy-five cent charge  
per extra topping. Give me everything  
the chef can stuff between the folds  
and, somehow, still manage to close.  
I'll wait. Listen to dazed suits mutter  
their litanies into cups of no cream  
and no sugar. To a mother, on the cell to her child,  
trying to explain in the simplest terms  
what cremation means. Steam  
rises from the omelette station, shrouds  
the chef – his job's mystique  
cranking up with the heat – crumbled feta  
in one hand, diced ripe tomato in the other,  
and a furrow in his brow,  
as the methodic whirl of a fan blade  
reminds him of the woman back home  
who will sponge grease from his arms  
with the same precision, the same careful strokes,  
whenever his shift at the station  
of impossible omelettes is done.

*It's when the body turns into air  
and rises to heaven, she explains.  
When the world fills up with so much other stuff,  
spirits like grandpa's go to a different,  
more beautiful place – where there's space  
for everyone, but his memory is what we keep here  
in our hearts, where there's always room.*

My omelette arrives. Impossibly, everything  
I have paid for is in it. Even a bit of fried  
potato to one side. Hats off to the chef,  
who by now has moved  
seamlessly on to the dishes.

## COASTLINE VARIATION #41

A sigh at the end  
of each word that she whispers:

*La playa. Las estrellas. Mira. Mira.*

A sigh at the end  
as she draws you in closer:

*Ahora.*

There is a man who will dive.

Then there's the flat-out refusal  
to even listen to any music recorded  
after nineteen-sixty-eight.  
The stance our modern Pop's been all fluff  
since then, a permanent fall/melt cycle.  
That these retread troubadours won't ever fill  
the mainstays' giant holes.

Poor schmucks. It's hard to feel for them  
today, walking from your house north  
on Clinton – a light snowfall, and Jens  
Lekman on my headphones giving the air  
a touch of the glockenspiel in it.

This not the first snow, but this the first snow  
I had kissed you. A jingle-jangle, sure,  
but met with a wide-eyed, open look –  
my, *was that really a tambourine!*?

your indelible tracks through the blank-leaved book.



BIRD TIME

*I've nothing to say to the moon.*

*Still, I want to talk.*

— William Matthews

I

The streetlamp's light on the cherry tree dresses  
the night in a pink feather boa.

It all looks ridiculous from where I'm standing.  
That's part of the reason I called.

## II

I feel like those punks in their Acuras  
out stealing signs: the signs

that tell us where the playgrounds end  
and the loading

and unloading zones begin. Don't say  
the wall in the shed where they're nailed doesn't read

like a call to prayer,  
like the poem that repeats its directions

again, and again to the dark.

### III

It's almost Bird Time. The name you gave  
to when even the trucks racing on Burden Street

quiet their engines;  
to when the glow-stick's impossible green

flickers out, and the hard-house,  
the break-beats, the trance

grind their teeth into silence.

IV

Every frivolity the night wears  
is being removed.

I need you.

At this hour my hands  
are at least as good as wings.

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## NOTES AND DEDICATIONS

“How Pop Sounds” was written as a homage of sorts to the title poem from Philip Levine’s collection *What Work Is* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1992)

“How Pop Sounds pt 2 (The White Album)” *The Dictionary of Word Origins* (Kyle Cathy Limited, UK, 1995) describes an album as “any blank-leaved book . . .” The Jens Lekman CD I have in mind is *Oh You’re So Silent Jens* (Secretly Canadian, 2005) recommended to me by my Australian friend Sonja Dechian.

The epigraph from “Thoughts While Driving a Stretch of Mountain Road...” translates simply as “The wall, the wall!” and is taken from Pablo Neruda’s poem “The Heights of Machu Picchu.”

A number of these poems were written with specific people in mind. In each of these cases they know who they are, with the exception of “Edgewater,” which was written for Frank Schnider prior to his death. I miss you, Frank.

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*Event, Existere, The Fiddlehead, Forget, Grain, The Malahat Review, Versal* (The Netherlands), *Coastline Variations* (Mosquito Press, 2004), and *Desire, Doom & Vice: A Canadian Collection* (Wingate Press, 2005)

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Finally, *Dear Sue, I am really glad you are working here.*