

DARK ADAPT

BRIAN STRANG

DP

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INTRODUCTION

The poems of *Dark Adapt* are governed by the rhythms of nature—night and day, seasons and tides, systole and diastole—the very cycles that determine so much of our existence. The title of this book refers to dark-adaptation, the capacity of the eye to function in low-light environments. The metaphorical meaning is both cautionary and hopeful, that we can slide into the soporific and fatal embrace of gradualism, and also that we can function and thrive under adversity and strife.

It is poetry's role to note what is happening around us, to be attuned to the layers of meaning in language that reveal themselves to us and to receive, through the imagination, signals from the world to which we belong. What's happening is multi-layered—social, political, biological and so forth. Poetry must be guided by all of it.

In *Dark Adapt*, I've been especially interested in (and guided by) darkness, or the lack of it, in cities here in the first world. For all of its glory, I wonder about the many ways electric light changes, distorts and reduces our understanding of the world and blinds us to its rich, restorative possibilities.

These poems dwell in deep darkness.

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DARK ADAPT

1.

DIRECTIONS

The light is sea foam is white is blue. It envelops the grasses, dunes and shore, the community of crows, deer and ticks. There is calm and the hissing of waves on the shore. Signs are rinsed away with each tide.

The light is iron is subterranean is fluorescent. It is emitted through an electrical sun, through wires and passageways. The image of fear is repeated in millions of variations. The inhabitants tread new ground every day. Signs are implanted and empty themselves every minute.

The light is a green stalk is an asphalt ribbon is water and mud. It coaxes seedlings and holds a circle of birds aloft. Here there is a wandering dread, a ghost with burning eyes. Signs are deep and worn, bloodied with the hands of war.

SÉANCE

crow calls the codeine dream
sun is coal all sounds drowned
light lifts a wing living things
crawl and walk caw and talk

pass with shame a sybil a cedar
who speaks of skin glossed of
sheets silken sunbaked glassed
wander a warehouse of wills

exile in oily black ocean night
exhale read entrails starry seer
onerous light: an oracle of errors
blue black footprints on the face

sun séance brings flowers dried
like a lineage unfurled speak of
thin hands clear mist in the air
a growth of the lungs inverted

THE LOCATOR

where a blaze sifts
moon round a light
growing stem blood
life forms wiggle in

slingers motion a
nation of malls its
swords in stone in
historical sonatas

The sharp edge of surveillance. Cathode light. Laboratory
doors swing open.

Here is a silver owl unfolding questions, flying silently
through sleep. This is a shield of stars that will never be
mapped.

winos in thinning holes
are buried face down
until they sprout buds
spitting the old song

what will become a spine
in sands of comeuppance
come to hammers over what
cannot be talked away?

A green rhyme of iron. The climate of bubbling fat. New
encampments sprawl across the valley.

Flight of invisible birds. Murmur at the edge of a cup.

what eases the broken
makes soft the cutting
removes tongue ribbon
is the deepest thread is

marooned in material
horizon of being silver
leaves remind that this
is all is all is all is all

The owl continues its aphetic flight, losing the O in its name.
It becomes an empty ring.

The believer drags the downed and winged alike. His name sits on him like a black wave of oil. But he becomes increasingly hollow and elementally drowned.

INVISIBLE SUN

A handful of jawbones, orphaned and ordinary. Confidence games coincide, shorten the head, concede on contact. Algorithmic heartbeat. Drive tongues into light drive the human beating itself into iron. The suction of certainty drifts complacent.

The unspeakable permeates, thickens the air, a nightblack court of ambitions. Defendants in silver, alchemic turn of the petal. Dust filters through floorboards and a singer is squalid in an orchid nest, a provincial prison. Disaffected and dissected, living miniature lives, encircled. In a lake of lights and likes, similar souls burn the sphere. Constructs that hold them go supernova.

Do you not believe?

Surround the source with the tremor of a bell. To those living carefully, you may now add another reverberation—encapsulated exoskeleton in eternal amber light.

They throw themselves down the leaves and into a funnel for the nectared mouth. Under the sun's embryo.

NUMEN

enfolded winter figures
on snow fade to wolves
melt their bones to sun

horse billowing with
a thousand hooves
somniaulant silhouette

earth shadow rung from
a bloom of radio curls
alight with rippled nerve

knotted exhausted stares
an automatic rain of light
cradled in the beak so small it

drips with bells as day dims rises
half buried in a din of suns
half dead dreamt and sunken

so like the coast it kneels away
unkind unkempt indifferent to
cathedral trees in mist skyward

over lazy open eye the rising tide
the waves sup salt are covered
in crows a continent of caws

THE LUNG TREE

air enters lungs leaves a tree of silver light twists itself
alphabetical and soft the morning is a rummage of error

sword swallows unload their wares painted faces and false
instructions inscribed on gold coins cribbed from the shrine
of overreaction

and popo populate always present as sundowners snug in
their sleighs

some lives shine released when they leave crying into lawless
hollows sorrows fill coliseums with skins

the million dollar music floats overhead

weasels hold the wheel as they spin on the black pearl of
waiting

open this lockbox of heart attacks in a cedar forest saw and
cut by a thrusting white rib bone

the beast yanked round by its neck spits a pile of bouncing
bulls from its mouth half-sized but realistic in every way

a cistern mist a deep well yawns and opens the way

ELECTRICITY

“Poetry is electric.”

—Will Alexander

in light trees creak in storm they break
animal ambulant an animus on stone
armed lockhorns they drag and pull

part from part segmented sinkholes
the clocks simper clamor and wince
scurry and coil wild and winged

in a cup in a bell a caravan of bees
becomes lost a listening post sound
eruption become a mind on the way

dopamine and derelict still it hears
it spins still to the sound the sound
upside down like a tree of hands

under inward eyes flame moths
trail down twin wells thin spindles

see signs leave your name behind

lie awake in pools of data in songs
sung while ragged wings close on
your eyes the world is under a wing

send the lot and sound the sound
an open sky an ear in the wind hear
what it means to be right here after

WHEEL

el obscuro caballo de la sangre
caballo ciego caballo desbocado
el carrousel nocturno la noria del terror...

the dark horse of the blood
blind horse runaway horse
the nocturnal carousel the waterwheel of terror

—Octavio Paz

infinity trees without names are none
gone numb golden soulless a dumb
struggle of moon affected unnerved
can they really? prenatal? prehensile?
feet are tonal and free but rooted
majestically in the stone of home
a private mayhem rotated inward
away from seasonal animal eyes
peering from darkened woods
a tree of hands alone the passers
ask for amber light for lightness
swallowed in pieces around sun
skins in a see-through world spin
what summers give way? what
gems forged in mute dizziness?

in the sum of suns
in one radial arm
an oneiric undoing

a whisper from earth prompts
seraphs long emptied to ambulate
the theater of tiny ambitions leak
poison through marrow emptied
emperor imp plucks eager heads
revolution a sinkhole deepening
is thickened air is filled with bugs
over failed fields in a warm world
something dreamt spoken and tiny
find yourself out of your hourglass
simulated in a ring of white belted
into your blood expanded to a disk
from the mouths of skeletal horses
your four-legged self flees the fields
makes a home in the wind grows
incisors that slice marks on singular
lifelike selves radio heads assembled
from pulsating slabs carousels filled
with horses polyethylene pink and

sterile they stand in a silvered bloom
while Pegasus on a hot plain decays
is attended by a soft pride of lions
a permeable collective silhouette
ice clouds revolve in the jet stream
the night is a spinning wheel above

THE PLASTIC AGE

oiled ornamental speed crackled
emperor imp uncolored unctuous
is dilated and deigns to condescend
a slinky Satan in repose knows
that gladiators are mere gladiolas
men turned mechanical medieval

red is a storm between worlds
circled by moons and lettered on
the circular walls of loneliness
cirrhotic swimming pool of drugs
circumnavigated by séanced souls
who shimmer liminal and surface
in a portable transparent forest
where state-sanctioned gods impose
an evening full of flies and transcribe
their tiny categorical dreams onto
the honeycombed memory of history

on this day rain ravens emerge vengeful
from their nests and marshal millions

descend on cities cover the code mills
black beaks break apart break into
an outreaching network of neurons
where test monkeys identify monads
in the muck of chatter of text order
the silent march of digital time moot
in tone deaf cubicles busy with moles
mired in minutiae but well-versed in
the knowledge of plastic-age remains

fluid-filled branches are phosphorescent
drip their secrets sublimated and stoned
run into the streams and to the ocean
where silence is eaten by whales driven
mad driven to dive deeper to escape the
static din whirr and ping they are
drowning in a stained-glass wilderness

this is the finite world they are given
where vestigial selves become transient
flame speckled and reborn as ants or
as a fly or a butterbean that grows again

they grow up again mismatched and
loved fecund in a millefleur mind

they bury their leaders at the axis
of uncertain strangeness move on
untroubled and do what is pretty
their wiggling fingers wear rings
each birth a spectral light a fissure
sparkling trees spun fine they roil
and recede in diurnal rain reveal
the weight of a stone narcissus

MACROSCIAN

“Man’s vision has grown but it is backed by less and less
Thought is thin feeble useless a trail of mist like the Milky Way
like the Milky Way
While the world is matter is spread out is terrifying
is real like the wall of hell
Thought smiles because it is going to die it could be”

--Nathaniel Tarn, from “After Jouve”

statue faces dawn cowl for crows a sphere
reduced to the immobile light of sludge
where birds button their beaks and silver
sparrows spit warnings into a pool of ears
not hearing but typing and texting the buzz
about bears spread thin who swim sink or
wash up starved star crossed unhinged
cosmos cares for nothing bone cages on
ocean’s silent floor

mercy murder and sleep coddle the sinister
even ground sounds onto imagination to
kindle a dreaming heartbeat gallons flow

from pulse despite talons into a rut roiling
raw wings now beating below the mind
a slow conscious sigh above the ground
mouths that grow from weeds that crack
certainty that breathe the hiss of rejection
the collective heart is a moveable armor
burnished black by ill gotten petroleum
a firmament for malignant sinking suns
predictive pages that write themselves on
days hollowed by production by so little
conservation but there is a gathering beat
beneath the sound a possible bloodstream
under the circular currents of certainty and
consumption

new tendrils in a ghostly gyre of plastics
this is the precipice on which the beautiful
idea rests where the burning sphere balances
on the abyssal where the sun will rise set and
set again on what is left behind of oceans and
their vast silent floors on the blind and bitter
fish that cling to heat vents live on what's

left for them by the big fish who fatten on
little blind fish entering contests becoming
dazzling blind fish for a moment in warmer
waters nearer to the surface where dreams
delete perpetual sharks who daily monitor
the motion of little fins with their flexible
magnetic frames perfectly proportioned to
locate the lonely lost and lame to cull and
clean but a shark is only a shark and swims
deeper into shadows cast over the surface
by global predation that prospers in depths
of empty dreams by certainty complacency
absence of doubt by absence of action by
stupefying absorption

shadows are cast by thinning predators in
their disappearing worlds a slow sludge
forward life flickers appears to be formless
and final in decline but they come to feel
their deepest and most immutable forms
the tiny tendrils where thought smiles
and fills with fire the seas and skies and

soil breathes upward from abyssal melt
a sun bloom birthed by imagination's
darkest burning

STAIN

some say “a crystal tree” others
“obscurely felt” whether apart
or astride the porcelain fawn
garroted the same a now sharp
heap in the windowless world
of one’s own whereabouts in
a gunshot land that oozes its vials
and vitals to a receding laugh
a darkened plot snows
light-giving spores on a spectator-
less
land

ECHOIC

some rivers flow backwards
others become silt

the grass made of plastic
a pinnate so sullied

some kind of flowering
petals to mastery

to worried places erases
halos from heads

in cul-de-sacs plains
turn to eyes

saturated and scattered little selves
insolvent inescapable

what are you doing in this place
of bright and brittle forms?

of pain of pain killers of people
of being alone?

of sleeping of exhaustion of light
what are you doing here?

stuttered sameness of totality
fills the air kerosene

transient expanse melts
is backfilled

unsettled in a white forgetting
a dead indifferent age

dawn freezes into icons
hobbling on swords

the disobliging libraries
foreign and difficult

swallowed by dictation
of palatine principles

a sodden rose in black tea water
on ashen wings

purple enflowered beaks
limping claws

before enslavement to space
ensconced eyes

pleats the pearled throats
enfolding willows

that stack the walls with episodic
televised trances

life forms with hollow bones
half-made skies

synthetic roots down
to cognoscenti

soporific air in the bones
the sectarian edge

the seasons secrete missives
circle inside out

drying seasons in the echoic
heart talon-gripped

2.

DIRECTIONS

The light is olive, is stone is smoked. It settles on the houses, the fields, the chestnut trees. People walk in organic patterns, slow the minutes to hours to days to years. Each village is rooted in its geography, sunken into the land itself. Signs are superfluous.

The light is white is heat is vision. It beats the inhabitants and bleaches their bones, eats the tops from their hovels. The world is constructed against it. The signs are ancient stones, placed here in a circle.

The light is clear is aqua is bottomless. It is thick and sensual and the people move against it in starts and stops. The muscles loosen and give way. The light itself is the sign and it floats on the ocean in a silver sun.

BLACK CHRYSANTHEMUM

“Heart to be turned to Black
Stone the Black Chrysanthemum
is the Throne of Creation”

—Charles Olson

slow comfort of the dark
jet stream begins to open
its petals in storm a picture
where rooftops break away
in the manual ticking sphere

clocks eat the coastal city
become undone come to
cloud dreams under water
so it sinks into snakes
sinks into portraiture

now you wait for a figure
with a disappearing car
loosed in a labyrinth
draw a sphere a round
would the world allow

pull to the edge of the sea
remove the silence say
this will be my name no
longer lie on waves on kelp
the husk of service sinks

wells within limbs on coast
moss on oaks gnarled on
melted hills indifference
drips and dulls the latest
outrage corrodes the will

at birth a pact is signed
lines of voices record your
thoughts you shrug a hand
pressed in yours with life's
impurities written through

black flower pulse has come
to be a structure of feeling
fear alone in sequence come

to be a deepening game
a man reduced to initials

who moves without moving
clouds of him in heavy air
crow billow bile but hold
a dark sun in your heart like
a wiggling beetle of thumbs

heavy bloom cannot be carried
you live in a vertical age frail
with vanishing bones that bear
the human dream of formality
dissolve in historical distance

this totem bursts opens
to twice its normal pupil
and with its roots cracks
the field of ambiguous ends
burns open eyes opens all

SONORIUM

without eyes names without
humans within microphones
stationed for radial emission

winners race to their graves
loud speakers stalactite teeth
announce abrasive agendas

new theories of flight foretell
the limit limbic senses liminal
systems of sets in the marrow

where dual suns of eye and I
bloom and bloat come together
come undone enter the constant

solemn heads bowed toward
the breeze listen to the sonic the
sainted and saline to the sound

of the absence of sound that

clutches as it crows baseless
and uncontrollable treason

that cracks their self same soup
rains crimson heat on reason
inhabitants gather the weakest

in a red forest down pressed
folded into earth fissures
they emerge wanting means

static machines gorge on zeroes
fold the forms into lines sort
the troubled from the troubled

so where does this get off? where
do they go whose eyes (as I) are filled
with a fabric of flaws and phenomena?

found waiting in lines queued
round Sylvian fissures speech
shuffles toward touch of others

toward the only return to what
busts through the order cannot
be packed back into its own shell

SOMNIUM

the nighthead of negative replaced
with the heart for anger becomes
a paced spiral of sacrifice the self

now turns totemic total the light
of stark night voracity rapture go
to schools to lean into the world

to know that seas shift shelves
sink in salt locked in air the ocean
vortex will stop will sink the land

security cameras butterfly the eyes
leaves and seeds seep into the veins
salt water runs through gated homes

televised lives make everything
possible make things ok but it can
not be undone with radio collars

doctored doses of terror or
plastic messiahs conquering
hands or helmets for the kids

the smallest thoughts are egg-born
systems of sets where faces flutter
down to you say no other exists

say what kind of life hides inside
boxes of the nearly born? a news
printed dream will not construct

wet and warm multiple mouths
or collapsing shells where eyes
and skies bleed into one other

AUTOMATIC

stand in a sector
of the new environment
where dawn gives way
to deafening snow on
the broad avenue

where a pencil-wristed
sadist with hundreds of
wives says people expect
too much from love
but keep your wishes

in obligation to science
and wanting no opinions
you attend secret meetings
escorted by soul sick men
to where dread converges

top of the food chain
where fear is five-fingered
desire what you want

and come to conclusions
before a walk that is not

waking but flying without
voices or senses a sentence
formed saying you are my
only ones you are only
my country my love for

the world and to bring
forth the world images of
imagining seep and hiss
tapestry of heights where
wraiths send greetings

an automatic world
closing down controls
backed down to manual
you are systematic lost
everywhere at once

what is mysterious
is not concealed but
so much more than
imagined yet imagine
you must try and fail

in depths of now
glass rain returns a
receding age foregone
conclusions life tapers
away in plain sight

dissolves intellect
accretes silver petals
coats the eyes sinks
to live under a surface
decline to sand beach

stone and hand and
bone worn with wind
wormed under water
in waves where lions
come up for a view

some other life could
have been yours touch
against your sleeve in
a crowd of crowns see
the double you feared

run after the figure who
recedes into dawn orbits
to a chameleon crowd
in earth detachable
hands nurse wounds

smell the scent of your
own skin alive walking
away with the self aware
gait of a ceremonial
leopard at a shrine

THOUSAND PETALS

longtime curse kills trees
opens roots gnawed
by long buried theory
no one goes amid brittle
paragraphs full of blood

hold to ground gone
soaked and soft melts
until you fold into ten
thousand human petals
little tribe of tiny suns

burn leaves and bark
the bells of elves
elaborate webs
order small lives
autonomous crows

welter the skin winnow
selves divide on contact
dried forest clicks with

wind in wireless eyes
sighs a cloud of beetles

the real tally of voracity
lies in rows on tarmac
you leave the scene
a plastic door opens to
ruptured gunning pulse

where winners stand
hands on hips lights
always green for theft
the fragile replaced by
ever-hungry mouths

that mash sorrows in
the eye and eye echoic
long oleum horizons
without names hollow
heads colonial spiders

make your way out to

where a world is being
born and borne and borne
where bones flower bring
outfolding shade of blue

say they are now going
extend your arm to touch
the nearest life form say
the last time is now say
something calls you now

WHAT HAPPENS?

crash a hard

man the fetal

grimace imp

patience is

permanent

In the canyon collider, in the global present, every moment is the same. Reason and fear pattern midday intuition.

Cut away to find plants uprooted. Restore the human levels. Mind within a mind says you will find it yourself.

An electrical current accelerates the call. Prey and predation are sublimated, projected, turned to jingles.

It has no song. But denial is its marker nonetheless.

The state is bred here is fed here. A thick web of programs and the incessant clatter of machines. The mind becomes open and soft.

Viridian figures materialize in the burning dawn.

A pooling fog. Cypresses twist their scream, answer the wind. You see the bay blacken like Japan.

The sun is coal. Protean figures limp along in the smoke. You wonder what you have found.

UNRECOGNIZABLE

9-11-07

1.

cut faces spring to cut smiles repeat themselves
thousands of times across an excavated city that
sketches a plan of a land never towering in this
spot where the capitol of vengeance has risen and
eaten sugared steel with new ideas see the plans
to see ideals stripped to where they are no longer
plans wonder at the hits this pile driver can make
of soul of sound of sun a falling clear day of sun
shattered forms enter every moment the most vile
so that now the chances have gone missing a show
teeters at the brink of the visible in order to inhabit
the inhabitants with fear strangulated sorrow and
the dull burn of fatigue for the span of a generation
one who will not know anything different the world
is in its new pieces the same pieces are thrown into
splinters of old conditions that birth a new burning



the interchangeable universe has now become a
teardrop a tear in the material of hearing and

of sight a placeless and plastic apprehension
the float of signs that makes you feel and see a
new set of signs not (as they are) the same ones
rewritten thousands of times in history so words
no longer mean ideas (they never were ideas) but
instead become markers for indulgence in blood
and more blood things that cannot be undone
in a generation or a century lost time now lost
lives now lost each one a person lost an actual
person with family lost a life and everything lost



and people will talk of us as they do of others
who were a part whether they were part or not
we will be known as one as the group that did
these things in retaliation whether we resisted
or otherwise tried to stop the course of it names
burnt in our names whether we say they were
our names or not this is the name we will wear
and it is on the face of not thousands but many
millions it is written in the smiles of those you
know and meet and especially those you do not
know who know you by one name only the one

name of the empirical the empire the colony the
colonial the capital the capitol the distinguished
the destroyer the trader the traitor the sold the
soldier the sodden will have one name and that
name cannot be spoken it is a forbidden thing
in the world where there are many starred arms
of the universe belonging to one destroyer that
name sits on your lips for thousands of years
a name not worn but it comes to be known by
we and us and they and them who are one vast
breathing body who cower before the forbidden
name over we the body that seeks resolution that
will not leave alone that we that will not live with
less that cannot leave things undone will supplicate
before the frightful name one that is without who
consumes time dissolves form and eats the flower
of being of darkness and of light whose very name
is nothing is dissolution and death whose name is
absence

2.

the heiress knits her web of relations keeping herself
center tucks the snakes under her haircut sips breath
from Kālī's steaming cup while the war flower blooms
in her breast and spills its nectar of liquid youth limbs
that speckle the sidewalk under her helicoptering arms
that scythe down the remaining add skulls to her
necklace where ghosts sway and their bone pates
wear through bald heads she regards killing as a
form of knowledge a form of transition an empty
ring a hole of zero cold water pools in the sockets
machines shake hands in the capitol automatons
maintain the common dream the hallucination of
feeling a synthetic sense of touch or trance of habit
the dream of consumption implanted so that every
action becomes a mediated image of prayer things
ideas and people alike redefined into triviality so
that they are not there and invisible things are the
last gasp of being of flesh stands before the cold
marchers collectors of souls now moving to where
life had been new repeating the messages of what
is not real is a sharp and lying viper whose eyes are

unstuck become the strawberry pearl of expiring age
and are petrified in the cold reverent shade of dawn



here the prison needs no walls since inhabitants are
bred in electric cages are sold as seen where they
say heart when they mean coin people of the loud
and shiny and the not-shiny that is just so where
the only song is the gurgle of blood from a bitten
tongue the “uck” of a choked gag where a feeding
tube runs under all of the sidewalks pipes in the
abstraction and artifice and the orchestrated shine
of a slaughter where masks are attached surgically
to the fiber of identity and no one will know they
are masks when it becomes entirely deferred and
absent

3.

you move to where cities are scars where needling
winds are bound for nowhere but return and a red
choir lights arcs of the coming night the earth spits
what is driven into it and tunnels collapse from the

muscle roots of the mountains ghosts are entwined
in the branches and when dawn comes its viridian
stalks adhere before being stung with a cherry sun



you remember that what is inside is out what is over
is under you climb inside of the earth to inhabit its
revolution and revelation in one single turn of night
of day lie where you can sleep under a glistening field
under the adornment of trees where the light cannot
be held or possessed in a waking state that is not a
dream you find the soil of memory stores receives
and yields a population of signals of unconstructed
and unconstructed signs the double helix of identity
only half its measure you retrieve its long horizons
and begin pooling away from the stem of the war
flower from its radiant and reductive decay that will
be folded into a rich black miracle of decomposition
at the very beginning of tiny human stocks where
what is nearest is most common and now glistens
multiple and teeming with the possibility of now
no other moment exists and life pleats complicates
comes to be upon itself moves to the next which is

also now there is no totalizing fear no absolute us
or we or they or them except the multiple plural one
whose name is six billion letters long an unfinished
surge of pulse a near truth that opens doubt opens
in the eye of night and of day and in one whose only
name is the dark eye of zero that doubt can come to
close where doubt loosens the grip of nothing spreads
pearls of plural into topsoil that grow into trees among
the hysterical machines of certainty of reduction mills
of absolutes into the one the only one an unfinished
eye of we and us and they and them the many eyes of
the unfinished unwholesome unknown who have
just one song that is the song of night of day of one
breath that is the breath of now that is the breath of
other whose song is at first unrecognizable but when
heard six billion times is the beating of the one that
cannot be one that fills itself with one song in six billion
languages tuned to the earth that is made of them and
they and we and us whose very names can be heard
through the screams of seedlings the names that have
no signs to name them the names that pulse become
myriad and one and who are contained by themselves
who emerge from the tangerine light of the blood of the

sun of names whose roots grow through to the center
of the earth whose vines wind and encircle the other
until the miracle of decomposition burns them into a
new becoming where the earth spits what is old and
new where there is no one no other where the dark
embrace of growth covers predator and prey in a sun
without signs and the earth refracts increasingly orange
where there is no difference between presence and
absence

3.

DIRECTIONS

The light is grey is mule is sepia. It hangs over the town, the collection of services in the wide valley. No totalizing fear, no seeming end, but there is an uneasy quiet lying beneath the roar of the highway. Signs are knocked out to their fluorescent teeth.

The light is pomegranate is shadow is steel. It holds the cypresses in its embrace, illuminates the tops of the kelp forest. Minerals bubble to the surface. A group of walkers on a cliff signals to the horizon.

The light is pine is black pool is filtered dust. It ends early in the river, in the dry air of altitude and yields to the animals that live in its lack, the mountain lion, marten and bear. There is a fear of fire and the balance of prey. The trees, precarious totems of history, signal thousands of years and the burn to come.

DARK ADAPT

few hues in the day now
hooded figures fly in
the face of reason night
cathedrals to them
selves are functionaries
without rights they devise
a plan for exit on the back
of pointy heads they attack
the guards but are trundled
into containers become
huddled for one who
spins decides how he
might impose himself
upon the world

Iron vines and buds encircle, enrage, entomb. This is the world that explodes, that seeps under the door. A word made of shattered glass. A worm made of symbols: convulsive rain and suspicion armed to the gills. This world is exposed in the womb—a cut flower that continues to grow.

each cell divides

promises stem
blood divides feeds
itself memory is
survival forms
rise specific physical
weather determines
color system of
carbon form city
within city ocean
within and
without faces or names

They hang out invectives, read partial masterworks, cover bodies with irony. Drive into the sun when things around are dying. You see we are made from a field. The whole is fed from one. You have been writing this scenario for all the years to come:

everything is nothing is everything.

emergent world teems
particulars form ground
physical color from weather
patterns imperial birds
peck and hunt likewise

arise entirely alike the sky

flayed red and purple

move and mark the same

what does not degrade?

APHOTIC

—for Basil King

spherical decline
born as monument
every color physical
this very earth circled
by a single moon
technical detritus
aluminum cloud
in the house of light

The same, inside and out. A form of emptiness, of aphasic silence. Worn with use and physical, yet particular to this light, this darkness, this wind, this water. Conditions are exactly the same every time.

who is not a part?

who is not apart?

The mind doesn't abide, bites into what cannot be. An image floats in the middle distance. Faces become projections as you walk along the street. They lead you. Half-sized but accurate in every detail. The inner landscape is uncertain. It speaks to you as you walk, gestures, leads the way. You begin to ask it questions and its mouth moves in response but no

answers issue and its motions become feverish. You try to understand. The look on its face: a concatenation of dread and empathy. Apparition of the ancients.

the roofs form
a patchwork over
the valley corrugated
something that drains
you of differences
makes everyone
indifferent kneeling
in the middle of
the freeway what
cause what local
conditions gave
rise to this?

A small hand points the way. The day becomes unbearably hot. People draped in torpor. Half-sized but accurate in every detail. Hide in the shade and shed the outer hide. Transmissible human signature. Heads protrude everywhere from this ground. Half-sized but accurate in every detail. They turn at the sight of translucent marching figures.

participants partake
but it ends in blood
the juice of human fruit
of human wanting
deep beneath
a splintered sun
where the world
is a crevasse

Two thousand years later in this remote province, their floors and foundations are still visible. Use the familiar form with them, as if you knew them. Visit their ruins, become their family. And you can still hear them, though they are dust.

spreading deeper
into the reaches
beneath light
both revelation
and symbol
in these waters
grow fruits that
unwind and destroy
on inverted trees

In a hotel room above the avenue, you sleep with your legs tied in knots. The darkness behind your eyes deepens. You attempt to see through the years but see only a reflection.

EELS

this day is an empty nine
a core of exhibition
unmasks things not intended
figures of umber and gypsum
moths of earth and shadow
become crossed in deep light
scatter selves across a garden
in a pathological realm
a kind of hysteria
against the grammar of trees

in the heights of a flat city
in the brooding inertia of a whirlpool while
the world sails onto seas of real time
over textures so like human skin
the shame of our animal hearts
of killing and the joy of meat
against a negative block of white
an organic light or a hole of zero
into the blades of civic spirit
between double suns

wrapped in skins turning blue
on melting ice fields
in mid-morning predation
reduced to metaphors of steel
drowning polar bears in tears
the acceptable water line of despair
keeps the world expressionless
refusing to surrender
to be automatic in
spectacular climates
is Calvinist and small

the sun turns to food
pressured by the atmospheres
against the flicker of prey
in the woods where reeds click
sounds stir the drought where
predators are starved hollow and reckless
bone on the middle plains trembles
want little to do with the future
line up broken glass on the walls
to reflect the numbers
but feet so brittle make little impression

pieces organized to mark the way
toward missing vowels and empty houses
and filtered words gain value
through surroundings in difference
they cut off the lights

the old world absorbs the new
each attention is a translation
accompanied by shame
and steeples twine the skyline of lungs
a mixed empirical message
runs over the fields in low oily sunlight
with only three rules for guidance
nothing here is just
hearts are made of eels
hands are for war

the machine is in motion
with nothing inherently valuable
in clockwork
the name itself a vestige
find the new world breathing
through a tube

in the rain of soot
ash petals of snow
melt and spit with cherry blood
and every member of congress
will wear a small hat on the eve of the iris
drawing their peacemakers with nothing
to see in their infinitely consistent hearts
mechanized self attentions
they declare their intentions
to study the budding rituals
but blood is a reminder of material
names written on their chests
unstitch the appropriate greetings
the cracking sound of chthonic heartbreak
there will be no national happiness
automatic night is quickly ruinous
insects collect dew from the leaves
people move sideways in the water museum

a table full of people share moments like dimes
a reason to arrange the world to one's own liking but
an unavoidable human trait makes it hard
for anyone to concentrate in the quiet of shame

falling with the sun among stacked signs
in a frenzy of perpetual weekends
phosphorous nights and a white veil
some kind of ritual solitude at the tables
without explanation for the absence of walls

GORGONIAN

noun: a colonial coral of an order distinguished by a treelike skeleton, including the sea fans and precious red coral.

adjective: of or relating to Gorgons.

sift through steel

munition that glows

your bones

folds the self

to product to

collapse and stack

the skulls high

on phantom

presumptions

in sand of signs

spider diagram

and orphan

ordnance

One can get used to anything. A head spins off with dozens watching. Fasten your own. Glass lungs. Take two pills from the tray and feign a swallow. The sacs and vessels burst—cotton, spittle, mud. Little fish in the breast milk you drink.

Bruises in the flesh are pill-sized. Arachnid man unsleeves
eight-fingered hands.

the boot splits

pate and heavens

salt and sponge say

divine backwards but

hallowed does not

exist on a sheet of teeth

glass fingers back when

desired every bearer

back at the end

wants warmth

to be out

of the lashings

Injections at the bus stop leave remnants in your leg.
Smiling pellet. Singing hole. Cut across the street. Know
that you are indeed followed, as everyone, in a city of
surfaces. Greeters know your codes, unwind you with a
glance, feed you with the headlines. And your ghost drips
from you at every session. Subcutaneous explosions work
your bloodstream with devastating results.

static men read
signals erase answers
corrode confidence
open pipelines for
running red horses
chew each other
noosed to the red
tree of skeletons
ivory jaw of war
bones thrown
to the red grinder
sounds soporific

Waffled onlookers have their hooks in a mess. One half of everything under the sky. The other drips into shadow. The same car passes every day at the same time—a signal to the dead-chewing mouth. In a greased lair of self, eyes peer upon the temporary situation. They are unglued and now waving their hooks at the fighters made of metal, made of morrow.

they are told to
leave on time get up
on time pull triggers set
traps work numbers

believe nothing
go home
sleep on time
in the mirror
explain everything to
an empty house
loaded with flags and buttons

In sharp rows, the hooks click and march. Their owners
withdraw, and they gleam and smirk, dig into the onlookers,
until they are public, an embarrassment, the establishment.

on the ground
some idea of fun
knitting desires to
knots and guts down
in a hole to hide
evidence shadows
gather you follow
acrid ache sharpen your
teeth and you with your
clan knock away the
onlookers with one

single gesture and

mind

The worms work their ascension. A dripping black hydrangea. A leaking heart. Sources that emanate human warmth. Superstructure flies with metal wings, leaves a trail of black petals, lands on all fours, soaks through shale, bleeds into a cave. Rods and cones removed for the simplest of sight, the soldier self is a lanterned eye.

SOFT TISSUE

dogs run delirious drugged
over the charlatan armies
your pin and needle clothing
your Coney Island Coca Cola

clotted heart corpuscle inquisitor
widows over cinderblock graves
show me your manometer caked face and torrential eye
shadow me your mandrakes your exploding box

where does the earth get the nerve?
on all sides a compass rose a star of arms crowned
deer rise from the ocean oiled and skinless
your reflection in remnants

soft tissue and a corrugated spine
lanterned eyes are a sideways war
what becomes a perceptual lust
is what defines the years of dust

MOTTO

trowel the fragmented line
over a city that shrinks its inhabitants
in a blackened light a chrome
calliope calibrates gunning futures
gulping down wherever they eject
soon enough subsumed and replaced
by the winged fisher

a cure circulates and its name is covered
consoled in a caked carbon frame
of the watcher holds to itself indivisible
from emerald water plated by leaves
circumscribed by infinity

knowing is a set of conditions
a slick and sharpened blade
dull silver seed implanted in
a fallow circle of unwanted strangers
the slick grey eye in a slurry of suggestion
eats what it sees leaves the rest
bloodless and granite a pantomime of life

in marionette spasms
quickly through the fingers
how much and what kind
of suffering is acceptable?

ADMITTANCE

begrudged bird becomes ever athirst
a thrice-blackened star or eyeless pool
of cratered code a thin blue waste on
a hand where one's two tongues took
you to sorrow where a molten mouth
pays a mind to signs softens the blow
the hole within a hole where you look
for more and see an eye within a sun
and close the thousand wheels alike
a silt of estranged seconds sifted and
siphoned from the hours in the night
where you choose to stand to land on
a shore that sheds a light and lingers
a boxed crossword of logos berating
the broken rattan of consciousness to
leave a seam of white night presiding
in a circle of superimposed heartbeat

ENDNOTE

dreams of red turbans
a princess murdered left
behind in your suitcase
snowing grace on beings
untouched by electric light

on trails through needles
soon a snow will send
intrinsic roots through to
the brain stem of echoes
in a burl of wooden heads

man with a chain breaks
out of a dream where leaves
disturb severed parts ants
from the pores in your skin
open you to new problems

in what seems an incomplete
struggle of earth that digests
whatever falls creates a blind

communion dead and living
comes forward with a face

with sun and soil petals worm
and carve spiral designs of
dreaming bodies in pods lying
crimson skin blooms when
trees explode in ash and rain

movie stars whose gods drink
blood from skulls hear “not-ice”
in warmth of ashen rain create
steel selves alive to eruptions
of erudition and effervescence

big plans on the highways
and the soft fatalities jam
wheels a garland of skulls
accretes ice in the blue light
where you hesitate to land

what silver platters will make
this palatable? what silver sun
will desiccate the disease?
land anyway where buds
burst mud make footsteps

corresponding scientists
excavate sprouting brains
without form or memory
in grey mammalian tones
a little like deep balloons

spit out the soft parts and
let limbs fall and reform
and wake to find iambs
with bottomless stupid eyes
in a charred clicking forest

minds bred on grammar
taxonomy and pills hunt
for double drinks and ill
gotten mnemonics rain
check light speed specials

have now become elliptical
fascinated with root systems
the theory of everything
brain scans freezing oceans
and solvents for identity

break despair into memory
in eight thousand year cities
know you must risk losing
your name where a sword
carves the fields to reveal

sleeping heads sprouting
stalks where Victorian
healers wrap their coats
with lights and take flight
leaving trails in the cold

data cloud a deployment
a stupidity spiral the work
of a stubborn fool collapsed
sun burns the flooded saints
swimming in the slow stew

honeycombed ambition
breaks in the blood light
cracks the toothed horizon
of dawn over the spine
encrusted forgotten city