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Enlightenment Suite: Poems

Zachary Harris
Carnegie Mellon University

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Enlightenment

★ Suite ★

Poems

**Zachary Harris
H&SS Senior Honors Thesis
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Insomnia Letter

What a long year this has been. I'm a ghost town now, did you hear. All of the temples & grocery stores are still as paintings. I'm afraid to touch them. I find myself standing in the backwaters, my ankles beginning to peel. Let me tell you, everything seems so much bigger in the veil of perpetual night. Each thought rips up the floorboards. My erection turns to limestone & comfortably seats eight. Horses carved out of onyx leave their tracks in the yard. Did I mention that it won't stop raining? Big rain, the size of my fists. I've never seen anything like it. In the vault of the abandoned bank, which used to have real gold filigree on its ceiling, there are bags & bags of crisp new bills that I can't spend. It's been that kind of year. The days fill with the miracles that no one else wants: mosquitoes hatching every morning from the standing water on Main Street, crates of vegetables splitting their own skins. The shadows of the trees keep saying that this my fault. Have you ever heard of such a thing?

Plummet

When you fell to Earth I was on the train watching a pretty Latino boy lick his lips. Somewhere between Palm Beach & the glittering edge of the world this boy was holding red carnations, their clustered mouths bobbing for something. His tongue kept appearing like a recurring dream. It was in the moment I looked away that I saw your vapor trail reaching out of the sun. It fell east towards the ocean. You've got some nerve. The train rolled on into recent history. The Latino boy's hair was perfectly cut, shimmered with oil. I tried to stare into the bag of sandwiches on my lap. Machinery clanked at my feet while hot noise filled your nostrils. Somewhere someone is grieving for the both of us.

Last Will & Testament

One thing is to be understood:
 I never wanted this
 Lots of flowers – all white – except
 the red carnation I will wear in my mouth
 Eat my ashes anyway you see fit
 There is something in the house you will never find

★★★

& Whereas
 there is anything left & it is worth something
 & everything in the garden dies from too much rain
 & nobody finds this body until the hottest day of the year &
 inside are marbles & card tables
 misdemeanors & seashells
 a long ago season's diorama of bones & snow
 & feathers & yarn
 stones dropping all the way to the end
 bullfrogs leaping from cliff to cliff &
 the most humid night outside the screendoor
 & the perfect white face of an egg

★★★

& Whereas
 any of this is worth something now
 in what is surely a new system of value
 if it can be leveraged towards a new home
 or a newer car or landscape architecture
 or the Japanese room you have always wanted

★★★

then I, the Undersigned, grant permission
 as long as you remember
 that I will be floating on the deep and mysterious sea
 my voices breaking on the rocks
 my heart the heavy thing you cannot shrug off

Letter to a Coalmine

Inch by dark inch the basket
holds me like a mother, the cables
climbing up towards the circle of light
that is your, what, your halo?
There are the roots of the oldest
almond tree in the world. A pair
of eyeglasses. The rust-colored line
of a centipede. Don't tell me how many
men you've buried or stolen from.
I got no use for numbers. The coin
of light blinks out, but it was darker
in the first mouth I broke into.
It was darker inside the stationwagon
of my youth. A boy's brain is as full
as any black hole. So what.
You've got bones, I've got bones.
There's the shuffling of dozens
of hard eyes still missing the heads
they used to belong to. A man travels
down & opens up in his own yard
as a flower. Orange & gold. I pass
a fat white spider. A girl's house slipper,
skin-colored. A handful of bones
in the shape of my name. & when I get
to the bottom, what do I find –
Fire, what else.

Airport Letter

the workers at the Wok-n-Roll know my name even though I've long forgotten it funny story actually they're not Chinese at all but from the lowlands of Vietnam & when I fall asleep on the toilet in the Concourse A restroom I sometimes dream about their country which always takes the form of a long golden beach the sun always setting & turning from orange to a deep bruised purple & in my dream I sit on this beach and the family's youngest son he must be about sixteen brings me a plate of lo mein & a Sprite & he's not wearing anything except a cone of blue-throated orchids he picks them off one by one until I can see the sharp line of his pelvis the small hard blossom of a nipple he leans across me and his back smells like frying oil & rock salt & I always wake up just then drooling & half hard my head pressed against the stall door after this dream I usually go stare at the tarmac & the colorless air bulging out past the edges wondering whose briefcase this is whose dream I keep having

Parable

I've seen you eating clay as red and rich
as raw meat. Around midnight, digging
at the riverbeds with cupped hands. Just last
night I pulled a clump of wet clay out of the shower
drain. You know the tub has to be clean
for the Christmas carp. Father went to get it
this morning. Mother told him to pick a lively one.
At market, Father will carefully pry open
the sharp gills. Inhale the scent of blood.
He will pick the freshest fish. You've got to keep
the tub clean so that the carp stays healthy.
And on Christmas Eve we'll take it apart,
shake out its white flesh like a downy pillow.
Doesn't that sound good? You've got to be more
conscientious. Here is a brush to scrub your mouth.
Make sure you rinse well. When you kiss her,
Mother will be sure to notice if your breath
smells like the river. She will tell Father when
he comes home. Carrying the bucket of crystal-clear
water, the carp tying itself into glistening knots.
He will be so upset that he drops the bucket.
The carp will slide across the floor. Gasping.
The carp's gills will flutter, the blood rising
to the surface. Tail thumping the floor like a drum.
Mother will cry into her small hands. Father
will desperately try to get the fish back into the bucket.
He will cut his fingers on the gray scales, the carp
has so many scales. You will turn into clay
as the carp gives up on the dream of water. Mother
will dry her hands and move you to the garden.

Larry: To Whom I Have Never Written

I.

I know a girl on a bike. She is beautiful
like the horses that will drag our carriage out to the islands.
There is something tragic about her grin.

Please see the attached photograph.

II.

There aren't many vineyards in my part
of the country and the cheap motels are cheap
in a different way and there are probably fewer
birds here and therefore fewer usable metaphors
but I am sure our homes have always had ghosts

who move the same things around when we think
we are alone. Our books are rearranged. The dresses
our mothers intended to wear at our shotgun wedding
get stretched out over the furniture. The sunsets
always look like ambulance lights.

V.

Every word drops heavily through my body –
father, starling, avenue, night. Already, my heart is burning.

IX.

I ripped up the dirt and found the remains of a Cadillac.
The worn leather seats were hot with sweat. I figure
she was some blonde, one of many, not your first but maybe

your last. From the overlook, the city's lights looked like birthday
candles. The pine trees outside leaned in closer. Her panties
slid down her legs and caught at her ankles like a rubber band.

Darkness has been warm for you ever since. She is the one thing
you are never allowed to talk about.

XV.

Our fathers will shake hands.
The priest will orate.

We will spend our honeymoon
somewhere warm,
our pale bodies
like the pearled handles
of two knives.

XIX.

We built the house out of books.
Anywhere, you could stop and press one ear
to the walls and listen. The one thing we always keep
in the kitchen is fresh fruit. In the evenings, we walk down
the hillside to the beach to listen to its frenzied chorus.

XXI.

This is the last one, for a while. The candle on the windowsill
has melted into the shape of the land between us.

I took it as a sign.



Ten Things I Love More Than God

All day I have been
watching birds land
along the power lines.

I think I love the butcher
trimming pearly fat
from a portrait of his son.

All day I have been thinking
of how to say this.
Mosquitoes are burying

themselves in the riverbed.
All day the moon
has been clearing

the limestone steeple
of the church.
All day I have been

watching birds
line up on the road.
I think I love this

boy, the one arranging
snails in opaline lines.
His silvery tongue

is fast under
the bandstand's lights.
All day I have been

thinking of how to say this.
This reminds me
of the season

I spent separated
from myself.
I fucked in one

room and wrote
all of it down
in another.

The days all beat
against the windows
like furious birds.

In the town square,
ice drops from
the glassy sky.

I think I love
the clouds, and all
of the cold and empty things

they are hiding.
All day
I have been thinking of how to say this.

The general store
is sold out of umbrellas,
of flour, of meats.

The beautiful thing
is how close I have come
to forgetting.

All day I have
been saying this.
All day the moon

has been clearing
the limestone steeple
of the church

but just barely.

I Will Never Sing the Kitchen Man Blues Again

When Bessie Smith
eats her man's donut,
she eats the hole, too,
because she understands
that there are thousands of ways
to exercise devotion.

Our life together is simple.
Every morning, I flour the woodblock
and Bessie flours the rolling pin.
She hums along with the whistle
of the teakettle.

Other than that, we don't spend
much time in the kitchen.
We go dancing in hot little rooms,
and share crystal tankers
of sweet gin.

And at night we lay in bed
like two pieces of the same tuxedo.
My body gleams in the streetlights
outside our window. Hers is reclaimed,
piece by piece, in the darkness.

Sunday

There is one giant church
in the Littlest Italy
and today its bells
are pealing for me.

I am getting married
or maybe I am dying –
either way, the state
has been notified

and it must have been
them who sent the pigeons
sitting in lines along
the sidewalk, pointing

one wing up, the other
down. Old Italian women
sit on their concrete stoops,
dreaming of hilltops

crowned with grapevines.
There will be yellow
curtains in my kitchen
and a saint in the pantry,

my lawn greener than
envy. The women smile.
I have never felt grapes
burst underneath my

feet. I have never licked
the Mediterranean Sea
from underneath my
fingernails. I have never

loved the unknowable,
or trusted the wind with
too much. Clouds the same
milky blue as a cataract

eye roll across the sky.
Each bell toll brings new
darkness. I take my hand
in my hand. The church's

doors are before me, the
biggest mouth in the world.
I drag them open and, into
the heavy quiet, say *I do*.

Why I Want To Be An Accordion Player

I have never had a better meal.
You are an excellent kisser.
Everyone has cried at least once.
Where is my handkerchief?
I stole roses.
I stole these roses.
Can we go for a walk?
The streetlights are out.
You look like an hourglass
that will never run out of time.
Stop looking at your watch.
This bench is wet.
That window is mine.
You will never stop looking.
I can not stop looking.
The stairs are narrow.
Hold on to my hand.
There is light on the wall.
Here is the edge of my couch.
That is the edge of the world.
These are my fingers.
This is your back.
Are you singing yet?

The Cellist: A Danse Macabre

I always had two women: one hard, one soft. When I pressed my ear
 to the cello's belly,
 I could hear darkness moving around. When I peeled the music
 from her neck, she
 leaned in to my hand and our bones almost touched. Sometimes I
 mistook the cello's
 exquisite geometry for my wife, laying in bed like a ripe constellation,
 a tongue made of night.
 When I thought of her, my teeth itched. She was a dancer,
 her body always etched
 with punctuation, and sometimes the three of us performed together.
 Holding the cello's hips
 between my legs, I brought the strings nearer to my mouth. My wife
 leaned into my arms,
 twirled along the edge of the stage, sometimes reached over to pluck
 a note from the cello's belly.
 She left me vibrating like a star. Now I have only one woman,
 the one without teeth.
 The bloodless one. I tell this story to every audience. I say *here*
 is where her leg curled
 around my chair, *here* is where her fingertip landed, *here* is where
 the cello opened its mouth
 for her. I tell them how she moved like a ghost in water. I play
 to the climax, my head
 spinning, her name ringing in my ears until – *Here*, I say, *here*
 is where she reached down
 and plucked the final note. It limps out of the cello. The truth is that
 I can hardly feel the music
 anymore. No, that's not quite right. I feel it differently. It blooms,
 over and over, like a wound
 on a dancer's foot: weeping, wet, always inching closer to the bone.

The Blue Madonna

The lightning said
Let me have a look at you
 and so I stood by my window,
 turning my hips with each
 flash. My body was a buffet
 for the eyes of the gods.
 This was around the time
 my father became a camera –
 when we prayed together
 at night, he fingered his rosary
 like he was bringing it into
 focus. I have no undiscovered
 parts, no hidden wells of skin.
 The eye says *You are as beautiful*
as an apple, my ship is caught
in your ice. Sometimes, it is my eye
 that does the talking.
 In the bed's acre of moonlight,
 I entertain America, with those
 big hands. America, carrying
 all those pennies. America,
 cigarette ash on everything. And now
 I'm tired of looking at cocks all day.
 They say *You remind me of a cave,*
you sparkle like a sequin.
 I want a different name, people
 expect too much. I want to ride
 my disco crucifix into the next universe,
 my pockets filled with pearls and horses.
 I still think about the haze rolling off
 of Michigan's black ice, about taking
 the river in my hands and wringing it.
 My mouth is starched and ready.
 The flashbulbs say *Let me have a look*
at you and so I let them: the dream
 between my legs, the veil of ribs parting,
 the fist-sized radio playing my greatest hits.

Upon the Death of a Television Comedian

Dear Charlie Rocket,
I can see your pores
through my camera lens,
opening and closing like tiny
mouths. Inside each one
is a dead joke.

Dear Charlie Rocket,
I once had your decoder ring.
I rinsed off the powdered sugar
from the cereal box and forced it
onto my index finger.
I think it fell apart a week later but
not before I foiled the Muscovites.

Dear Charlie Rocket,
I wanted to be an astronaut, too.

Dear Charlie Rocket,
1980 was a good year,
wasn't it? You and Ronald Reagan
were finally on television.

Dear Charlie Rocket,
The lenses jump
in front of each other: focus
and refocus. A man with a clipboard
looks like your father. The hairstylist
has hands like your mother's.
You can sweat as much as you want.

Dear Charlie Rocket,
Enclosed is the secret formula.

Dear Charlie Rocket,
America had two daughters: Success
and Failure. You shackled up with the latter
sister because she offered no resistance.
She brought you beer. You filled her womb.
The kisses went sour. The house
peeled itself from the Earth. I saw it all
on television. You never saw the kid.
I hope you blamed the Muscovites.

Dear Charlie Rocket,
Lift-off!

Dear Charlie Rocket,
Your blood is pooling
all around my feet.
The lenses focus, refocus.
In the floodlights,
it looks like paint.

Joy & Pain

He is dressed in the immaculate white
of the eternally blessed – God’s best friend
on Earth! – & in the loud, shapeless darkness

of the theater, he asks the audience to hear –
really hear – his music’s saintly slow burn.
Front row center, where the stagelights

bleed into the air, I am also bleeding light,
like a candle, like snow – I am the only white
boy in the building, & my cheeks are burning

because my hips are not as agile as my friend’s,
because I am the sore thumb – intruder – here.
He says he can see God moving in the dark

like good music does, turning the darkness
into handclaps, basslines, sequins and light,
& I’m leaning forward, really trying to hear

where God lives. Is he inside these white
spaces between notes? Will he be my friend
after all these years? I am getting heartburn

from these keyboard solos, but they burn
so good. I remember sitting in the darkness
of my tenth year, trying to make a friend

out of my clarinet. The notes were never light –
instead they got stuck in my white
room like flies, too heavy for even God to hear.

Now the singer is asking me – everyone – to hear
the magic, & untethers the slow-burning
wail we have been waiting for. Yes, I am white,

but my spine shivers too, those quiet dark
parts of my brain suddenly swelling with light –
God is sweeping across me and my friend,

He shimmers behind my eyes. My friend,
she stands up, palms out as if she could hear
through them, & in the pure brilliant light

of the funk, the edges of my soul begin to burn.
God moves through the theater, the darkness
as water, converting even this somber whiteness

into a friend. As the last of the music burns
off, I leave everything here, in the theater's dark –
the clarinet, the white notes – & call out to the light.



In 2086,

the house I live in is made of mirrors
because the future is all about self reflection.
When the sun rises, it shimmers like pale fire.
After bathing, I pull on my stiff one-piece
white garment, the one with too many straps
and the strange hood. I think I have never
worn it correctly. Birds made of gun metal
land on my windowsills, coughing up sparks
and singing Mozart concertos and classic
soul. Some days, they are my only visitors.
I have one memory from better times, so vivid
it could be a dream: a dance in a clearing.
The chaperones pretended to be trees,
holding clumps of Spanish moss in their raised
hands, and we twirled around them. The boys
bought all of the girls corsages of thorns
and poppies. The girls, in return, rouged their
cheeks and looked like ghosts underneath
a chandelier of glowing insects. Even now
I can remember some of those ancient steps,
how the evening stars made it so dark we never
knew who we were dancing with, or if we
were still dancing at all.

February in Poland

My spacecraft disappeared
and then it was just me and the lunar
winds singing like a broken accordion.

I was in the frozen valley. Angry snow
collected inside my collarbone. The rows
of glass eyes and gold fillings rattled. The air
as clean and desolate as an envelope.

Nothing was left but chimneys.
I took off the walls and the doors ran
into the forest. Bathtubs wandered into
the streets. I sold the diamonds and bought
more diamonds with the money. I took out

my anti-gravity spoon and dug clear to the center,
where I found a sort of snow-globe:

Ashes piling up on giant scales,
a little house with glowing windows.

Elegy Pulled From the Ovens

I am in my kitchen, slicing
the white heart of a cabbage

while my white heart is somewhere
else, adorned with ribbons

and tied to the top of a maypole –
we spin across the town square,

the jubilant and I, because another
long winter has ended, because

flowers are blooming all along
the gray corpse of the countryside

and the sky that hangs like a dingy
apron is cracking with sunlight –

I am turning the cabbage into a pot
of white paper on which nothing

is written – but I have thousands
of notes about my visit to the camp –

*the metal fixtures gleamed with
imaginary light, brick scrubbed clean,*

*flowerbeds burned with blossoms
that could not be snuffed out –*

my hair has been cleaned and combed
straight, and my gaudy peasant

costume is hanging in the closet –
I am finally sitting for this meal

of cabbage and noodles while
the land I remember in my blood

gets dimmer every day, as if the sky
is being shuttered – or maybe there is

nothing solid about my blood – maybe
it is thinner than it used to be –

see how it flows easily into this bowl,
making my heart as light as ash –

In A Cemetery in Brooklyn

Dirt in my mouth ants in my blood
my bed was a long white dream
the crocuses picked up their heads

and I am a good Jewish boy again
my tattoos faded like a bad argument
the rose in a fist the question mark
the map of a holy land

there are still a few stars out
and they look like earrings which
will soon be put away I have nothing
to say about earrings now that I

can't hold onto anything not
the dogwood blossoms edging
their way onto the scene
not my ancestors' hats though
my head is cold

it's not really cold

the dirt in my mouth it tastes like
a first kiss I am naked but funny
like the moon down in the harbor

the boats are speaking to each other about
love and loss of cargo

Balkan Honeymoon

we sat all evening on the patio
the Adriatic rippling beneath us
like a silk veil a waiter or waiters
brought us bottle after bottle
of strong liquor made with seeds
and bitter herbs they told us but
you leaned over and said it was
sour like a lie the bleached taste
of come on a silver platter
between us were a dozen small
octopi swollen with butter and olive
oil – each ready to burst a mouthful
of salt *taste like the motherfucking
ocean* you said and then threw
a glass onto the rocks the waiters
began yelling Slavic curses and I
remembered yesterday taking
pictures by the water wondering
if there was enough room on this
peninsula to lose myself

The Paraplegics of Cherbourg

I.
 My French is rusty like an old
 trombone, and my time in Cherbourg
 has been hard.
 Every morning, my baguette
 is soft and tastes like seawater.
 The coffee grows a skin thicker
 than mine. Pigeons

coo in the streets like missionaries.
 They want me to forget.
 Every morning,
 I get closer and closer
 to their gospel.

II.
 When the Socialist Revolution failed to materialize
 in Pittsburgh, my parents went for the hills.

They emptied the pantry into their knapsacks,
 filled the station wagon with batteries and blankets,

and set out. Long fields foamed with heather and clover.
 Three days in, they found an empty Colonial surrounded

by cornfields. I arrived one year later, underneath
 the flickering menorah. My parents were silent

for most of my childhood, solemnly holding secrets
 inside their mouths. The books that lined our shelves

were too dangerous to touch. The cellar was off-limits,
 as was the shack that used to hold the rusting tools

of capitalism. All of the trees lost their leaves
 in anticipation of something terrible. The corn bulged

with fear and dropped to the ground. Birds flew out
 of the fields in big dusky tails. I taught myself to read

and write, adding and subtracting from my ration
of soybeans. I ate jar after jar of pickled vegetables.

A portrait of Lenin hung on the wall across
from the toilet. I turned five, and then ten, and then eighteen.

The pipes got old, and began to sing. Someone must have been
listening, because one morning black clouds rolled up

to the horizon and then became men in black suits. They sliced up
the mattresses and punched holes in the walls. One of them

slipped some money into my hand and gave me a ride
to the coast. The prow of my boat cut through the broken

yolk of the sunrise. I drank seawater and talked to gulls,
and was asleep when my tiny craft drifted into Cherbourg.

III.

Yesterday morning
when I turned on the bathroom light,
I found a Bolshevik
perched on the rim of the toilet seat.

He was skittish as a bird,
clawing at the porcelain tub,
watching the light bulb
burning away in the center

of the ceiling. His pupils shrank
into poppy seeds.

I went to the kitchen
to find something to feed him –

a handful of grapes,
a slice or two of cheese – and when
I came back he flapped
his arms angrily

and spoke in clunky Russian.
He shook his hat
loose from his head and it fell
to the tile, a misshapen

loaf of brown bread.
 I stepped on it
 and slid backwards, smacking
 my head off of the sink.

When I came to,
 the window was open
 and the Bolshevik was gone.
 I looked outside

and saw a line of muddy footprints
 going into the port's
 icy water.
 There was a little of my own

blood in my hair,
 and my mouth tasted
 like pennies. He left his hat
 in the tub

as well as a handful of Marxist
 pamphlets. I put the hat
 on a hook in my closet
 and burned the pamphlets in the stove.

IV.

My father was going to kill the President, and my mother
 the First Lady. That was the finding of a special

judicial tribunal appointed to try them. My parents
 were being held in a big prison complex underneath

the Hoover Dam. The government sent a letter
 soon after I found steady employment at the dancehall –

I still wear out five pairs of shoes a night. They warned
 that the only thing keeping me out of the ground

was the Atlantic Ocean. I danced straight for four days
 and four nights, and buried twenty pairs of shoes

in the little city park under the wet cover of night. Then
 I came back to my little flat and drank enough wine to kill

a horse. I threw all of my teacups onto the stones. Some
of the shards slid into the port where they bobbed like seagulls.

V.

This morning, I saw my father eating a croissant
at the bakery down the avenue. My mother
sat across from him – dressed in white

linen – reading a French newspaper.
The sun was cheery and shapeless.
Everything was dripping

in yellow light. I knew it was a dream
because my mother took Spanish as a young girl,
not French;

Spanish because more oppressed people speak Spanish.
And even though I knew
it was a dream – that my parents

were in detention, giving tattoos with soot and wire
in exchange for cigarettes –
my heart became cold,

an iceberg floating in the emptiness of my ribcage.
Cherbourg froze in nuclear winter.
There was nowhere safe. They had even found me

in this tiny coastal town. They will find me
even in this tiny coastal town.
Blood can always smell its own.

VI.

My time in Cherbourg
has been hard. Every morning,
there is a new alphabet
leaning against the wall
that I have to learn.
There is only one brand
of deodorant, and it seems
like everyone plays a musical
instrument except me. I cook
elaborate dinners of fresh seafood

for nobody. And I had to get rid
of my mirror
because I was tired of seeing
my fleshy face staring back at me,
needy and prayerful
as a terrorist.

The Golem in Boca

From the deck I can see the sunrise break in the ocean
 like a yolk.
 A tumbler filled with ice cubes sweats in my hand
 as the ocean's tongue
 rewrites the sand. The residents make coffee, arrange jeweled
 slices of smoked salmon,
 slap their arms until the blood's script returns to their skin.
 God fills their
 hearths with mangoes, wet bunches of fish, onions, raisins.
 I do not eat,
 but keep a bowl of lemons on the kitchen table should
 anyone drop by.
 They have shriveled up with waiting. At ten I have a
 tennis lesson, and
 at two I'm going on a nature walk along the highway.
 The residents think
 I am a monster, but still smile at me. I came here because
 I thought it would
 be good for my cough. It's only at sunset, when the angels
 come, cradling
 a flaming aleph in each arm, that I miss my home. They
 bring the curtains
 that used to part when I walked down the street. They bring
 the voice of Father,
 his old hands, his heart choked with clay. They bring
 the blanket of
 black river that wrapped around me. I miss the love
 of my people
 most of all. But now the corners of the sky swell with light,
 another morning
 of strange distances. The palms rustle with quick lizards,
 with blue flies.
 The residents are waking up but I do not sleep and so
 spend the nights
 as empty as an attic, feeding small parts of myself
 to the murmuring ocean.

The Real Weight of Everything

I am looking at a photograph
of the sky in which the sun
looks like the absence of some
thing it was taken by my friend L
who is as beautiful and lonely
as the settling of a house
she says the corn really whispers
sends up words like shotgunning
birds against the hole through which
dusk's light is bleeding where am I
in all of this I think in Pittsburgh
though everything looks flat
the spotlight moon the matte
black rivers the furnaces emptied
of their ghosts I don't know
where I am which is why I am
sitting inside this phone booth
clutching the receiver with my collar
bone I remember where shadow's
tongue touched the corners of your
mouth where I wanted to place my finger
and write my name in one long line
across your back but you dissolved
at my touch and became
atmosphere again bright white air
surrounding row after row
of wooden houses the kind
I might have painted fifty years
ago if I hadn't also been
atmosphere I think what L and I
are missing is density the real
weight of everything we have
become cloud country too much
sky to make sense of
I think maybe I will drive to Illinois
to see her or drive some where else
to see you maybe the mountain
top where you have surely settled
where your haze can catch
my voice on its way back down



Enlightenment Suite:
Invocation of the Forces of Goodness

I want to clear the air. I want to take off this belt
and oyster cufflink. I want to put down the portion
of lumber I have been carrying for the past
one hundred miles. I want to bury his name in the sand.

Once I helped the monks sweep out their hallways.
Once I weaved tapestries in my spare time. Once I
had a furnace in my stomach. I want all of it back.
I want a bed of sunlight. I want a chair I can play
like the xylophone. I want a handful of chickenbones
and the future they tell. Give me the sand and I will
bury his name. O Moses give me anything.

O Muhammad O Einstein O Joan of Arc O Bob
Newhart O Plato O Gene Kelly O Dalai Lama O
Dostoyevsky O Ginsberg O Galileo O Madonna
give me anything. Give me the map, the iron compass.
Point me towards what will ease my mind.

A Melody to Sever the Ego Syndrome

Now the only music
is coming through the passes:
the thin whine of wind,
the snow's dim percussion.

Inside the mountain,
I am cutting off my beard.
A small fire is burning
in the corner. A jug of wine

& the old phonograph,
its mouth hanging open
like a shell. Next to that,
the only three records

I have. I only listen to one –
Buddha's Dial-A-Hit.
It reminds me that soon
the long winter will yield

to spring. The mountains
will foam with jasmine,
extra-vaginal lilies, the music
of birds fucking in their shiny

trees. I can almost feel
the warmth on my flanks.
It's time to play that record.
Time for the phonograph

to speak. The stone floor
is carpeted with my beard.
I lean back as Buddha
plugs in his wah-wah pedal.

Here come the bongos.
I am a bird. No, a cloud.
I am an ugly white star,
looking down at myself.

Dance of the Black Hat Masters

I saw the angel in the marble
and I carved until I set it free.
I moved the meats around
until the labyrinth appeared.
Even the monks were surprised
by what I could find in a cornfield.

Last week I found enough teeth
to make a piano. I played it
in the town square, which the villagers
had hung with lights. We Watusied.
We tangoed in precise grids.
We waltzed our faces off.

A man wearing pure white robes
and a black hat moved among the crowd.
His face was obscured by a mask.
He asked everyone questions. His voice
was beautiful – like slate. We ended up
under the same tree. I let him put his
hand down my pants in exchange
for the sight of his face. It was dark
but he looked like some body I used
to know. Even the night can't hide

anything from me. I took hold
of my past – its heart beat,
I swear – and swept into the trees.

Intense Encounters of the Third Degree

How many of your mouths can you open?
 Can you see the face in the tree's grain?
 Is there enough time for one more dispiriting boxstep
 before the sun sets?
 Remember this time last year? The car sinking in the lake?
 How our hearts turned to cobalt smoke?
 Why didn't you stay
 where I left you?
 What are the secrets of the moon?
 Why should I give a fuck about the moon?
 Can I

get a glass of water? Can your finger
 tips turn it into bourbon? Are there snakes in the garden
 or can I step freely? Are you empty like a paper
 lantern? Are you still filled with my breath?
 How did you take the silver
 from the trees? Where did God go & why
 did he stop talking to the universe?
 Do dogs always howl
 north? Why is

Polaris so bright?
 Did you love or hate me &
 what was the difference?
 Remember how my thumbs fit perfectly into your eyes?
 Remember light vanishing
 into my mouth?

The Snow Lion Dance

According to my new
perspective everything
is a circle. I am a circle
of hands and eyes and
forehead. According to my
new perspective the mountains
are Technicolored: reds
more vivid than blood,
blues to get lost in. According
to my new perspective
the world is one border-
less organ, one house
stuffed with lightbulbs.
I want to praise some-
one but I'm not sure who.
Rejoice! Rejoice! I ought
to say it with bells but
bells are expensive.
I will let my prayer flags
flap in the breeze. I pull
the costume out of storage,
repair the moth-bitten parts
with crane feathers and
moss. According to my
new perspective this is
what I'm meant to be:
the Snow Lion. My roar
is the sound of emptiness.
I climb the peaks and valleys,
a caterpillar of snow. Rejoice!
Flowers grow in my foot-
steps. Rejoice! I want
to sing to every rock that
will listen. Rejoice! I am
so close to the sun now.
The land is a golden heaven.
Rejoice! This fire is what
we have been waiting for.