

THIS MYOPIA: POEMS AND PROLOGUE

by

CHRISTOPHER JON MCDERMOTT

(Under the Direction of Brian Henry)

ABSTRACT

The prologue describes two kinds of myopia in relation to poetry: a myopia of being, characterized by habit, distraction, and numbness, and a myopia of perception governing poetry's hermeneutical range. Drawing on Blanchot, Agamben, Kandinsky and Lefebvre, the prologue advocates a conscious relation to death as well as potential being, and argues that such a stance characterizes the poet who must write, in contrast to the recreational poet. All poets are dually myopic, however, since just as one can never fully understand mortality, one can never see with perfect clarity. American poets such as Emerson, Stevens, Oppen, Palmer, Wright, and Hejinian have confronted this struggle, described in ethical and spiritual terms by Levinas and William James. Poetry faces the question, "Is it possible to perceive an Other without appropriation?" yet repeatedly manifests the poet's particular "take." To escape the limitations of the self, Jack Spicer sought a poetry of "dictation." Artists such as John Cage, Jackson Mac Low, and Marcel Duchamp used methods of generating randomness to lessen the influence of the ego upon their work while acknowledging authorship. The poems in *This Myopia* generally avoid the strict procedures of Oulipo yet employ a variety of methods, including one generating words from strings of the numbers comprising π . This links thematically to the poems, many of which concern circularity, the desire to expand one's range, and the impossibility of measurement. One form takes the end part of a chromosome, called a telomere, as a rough model for composing a poem. Another, the use of the line as fractal geometry, derives from chaos theory's consideration of self-similarity across scales of measurement. While often ending in lines suggesting closure, the poems suggest that a provisional sense of closure furthers more exploration, whereas open-endedness can fail to acknowledge the vigorous act of trying to understand while knowing one's perceptions are tenuous.

INDEX WORDS: myopia, perception, Blanchot, Agamben, Kandinsky, Lefebvre, potential energy, hermeneutics, Oppen, Palmer, Wright, Hejinian, Stevens, π , telomere

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DEDICATION

For Jennifer Morley...light to the dark, light blue

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PROLOGUE

Myopia describes not a curable ailment but a state of being. When referring to sight, it implies a contrast between what one does see and what one might see under more favorable conditions. It differs from blindness in its relative nature; whereas blindness means the lack of sight, myopia is sight deemed insufficient. Like blindness, myopia also refers to thinking, but while blindness implies the complete failure to understand, myopia of the mind suggests exclusion and a stand-in—a deficient *something else* that commands the attention. As a way of being in the world, myopia begs poetry's answer. Poetry cannot overcome myopia, but when myopia signifies habit and taking one's way of life for granted, poetry can grant an otherwise elusive way of being. The poet threatened and informed by this crisis can supplant, however briefly, a myopia of non-being with a myopia of perception and form.

The poet who writes while understanding the consequences of not writing differs fundamentally from the recreational poet (who serves the self above all and lobbies others for a confirmation of individual experience). The poet who needs to write, who faces poetry as a last and only resort, serves the art, regardless of the cost and with little prospect of reward. In *The Space of Literature*, Maurice Blanchot defines art as “primarily the consciousness of unhappiness, not its compensation” (75). He describes the situation faced by someone inescapably drawn to writing:

Certain artists, through no one knows what good fortune or bad luck, undergo (writing's) pull in an almost pure form: they have approached this instant by chance, as it were, and wherever they go, whatever they do, it retains them. It is an imperious and empty demand exerted all of the time, drawing them out of time. They do not desire to write: to them glory is vain, the immortality of works of art does not impress them, and the obligations of the calling are foreign to them. To live in the happy passion of beings—that is what they prefer. But their preferences are not taken into account, and they are themselves dismissed, propelled into the essential solitude from which they do not emerge except by writing a little. (55)

Blanchot suggests that the writer who prefers the colossal difficulty of writing to the agony of not writing will find not contentment, but perhaps less alienation. How could this be true for the solitary writer? Blanchot defines alienation as not only the lack of otherness, but also the unavoidable remoteness from one's potential. According to Giorgio Agamben in his essay "Ethics," "There is in effect something that humans are and have to be, but this something is not an essence nor properly a thing: *It is the simple fact of one's own existence as possibility or potentiality.*" He argues that since we are always at a distance from our potential, we always "have and feel a debt." (43)

Because of an incalculable distance separating the possibilities for life in the world and the possibilities for life on the page, an unavoidable tension persists, for to fulfill one's potential means more than achieving goals; it also requires death. The implications leave the writer in a quandary. As if perceiving his life weren't difficult enough, the task of perceiving his death requires the impossible. Blanchot insists, "To see properly is essentially to die. It is to introduce into sight the turning back again which is ecstasy and which is death...things then offer themselves in the inexhaustible fecundity of their meaning which our vision ordinarily misses—our vision which is only capable of one point of view" (151). If we had a

lifetime to do nothing else but attempt to “see properly,” as Blanchot says, the task would be prohibitive. Nevertheless, we might glean at least some real understanding of the problem. For the majority preoccupied with local needs, life from day to day can vary little and its limitations and potential may go unquestioned.

Wassily Kandinsky describes people in such a predicament as being unconsciously dead. Only an external “jolt,” he submits in *Point and Line to Plane*, is capable of “shaking us from our dead state into living experience” (539). In order to earn a living, most people sacrifice time to jobs that employ a meager fraction of one’s abilities and desires. Subscribing to an excessively restricted range of behavior, they have learned that to express interest in more than a designated task is to be distracted, inefficient, a worker to be replaced. A society characterized by such conflicts, asserts Henri Lefebvre in *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, is a “terrorist society” in which “the individual seems to disappear, and they take place in everyday life” (151). Lefebvre places the burden of responsibility on the masses that never question if things could be otherwise, who adapt and deny any of their observations incongruent with the given structure. He writes, “People living in everyday life refuse to believe their own experience and to take it into account; they are not obliged to behave in this way, nobody forces them, they force themselves—a typical feature of the terrorist society; only a very small minority draw conclusions from what they know” (187).

“What is laid upon us is to accomplish the negative; the positive is already given” (Goodman, 3), said Franz Kafka, who saw the positive as the certainty of death and all the lesser deaths inflicted upon an individual in the meantime. For the poet, the terms of the given world inflict at worst a terrorism against his life, and at best an indifference to anything

he might conceive. While he always recalls W.H. Auden's claim that "poetry makes nothing happen," the act of writing poems is nevertheless a resistance against ceding his life to uses dictated by those who would find him interchangeable. Poetry is thus a confrontation with everything at stake. It confronts all that tells an individual his life does not matter, and if confronts death, which calls him naïve to assume he has time to understand even his insignificance. It matters little whether or not the poet finds, in these clashes, agreement or disagreement with that to which he first stands most opposed. What matters more depends upon the question's open-endedness, enough so to allow the poet to continue writing, concerned less with an ultimate verdict than with accruing evidence in a painstaking process.

Writing poems depends not so much upon a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," as William Wordsworth insisted, as upon the capacity for feeling at all in the midst of overwhelmingly numbing conditions. In the poem "To the Reader" from his book *Torn Awake*, Forrest Gander situates the reader before a mirror, disappointed in finding "wrinkles of sarcasm, the crow's-feet of insomnia, / and the bleary eye of hesitation, / and the silent voice saying look what time it is, and your name, and why don't you lie down / so you'll be rested for work tomorrow." He asks the reader, "How has the tactical amnion of habit failed / to protect you? Gone from yourself, you are not alone. Although when / you are gone, / you are not." In this scene, the reader confronts his face as text, and Gander implies that a literate act of such introspection can bring to light one's crisis of being, resulting in a need to break from habitual slumber. Why looking in the mirror, itself an habitual act, could one day offer an epiphany remains a mystery. Writers such as Paul Valéry and Kandinsky have tried to identify the source of wakefulness and both conclude that it comes from within; both say that a "disturbance" along with an awareness of the fact leads to feeling.

“The open eye and the open ear,” Kandinsky proposes, “transform the slightest disturbance into a profound experience.” (539)

Such exceptional occasions evoke a sense of being alive that Susanne K. Langer describes as art’s essential subject. In *Feeling and Form*, she claims that the “*illusion of life* is the primary illusion of all poetic art” (213) and describes how a poet selects and orders details:

The appearances of events in our actual lives are fragmentary, transient and often indefinite, like most of our experience—like the space we move in, the time we feel passing, the human and inhuman forces that challenge us. The poet’s business is to create the appearance of ‘experiences,’ the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of *virtual life*. (212)

The poet must fight the deadening forces of the habitual, from sources both internal and external, if his life is to be anything more than a frustration. Everywhere he looks, he finds a world he did not create, a conflict described by George Oppen as almost a cliché and the predominant complaint of young poets in 1959. “I suspect I identify myself to them as the enemy the moment I accept some responsibility for the way things are” (Duplessis, 26), Oppen wrote, referring to his project of immersing himself in the world, which he defined through such activities as going to war, working for the Communist party, becoming a cabinetmaker, and working in a factory. Oppen had retreated from poetry into a twenty-five year period of silence, convinced that his first book, *Discrete Series*, demonstrated an insufficient understanding of the world in its particulars. Considering poetry “a test of truth,” Oppen demanded that his poetry adhere to the same project of critical perception and interpretation that he valued in his life.

This hermeneutical approach has a long history in American poetry and may reflect an inherent anxiety concerning the ethics of perception. Gerald Bruns, in *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, outlines two kinds of hermeneutical experience: “In the one the subject internalizes its object, consumes it, adds it to itself; in the other the subject is divested, exposed, and transformed by what happens to it” (154). Bruns refers to Emmanuel Levinas’s concern with the ethics of the social encounter, where face meets face in a moment of “proximity and exposure” (146) that risks appropriation and vulnerability, as well as Augustine’s religious concerns when he writes, “For they are able to see only insofar as they are dead to this world; insofar as they live in it, they do not see” (142). Bruns emphasizes, “As in mystical tradition, the cleansing of the eye is the crucial event. It is a metaphor of initiation and spiritual transformation.” Perhaps it is a concern that humans are flawed, corrupting everything in sight, that led Ralph Waldo Emerson to describe a transcendent way of seeing in his essay “Nature”: “I become a transparent eyeball, I am nothing—I see all” (11). But Emerson’s scene where “all mean egotism vanishes” must remain more prescriptive than descriptive of what humans can manage.

This Myopia, in several respects, attempts to answer Emerson and a selection of poets deeply engaged with issues of perception—primarily Wallace Stevens, Michael Palmer, Charles Wright, and Lyn Hejinian. *This Myopia* confronts the unpredictable consequences of restricted perception—at times an utter inability to navigate one’s environment, at times the consequences of not being able to apprehend death and the resultant diversion of attention onto intermediary forms.

In *Mind of Winter*, William Bevis describes the situation faced by Stevens, who tried to approach Emerson's ideal but faced the limitations of the self: "Just as T.S. Eliot bemoaned the 'distressing emphasis on personality' in a modern age stripped of all authority beyond psyche and cortex, Stevens also tired of the triumph of self and yearned to encounter an other that was not created in his own images" (10). Stevens' "The Snow Man," perhaps more than any other poem, depicts this crisis of perception. Despite Stevens' insistence that his poetry was inevitably autobiographical, critics such as Harold Bloom and Helen Vendler have denounced "The Snow Man" for demonstrating a repression or evasion of self, as if such a detached stance were an inferior one. Bevis distinguishes between imaginative perception and meditative perception, and says that the detached state of meditative perception employs "a passive rather than an active self. The result is at least the illusion of an other perceived in purity, without imagination. This mode of perception usually generates poetic image, not metaphor, and is often set in a context of stasis, unity, or even peace" (11). Studies of the human brain show that during meditative states, the part of the brain that controls language is inactive. If this were the case, then it would be impossible to speak from a condition of pure transparency. Stevens appears to recognize this and come to a compromise when he writes in *Adagia* that "The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe it willingly" (903).

If Emerson is an idealist and Stevens a realist who compromises, then Michael Palmer, in *The Promises of Glass*, is a seeker of the perfect opacity. Palmer weighs the notion that metaphor can only approach transparency, and dissatisfied with repeating Stevens' methods and conclusions, presents lines such as the following from "Autobiography 13":

“Here, try these, my new glasses. / Note that I have painted the lenses black // As ink.” He thus suggests that if metaphor cannot show us the perfect transparent vision, perhaps it can blind us with the opposite. In the first of his eighteen “Autobiography” poems, Palmer starts with the line “All clocks are clouds,” furthering the idea that metaphor leads to obfuscation. Palmer repeatedly suggests that too much self and too much light hinder perception. His preference for an uncompromised darkness characterizes “Autobiography 14”: “and we noted the sun’s // utter failure to explain / anything at all.”

One can start with the conclusion that achieving clarity is impossible or, as in the case of George Oppen, one can undertake an attempt to know and fall short, but perhaps fall short differently and interestingly. Among those who have grappled with this issue, Charles Wright considers the Western tradition as well as the Buddhist perspective in which selfless perception, that admittedly elusive foundation, would allow one to contemplate the divine, which Wright identifies as the given content for each of his poems. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein writes, “When do we say that any one is observing? Roughly: when he puts himself in a favourable position to receive certain impressions in order (for example) to describe what they tell him” (161). Just as John Keats’ concept of negative capability proposed a stance for observation, Wright’s trilogy *Negative Blue* can be seen as a realized manifestation of such an endeavor: capability, Wright suggests, must take on a color to become actual; it cannot remain abstract and neutral. His choice of blue (“Sky blue, blue of infinity” from the poem “Black Zodiac”) evokes the sky as the height of perception, but *Black Zodiac*, the second book in the trilogy, suggests the lack of all illumination which might otherwise have allowed one to extrapolate fragmented perception toward a sense of unity.

Black Zodiac's sense of futility manifests itself from the first line of the first poem, "Apologia Pro Vita Sua": "How soon we come to road's end— / Failure, our two-dimensional side-kick, flat dream-light, / Won't jump-start or burn us in." Yet for Wright the failure remains necessary if one wants to avoid the insufficient comforts of dogma. Plato's statement, "God always geometrizes," alternately expressed as "God is in the details" (attributed variously to Albert Einstein, Gustave Flaubert, Friedrich Nietzsche, Vladimir Nabokov, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, among others), informs Wright's exploration of the visible world. He tries to proceed objectively, wanting as his only bias the expectation that the divine will reveal itself in details if he remains ready to receive it. "The secret of the universe is Form," he writes in his book *Half-life*, "even if poems are not the secret of the universe. 'They're only clues to the secret of the universe'" (154). Wright's intention of open-mindedness combined with formal arrangement as poetic strategy resonates almost completely with the following passage from William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*:

When one views the world with no definite theological bias one way or the other, one sees that order and disorder, as we now recognize them, are purely human inventions. We are interested in certain types of arrangement, useful, aesthetic, or moral,— so interested that whenever we find them realized, the fact emphatically rivets our attention. The result is that we work over the contents of the world selectively. It is overflowing with disorderly arrangements from our point of view, but order is the only thing we care for and look at, and by choosing, one can always find some sort of orderly arrangement in the midst of any chaos...Nature...is a vast *plenum* in which our attention draws capacious lines in innumerable directions. We count and name whatever lies upon the special lines we trace, whilst the other things and the untraced lines are neither named nor counted. (438)

For a book that begins with coming to the end of a road, the conclusions packed in the final poem of *Black Zodiac*, "Disjecta Membra" offer further resignation:

A writer's sense of audience can play a defining role in his poetry. Just as one should never take poetry itself for granted, one should never assume a captive audience. This does not mean that a writer must cater to an audience or entertain. It does, however, require respect for an audience's time and intelligence. If a poet cannot regard his readers as equals offering their valuable time and unquestionable aptitude, he will likely pander and condescend. His writing will likely be predictable, since he may see little need to depart from a way of writing with which he is content. Exploring the poem as a social interaction in his essay "The Scandal of Sincerity," Steve McCaffery applies Levinas' sense of the Other, as expressed in such works as *Totality and Infinity*, to the reader: "There's a sense in which all poems are offered as faces" (229). He describes how Levinas "focuses on the paramount need for individual responsibility for the other person and on that other's unique status as a separate, nonassimilable selfhood." In his exploration of one of Levinas' central ideas, McCaffery imagines the reader

...as a neighbor ordered to the writer's responsibility, with an obligation to read a text as if responding to a face—its nudity and obligation...Levinas's own description of the critic-reader can be seen to present interpretive response as an unethical violence of appropriation rather than the pacific economy of neighborliness. (210)

A similar exacting relationship, therefore, applies between both poet and audience and poet and language. In her essay "The Rejection of Closure," Lyn Hejinian writes, "Language discovers what one might know, which in turn is always less than what language might say" (48). When a poet such as Hejinian adopts such a humble position, she works in the lively state of inquiry, orienting herself toward the language as the generous poet orients

herself toward an audience. Such a decision works to avert the harm caused by its converse, described by Martin Heidegger in *Poetry, Language, Thought*:

Man acts as though *he* were the shaper and master of language, while in fact *language* remains the master of man. Perhaps it is before all else man's subversion of *this* relation of dominance that drives his nature into alienation. That we retain a concern for care in speaking is all to the good, but it is of no help to us as long as language still serves us even then only as a means of expression. (144)

To escape the overdeterminations of the self, Jack Spicer advocated a poetry of “dictation,” where the personal would be negated to the greatest extent possible. Spicer admitted that one would always have “mental furniture” in the way, and so complete negation is never possible; he believed that his emphasis on accomplishing the negative led to an uncovering of something more valuable and otherwise hidden. Artists such as John Cage, Jackson Mac Low, and Marcel Duchamp have used methods of generating randomness toward similar ends, each simultaneously working to lessen the influence of the ego upon their work while acknowledging authorship. Calvin Tomkins, in *The Bride and the Bachelors*, quotes Duchamp: “Your chance is not the same as my chance, just as your throw of the dice will rarely be the same as mine” (33). The validity of this statement has been borne out further by scientific experiments carried out by such organizations as the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research program (PEAR), where random number generators have produced results particular to different human operators. However, chance operations interest me less as an end result and more as a useful means of provoking a less predictably subjective use of language. In *This Myopia*, I have applied a variety of methods, including one similar to Charles Bernstein’s advocacy of homophonic translations, where one takes a text written in an unknown language and writes a “translation” based not on

fidelity to the meaning of the original text, but on how the letters prompt a response in one's own language. My source text, however, includes strings of the numbers comprising *pi*. This also links thematically to poems, many of which concern circularity, the desire to expand one's range, and the impossibility of measurement. Blanchot describes how such a matter consumed the attention of Kafka: "Of all the undertakings to which he applies himself in order to orient his life differently, he himself will say that they are nothing but broken attempts, so many radii making the center of that incomplete circle, his life, bristle with dots" (64). When such themes are inherent in the forms themselves, they can influence the content both deliberately and unexpectedly.

This *pi*-based form uses a system derived from *The Memory Book* by Harry Lorayne and Jerry Lucas, wherein each number corresponds to one or more consonants, grouped linguistically by sound. For example, the number *one* matches the dental sounds of "t" and "d," *two* the nasal sounds of "m" and "n," and *four* the liquids of "l" and "r." Vowels are variable and have no assigned value. The process of scanning numbers, while reading them as one would read music, invokes words. Any word may launch a poem. "Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination" (4), said Wittgenstein, and my procedure is similar to unsystematically playing notes on a keyboard; eventually, I begin to select patterns which accrue towards becoming a song. Since *pi* is a non-repeating string of numbers, every possible utterance could conceivably be produced by this method. I typically use a string of several hundred numbers at a time, and since multiple interpretations are always available, what results in the selection amounts to a kind of Rorschach test measure of disposition. I wrote the poem "Citrus" using this method. After turning an array of numbers into words, I examined the words for what I call their "pivot value," a subjective

sense of a word's energy and potential. While I have seen how poets have painstakingly employed Oulipo techniques, the success of their projects can often depend upon an acknowledgement of the particular problem they have solved. My methods may serve as necessary tools in building a poem, but I have tried, within the poems themselves, to keep them hidden. Few of them have unbreakable formal imperatives. On the occasions when I have worked with rules in the strictest tradition of Oulipo, such as when I wrote poems conforming precisely to a string of p_i , I was disappointed with my overall results. While parts of the poem appeared surprisingly strong, most of it seemed to strain too hard to fit the form. For me, such procedures risk losing the fundamental purpose of writing against the rule of death. Writing against invented rules interposed between oneself and death may help to break habits and may lead to surprise, undoubtedly valuable results, but innovative craft most effectively combines with fundamental necessity. To that end, I have sought to develop forms whose fundamental nature connects writing with death. The relationship between "Citrus" and death, for instance, is one of myopia as distraction. When content's dire implications resist one's grasp, attention turns toward particular aspects of the content's form.

Another form I created takes the end part of a chromosome, called a telomere, as a rough model for composing a poem. As chromosomes replicate over time, they do so imperfectly. Genetic information gets lost in the process and aging ensues. Telomeres contain DNA sequences, they play a necessary role in replication, and they "act as caps to keep the sticky ends of chromosomes from randomly clumping together." Starting with a line containing a sentence, phrase, or word as the initial code of information, I "destabilize" the line by removing a letter. With the remaining available letters, I form another line,

continuing the process of loss and reconfiguration until just one letter remains. Such a process requires a countless exploration of options before the result shows anything more than a tedious formal puzzle. My poem “Telomere” posits an internal monologue of a scrivener, much like *Bartleby* but one who would rather translate or deform a text than copy it. The poem must end with a choice between “I” or “T”; it ends with “T” because the scrivener loses any sign of the self. Only the first initial and trademark of the poem’s title remains. Thus a theme of the form itself, loss and reconfiguration, also pertains to the poem’s themes. The telomere device can also work in the larger scheme of other poems. The first two words of “Miss Neighbors,” for example, are “She said,” with the third, “she’d,” following the telomere’s rule of loss and reconfiguration. In the poem, a boy loses his ability to speak, and consequently is united only to his own name, as spoken twice by the teacher, while the other students pair a word of their choosing to her calling of their names.

T.S. Eliot said in “The Music of Poetry,” “No verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job” (31). His statement relates to my poems most significantly in terms of sound. While rhyme is the most obvious of all poetic devices, I favor a progression of sounds that turns back on itself, as with a musical riff that starts with a note and ends on the same note. Sometimes this pattern concerns single words such as “cook,” “museum,” “laurel,” and “local”; at other times a “reverse-rhyme” of words such as “nail” and “lemon” offers a harmonious effect to the ear while remaining relatively undetectable as intentional form.

Another form I often adopt, the use of the line as fractal geometry, derives from chaos theory’s consideration of self-similarity across scales of measurement. Considered out

of context from the poem, each line still resonates with the larger poem. Examples of this occur in the first two lines, “My life com- / posed of sequels” from “Bartleby: Basal,” emphasizing Bartleby’s life as a commercial endeavor in the first line, and in the second line how the repetitiveness posed to him splits his composure. Sometimes the fractal line will offer the reader a cue to reading the poem, as in the lines “sincere; this can’t be,” from “Mother Upstairs,” and from “Haze,” “Are you hungry / I’d feed you post // haste, so much else” where the line break on “post” emphasizes the speaker’s apologetic stance, as if all that can be offered to a genuinely hungry reader is akin to a self-serving stake in the ground or a post on a blog.

Words and lines open to several interpretations hold a particular attraction. Alice Fulton praises what she calls a “supercluster word,” and admires Emily Dickinson’s poetry for its multivalence: “In real life, taking one path usually means forsaking all others. A Dickinson poem, in contrast, allows us to experience many outcomes, some of them conflicting. ‘I dwell in Possibility—’ she wrote. Her poems prolong the intoxicating moment before choice when all options are potentially ours” (152-153). In his notebooks, Albert Camus makes a similar comment about an artist’s relationship to his options : “The true artist stands midway between what he imagines and what he does. He is the one who is ‘capable of.’ He could be what he describes, experience what he writes. The mere act would limit him; he would be the one who has acted” (11). Both of these observations help account for potential energy as a theme in my poems, and multivalence as a strategy. The “supercluster” words I have intentionally used include “founder,” “terminal,” “caves,” “concentration,” and “pupils.” While “myopia” is not such a multivalent word in its definitions, its sound evokes “Utopia,” and also hints at “my opiate,” as in, “religion is the

opiate of the people,” but with poetry substituting for religion. Myopia thus has an ironic relationship toward much that it connotes; it is a word whose sound suggests grandeur or consolation in fantasy, drugs, or religion, and whose denotation implies failure.

In *My Life*, Hejinian writes, “Skies are the terrain of this myopic, eyes are the servants of perception. Of course, this is a poem, that model of inquiry. Of death life bound.” As someone long interested in psychology, I undertook a series of biofeedback sessions to better understand how my perception works. The most important implication for my poetry was discovering a tendency to shift into a meditative, non-language associated state (called the alpha state) when confronted with unpleasant thoughts. I concluded that my poetry must confront the negative if I am to speak at all. The implications of such an active approach apply pressure to my poems, which encounter anxiety over doing more harm than good and making a bad situation worse. In Samuel Beckett’s novel *Murphy*, an annotated chess game between Murphy and Endon calls Murphy’s first move of the game (P-K4, commonly considered a good first move in chess) “The primary cause of all White’s subsequent difficulties” (244) as if to act at all in a disagreeable situation will only further the chaotic progression toward ruin. My poem “Haze” has a speaker concerned about his calculating restraint while around him energy flows militantly and rampantly; he eventually receives the command to “made like an admiral or surrender.” The word “admiral” suggests a slight pun on “admire,” as if an admiral is “one who admires” as opposed to the speaker who deems the environment terrifying and would prefer retreat. The speaker’s sense of exile is heightened by the lack of agreeable options; if he stays, he must surrender, whereas becoming an admiral means he must abandon his land for the sea.

It has become almost a truism that poems should avoid closure, as if closure itself suggested certainty. In Charles Simic's review of John Ashbery, titled "Tragicomic Soup," he writes, "By taking lightly the whole idea of one meaning, he blasphemes against our transcendentalist tradition, which all but obligates the American poet to end each poem with a wholesome insight, if not a cosmic vision. 'Please don't tell me if it all adds up in the end. / I'm sick of that.'" I propose that the assertion of uncertainty is yet another kind of certainty, and it often gets used as a crutch. A poem may end with ellipses, for example, in an interesting way, when the momentum of the poem suggests multiple resolutions (as it typically does with Ashbery), but it may also end with a sense that the ellipses are alibis, insufficient rain checks for having nothing to say at the moment and deferring a sense of closure that would reveal that lack more acutely. Poets who don't fear risking a fleeting sense of insight, who don't fear having to later contradict themselves, work in a more dynamic range. While my poems often end in a line that clearly feels conclusive, I don't propose to nominate them as acts of knowing. I see them more in line with the idea expressed in my poem "Drip Drop," where each paint stroke or act of language compares to adding paint higher on a wall. The paint always drips down and revises what came before. I see a provisional sense of closure as furthering more debate, whereas open-endedness can fail to acknowledge the vigorous act of trying to understand in concert with knowing that one's perceptions are tenuous. Even some American poets most associated with sweeping, confident gestures have acknowledged their engagement in a process liable to change: "Do I contradict myself?" asked Walt Whitman near the end of "Song of Myself": "Very well I contradict myself. / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)" And Emerson: "I wish to say what I think and feel today, with the proviso that tomorrow perhaps I shall contradict it all." I

contend that to end every poem with a shrug is to neglect the greater variety of insufficient gestures that risk imbalance and call for further action.

Some of my poems include nods to earlier poets. The sprung rhythm of Gerard Manley Hopkins' "morning morning's minion" informs the phrase "scar scarred nerves" in "Atmos." In "Azimuth," the speaker offers a little finger as "the least bombastic gesture," in contrast with John Keats' majestic "This Living Hand." This also resonates with an underlying concern in the poems that human potential has become dangerous beyond measure, and it cannot be freely celebrated. Heidegger writes that "To be a poet in a destitute time means: to attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods" (92), and this concept applies to "The Man With the Subtle Spatula," in which an Apollo-like figure is reduced to waiting in traffic and later apologizing to his food.

Camus writes, "For the work to be a challenge, it must be finished (this is why one must say 'without sequel'). It is the opposite of divine creation. It is finished, thoroughly limited, clear, molded to the human requirement. 'The unity is in our hands'" (86). Myopia's paradox consists of knowing that unless one sees less than what one saw before, knowing what sight neglects can be a vague assumption at best. Poetry engages both the crisis of being and the crisis of perception; a feeling of longing can only hope to suggest what myopia excludes. In the words attributed to Robert Creeley, "I see as I write." Writing thus leaves evidence of the struggle and the coming to terms, however lacking, with myopia.

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THIS MYOPIA

HELLO FROM PLATEAU RIDGE

By want or by slant we grasp not much
save the drastic. Drawn to the catastrophic
or ecstatic, we push on middles toward one
of these bounds. Such lunacy took hold
who knows when? There were hints in the way
we treated plants. When they seemed nearly
dead, that's when we swore to water religiously.
Till no one cared to maintain their frontier green.

THE SUMMIT FARMERS

Is it hubris
to fuse atop
a mountain where
nothing grows?

Criminal not to
notice the police?

Shall a Love
Tax be levied,
all fortune be
taken for stolen
in ritual gloss?

Over measured
soil, for a stay
of compensation. O
to steal inside our
cells and break.

HANDS OF THE ARCHER

You may find a consequence familiar—
staring at mounts during driving
and archery. Nothing is natural.

There's a stray because and why
come down to blue and black—
pokeberry, larkspur, soot.

I vow to inherit fingerprints
and honor the endless wander—
spreading dust, magnifying glass.

Half a chestnut builds an orchestra
while in diners we shrink in spoons,
never asked, "Will you eat?" It's just taken

we'll choose. I hear on slopes
no one falls anymore,
that everyone's learned how to look

though some days all tones plunge
to complaint, like a chauffeur's regret
he won't spin past his tires.

Some days the question isn't suit
or shirt but nothing and sheets—

not the lost sails of lost ships
nor partial flags to be released.
Not the wind's hungry wrappers.

CITRUS

Chronic simpers in between.
They temper an otherwise
ache niche. *You took it so*
easy on us, who could tell

the Alps? I was distracted
by the arc of a bluff.
Cave-makers fighting
for the hills. By the chaff

that was such a choosable
straw. *No no no* and on,
it can be impossible to use
up the no feeling. The siphons

I choose I soon recant.
I was distracted by a cook
who was pushing the ashes
of a lullaby mechanic

in a clay sauce.
By the cosine of a nail.
By the shapes of the lemon
I was crushing on the ashes.

THE PLAIN SEDAN

comes standard as a hearse and often
 looks paved-colored. To blend
 with roads may comfort the driver
 who chose this car, whose shoes resemble clay.
 Among the two riders it holds one says

My foot could fall off and the other
This air smells like laughing gas.
 By habit the driver situates north
 or maybe it's a needle in his eye.
 For west and east he remembers: WE.

The passenger's stance is to peer over glasses,
 an effort to offset her lack of sway.
 In the plain sedan they speak a wooden tongue—
 neither splinter nor tinder, nor offer to ply.

The plain sedan pulls roadside, toward
 tree trunks stacked like shins.

Such pressure to counter is bound to relax—
 The plain sedan shall be dented into recognition.

MOTHER UPSTAIRS

The morning the mother
upstairs said bye to
her baby she didn't sound

sincere. *This can't be,*
I thought and so went
to the doctor to get

my perception checked.
"Everything's a bit off,"
I cried and told him of

the mother. He put light
in my ears and eyes
and mouth. He hit me

in the kneecaps till I kicked.
"Who's the mother?" he said
and I told of how she owned

the space where I live,
how I'd heard her upstairs,
and watched her baby.

"What else?" he pressed and I told
how the mother had begun to drop
her "I"s when she spoke.

This caused many of her statements,
such as "Appreciate it,"
to sound like commands.

"Any history in your family?"
he asked and I replied that it is
only math. That lately

in my room I'd found geometry,
and am working
out the distance of a circle.

AZIMUTH

Here it is, the little finger.
The least bombastic gesture.
The one you're freest to interpret.

Will you liken it to fingers known
to wed, appease, insult, accuse?

I awoke with a bearing, though
tried to sleep without style.
I don't know what to make of it.

Is it friction holds the head
and feet from spinning,
grounds the lodestone spine?

I want to say there are boundless
ways to misconstrue true north,
forget your declination—

too much metal in your boat
or in your teeth, in your blood.

I awoke with a bearing, my newest
gesture pointing who knows where.
Homunculus, the face leaves prints.

Can you measure what a face put in
between the bones and where they point?
Does a mouth twist to compensate?

CATALYST

She would bring you clothes
but nothing fit.

She would disappear,
return with a coffin
you could see through.

Nearly invisible,
she'd say smiling,
Try it on.

Just your size,
and with holes for feet
you would wear it out.

You would take it and walk
your passage unseen.

Let the sun split
the glass and be

cast in burning
color to the bone.

ATMOS

So fumes start fatal and settle
in blend. One figures they've

been here, though sense caves
to all but the new, etcetera.

If you'll defy the catalogues,
I'll follow. To project

along your spine. Ready again
to scar scarred nerves.

We're a low-riding car
to whom bumps are nearly curbs.
See the hills' curves framed
through fence wire grids?

You should wear something
like that. If I never slip you

into bias or tribute, that's
liberty. This wasn't close

to concentration. Less a tour
to an undiluted space,

where like fumes driven out
of combustion we spin.

ESPALIER

Let's go not to our smile museum.
Meet me at socket face.

Look at that thing. Lately my jargon betrays
such a limited rapport with things.

You should be the one to drive.
Okay, taxi.

I listened so long to the horticulturist,
so particular and far, wondering how it begins.

All I've been doing is guessing where
we're going and gauging momentum.

No one deserves some musty homily.
You've probably come to expect

a song about voices, a dance about feet.
There's nothing I do that could skirt

the question of what am I still doing alive.
You say it's the same, that's why we pled *taxi*.

MISS NEIGHBORS

She said she'd call on everyone—
her rule was firm:

“When you hear your name,
you’ve got to give me a single word.”

The boy was more than worried.
He was laboring, thinking he'd always

remember each person with a word,
that everyone till death would remember.

But he wouldn't—not much—
just a twin who said “matches,”

Estelle who said “stitches,”
and the way they all looked

while this mute boy sat,
bewildered and never so alone

when she called his name:
twice and loud.

THE NUMBER ARTIST

Hired one day for substitute math,
he had us fill up the board
with favorite numbers,
then raising the chalk,
started turning them into people.

Five's curve became a nose.
Three lips.
Two the middle of an ear.

Ones proved versatile,
easily gone. Eights changed
to eyes and breasts
which infinity flipped
would never displace.

I drew zero, a mouth, though
would learn to see any number
of holes and spheres.

Thus math would always hold
the prospect of a tangled dance.

Each number shows
its part, waits
on the blank to be asked.

To be added, lost in the sum.

THE AREA RESIDENT

“Barely have time for my own flesh and blood,”
a neighbor maintains, cutting hedges again.

The fields controlled by the area resident
are flagged with high dandelions
testing their stems.

He was adopted by mistake,
moved to find families grow everywhere
they can afford to.

He remembers taking meals in the mandatory lunchroom,
knowing everybody-in-the-lunchroom’s name.

He thought the purpose of days was to add people.

Now he’s troubled by last names,
a feast to greet his altar.

BARTLEBY: BASAL

My life com-
posed of sequels
to the day I started
copying, I stop
to watch what
changes without me
and within.

All bosses leave.
I start to copy myself
and it's less:
No hands, just eyes
to close. I smell
the whole note
of each breath.

Follow closely
my regulated heart.

THE MAN WITH THE SUBTLE SPATULA

To the man about to cook, the moon was the wok's
antagonist. On his drive back from the terminal, red lights
mocked his range, lasted so long he almost lost interest.
He practiced his songs, watched crows in the laurel,
though he sang only bird and tree. The edible world
had its guarded price. Rock and dirt remained ample and free.

He was bracing to uphold the reputation of food.
Consistently lofty with his wife, it had wavered so much
throughout history—enough to leave anyone wary.
After a whole life of eating, he was unsure how
he would handle it now that she'd told him
their previous meal: "When you eat, you look like you're apolo-
gizing to the food."

TRUCE

There are skies you can live up to.

There are skies that bridge the stable
contract of the ceiling, beckon you in more
ways than maintenance can inhabit.

Though what if you conflate the possible
with the vague? Exploit your limits
for small-scale extrapolation?

There are skies sounding minor chords
off the locks of a woman.

You should not mistake this
as your call to intervene.

THE GIMCRACKS

Forge a door to forge
through it. Forge a window
to prove horizon
and trees intercede.

With a moon dark
reel in the infinite aside
from stars constricting.

If time shows, its measures
weigh a window's migrations
a door's hinge coming loose
not to mention flesh.

The eyes aim to feed
past a body and leave
but revert to form
additional roots.

Clothes, again, though
widely enforced &
fashioned in riveting threads
might hang for an era
more chosen than bone.

HAZE

1.

This take must prove
 maladaptive, unfit,
 a calculated haze
 amidst generals that hurdle
 particulars headlong.

No order restrains
 how the softest of treads
 forms a vise with the soil
 to what tries in between.

Kindred in the thicket
 one whittles toward totems
 while messenger fumes
 own the stage between
 tour de force timber
 and alibi flame.

No choice save a mask
 not to eat through the breath
 what flesh flies the breeze,
 olfactory benchmarks
 shift to deem standard
 the daily seared haze.

Your life suits a shield
 while you're holding it loath
 to one's take of the rule,
 they charged, make like
 an admiral or surrender

2.

And if this be of my life why
 or who another addressee?

I'm holding out
 no cures again

no lawful advice
 and am yet to listen

before taking your life
I mean your time,
I said your time!

Are you hungry
I'd feed you post

haste, so much else
I would do though

this otherwise cater bent
won't come through to you

whom I could hold, uphold,
you who never quit first.

REPERTOIRE

She wrote love on
new math workbooks.

Upside down so
he could read it.

Well so hate you
his reply though

he didn't mean
the least dislike

but feared this more
even then than

falsehood and in-
jury—the rude

proximity.

SHORTHAND COLLATERAL

Thanks to those who carried me
to the carnival and not the slaughterhouse
I grew quick to claim the moon
was full when it was only close.

Green lights that I imagined were more
commanding than the red ones I passed through.

Past my tendencies to celebrate too long, I turned
into a fledgling expert on crushing data
to scan with such endless dosage.

Growing closer to the grave
made selected breaths a windfall
while the rest passed on. I am young.
I am young. I am young.
How long could I say it?

I was singing of the obstacles
to the outward charge of each long spill.

Glib was March as a fraction of the year.
How to stand with both the ball and the heel?

MY OTHER SILENCE

Silence its cost
and saying its cost—

if there's a way to cut losses
if there's a way to cut

I guess that's what
I guess that was what
when silent I wanted to cut.

Once speaking
to speak again else.

How though to counter
what wasn't
the silence I bought?

SUNDAY TILT

I sit to your left
a local
driver in neutral.

Could we uncover an idle
way to yes, tell a steering
wheel from ouija?

Swayed by first inclination
I would reach beyond appendage
if this front could only quit.

BICYCLE

Bicycle, you are too much
in the shed.

What use for treads in the air?
What kind of seat bears no weight?

Your loyal spokes wait on wheels.
Your pedals hang like lost feet.

Bicycle, you could have been
so much less. The universe

Is charged
with fruition

and even your brakes
beg to wear, disappear.

Not merely toy with dust.

PORTRAIT HOUR

Visage in a pile of socks.
In trees' patterns
and a piece of luggage.

A face points to seasons.
Such worn association
would prompt some to invent
a fifth more bare than winter.

The momentum in one's face
may be steadfast or wishing.
We stare to freeze the forecast.

Are you famous?
I never know who's famous anymore.
I could see you gaining fame.

That your coming lines could parallel
an age grows clear to anyone—
the waiters, and even the painters.

FOUNDER

The merciful calm at finding the women
already pregnant is a pompous calm.

The kind scholars of midriffs undergo.
Take leave in tall hotels and stand on toes.

A man eating less than he burns makes an effort
to reconceive hunger and returns

to old menu. Even a transplanted heart
hauls a saga and pushes for more of the same.

No one could survive a fall from any cruising altitude
though the odds increase when sinking closer

to where all reaching begs collapse,
a bed or plot for no resistant pose.

FOR A LESSER PARALLEL

To be remeasured until
proving less and less away.

Somewhere there's a reach unscathed
though I learned on wheels how

my first move is a turning for the cliff.
Motion defies me, and half my work

is to help it. Camaraderie
says otherwise—says, Let fly your stream,

we'll applaud how it arcs. What I hear
is no more than our steerings between:
forging a lane to forfeit a crash.

LOOP

I try thinking less of them
as traffic and more
as my contemporaries

and never see much of our
bare, bare engines.

TO MAXIMUM IRISES

Here August seemed to reach its potential
while our pupils only grew so far.

The December light less tempered
seems to move toward an intensity
augmenting our irises.

Snow would be the rare case
of addition, though it likely will not
cloak this framework
that eases an otherwise glare to tones.

This is not an incomplete nearing
though it is tempting always to extrapolate.

I am far more up to this than August.
I question why and am answered maybe
by a bug lost in my eye.

FLIGHTS

Long stairs to a room
that is bare.

Looking out: only the top
of a church, beyond.

Below, the overlook, bagel shop.
Its nightly neon casts

shadows of fire
escape stairs on the wall

while they meet
their own centers, holes.

She'll bring small candles, light
them all with one. Wax drips

on pine, nothing holds, is level.
The climbing inside will reach

no floor. So in flight
from all else they'll turn

alone to what is left.
Turn to face.

THE STANDARD SIZE OF MOST THINGS

Like a ton of local blocks
it was some church at one side,
a diner at the other. Portions
amplified by a rationed plate.
Getting up to bearings on his sunken
share of the full-sized he's
bumped by done routine,
going halves on speculation,
alarms one learned to sleep through,
another tenant hitting the ceiling
as bed legs failed, such breaks
the alien measure.

DETOUR @ DODGE HALL

See them only
as close as their seats,
always looking forward.

See him glancing on her
reflection from turning
the glass face of his watch.

See a long hair of her
somehow in his mouth.

See him keep it in,
press it, sure he can
taste it.

Unsure of how much slack.

Wary of the pull.

CODA

A toe only testing a tepid river.
A toe reporting somewhere back.
A severed toe yet a toe without dues.

(Refrain)

A city up to nature.
A new meat primed for naming.
Shredded nails flagrant to magnets.

(Refrain)

CONTRACT

So the road and
sky show
the same off grey
One assumes
responsibility

LIMBO NOR

No stylus
in a groove transmitting.

No laser reading
alls and nothings.
No broken records.

No automatic smirk
default frown
lackadaisical gape.

No statue, one foot forward.

No tourist remembering four directions—
no ticker counting up and down.

No hunger to order
ruined by menu.

No hand for hire to show
how the new zeros compare.

TELOMERE

SCRIVENERS SHOULD NOT TRANSLATE
SERVICE RATS SHOULD NOT ALTER
ANAESTHETIC SOULS REVOLT
LOVELESS AUTHENTICATOR
VERACIOUS HALFTONES
CAREFUL TO VANISH
VOUCHSAFE TRAIL
ARCHIVE OF LUST
ARTFUL VOICES
VOCAL SURFEIT
OUR FESTIVAL
FAR OUTLIVES
VIRTUAL FOES
VISUAL FRET
RIFT VALUES
A SIFT RULE
AS FILTER
I FALTERS
STIFLER
ITSELF
ITSELF
LIFTS
SLIT
LIT
IT
T

SONNET 01

I let another instant postulate the whole to be—
wayward in an open lot where everybody goes.

Would I hold out enough for everything's close
if my life were the day and to sleep were to concede?

Once, I watched a vein of her neck pulse as she slept,
still afraid to see what I'd mistaken for a swallow repeat.

If I'd started sooner...started sooner...truant son...
I'd too be spent, instead of following the eyes fade.

No pride in this or being first to know the shadows
when this newness turns to patterns, starts

finding each morning in night's clothes,
building appeals for some star chamber as though

I had a case, before I had a coffin,
why I should see the end and have it send me back.

NEW

Bird on a branch.
I threw a rock to see if
It was alive.

Too

The double letters in her name—
the abundance was compelling.

“Needed?” is the question
I hear mostly only once.

A single sound at the door?
Call it a random rock from space.

No one knocks once for an answer.

RADIUS NOOSE

A baby trades rattles for meat.
A spy in a tailspin turns vicious.
The freight names its cave.

A nest lulls the viper. Roofs tease
the mourners. Fire muffles sighs.
A bitter mime sulks, apes laughs.

Shoes bask in pressure.
A fugitive tank lips the lake.
The mover knocks with a nail.

Knife a metal ticket to fame.
The same mime toys with matches,
baits tenants, smashes shells for release.

A missile slights the names.
A rare beam forks the night.
Pain remains the fable, banal?

Tussle. Smash. Chill.
Merge. Jab. Germ.
Bloom. Sap. Knot.
Match soot. Wherever valve.

AN HABITUAL

The seldom realm
they planned their variables around
assuming a return.

How many scale
ambition down
to range, to oath.

How many do they favor
by default, when reasons
not to don't pan out.

Inside people
simulate themselves.

Somewhere, proclivities
to union override
the sapped assembly.

PARTIAL

Do you accept these hedges as your trees?
Do you take this sink as your lake?
I caught you crouching for the heights.
I said your body can look like a target.
I said your body can look like a target.
You rose, galvanic.

TAKE TWO

1.

If I claimed to speak between
water and crystal, and you
construed a thousand
centrifugal ways,
I'd claim them
all and call it
my saline compromise.

2.

I wasn't one for slight degrees.
I didn't try to prove the sun.
I never learned the billion names
for ruthless grey.

TWO POINTS

My disposition
in line behind my elders
I babble and
procrastinate:
All breath and no death.

MY SPECIALIST

Shows how to turn
a birth certificate
into a kind
of or-

igami
that won't get taken
for even
the closest animal.

KING'S BAY

Six billion submarines by my coast
turn weather to lesser diversion.

Six billion submarines, nearly
one for each human eclipse.

Six billion submarines by my coast:
exemplars when the point is restraint.

Six billion submarines by my coast
turn weather to lesser diversion,
they turn weather to lesser restraint.

But I can't see my submarines.
I can't know the coast.

My authority is weather,
clouds rising, cloud plankton.

HOW TO RUN

Shun
the panoramas, flee
the vistas, resort
to refuge indoors?

With clocks to track
each lap? Where lies
the utmost surface?

Outside to a scene
of attention misspent,
a dusk lit by second-hand lamps,
curbs bugs and more crises below,
relations to a map?

I could tackle a lane
where all's dark save
two lines—light stripes that move
when I weave in between.

Though the best
would have to be running
in space, with no chance
to collide.

For the erratic, unwieldy.
For an ease and earth's reprieve.
Feet the last resort.

AGAINST FRUITION

Reflex to the word *cry*
a familiar anchor.

Yet to grapple
with the word as crypt
or vapor.

All I knew was an ambulance
observing the speed limit,

a trope to hang on a lamp—

to summon at twilight the pardon
when I did not beg *fulfill*.

QUÉBEC

I split I count
bisect, accrue, for all
I want I take it out—
I'm not centripetal.

And afferent you,
who take all to heart and agree:
even geese are too much.
The wrack. Implode. Can't

down, contain, yet join me
for counts: twenty-six!
As though nothing's to choose
else to grasp, let's go

inside the breach
and not lack.
I have known you
to alter the clock.

We'll survive
our twelfth
hundred collapse.

LITMUS

Could I guide you
I'd be full

of trickery, control
all your settings.

Though these hills
won't fit your paradise

disposition.
I'd have to take you

back before Vermont
was made

(life's reputation
depends on your fate).

YOUR PRIMAL X

Return to our uncovered vessel,
amend the futile turns?

I've drawn the starkest maps
to bury claims,
learned fluent anemic.

Now your hues abstract
all brushes aside.

Your primal X
endures all gauge,
evolves like a sum.

Ex-

You must have expected me to answer from habit when you asked me how old I was and would not wait while I

tried
for once
to answer
from memory.

ARCHITECT'S LAMENT

The instant I
would posit blueprints
before you, or a fire
designed to consume the space,
I was already wishing
I had buried my eyes.

Takes an epoch to go
when a new bridge burns
in each limb.

DRIP DROP

I paint up
a wall,
dripping.

You know...
implications.

DROSOPHILA

So much of them crushed
not to sense that somewhere,
somewhere in the mess
must be something
being fed on,
maybe something rotting.

He'd left a host on the walls—
new Latinate display—
hoping to scare off the rest.

Soon he'll aim
to scrub them away,
take a bucket and a sponge,
wipe the crushed flecks
from the gaps
where no portraits hang.

GNAT, PH.D.

Dear gnat, you knew
we weren't trying to
pet you.

Did you see our
Viking equipment?

ECUADOR

My whole life,
even in Spanish,
I was making this mistake—
meaning fork
and speaking knife.

MY MYOPIA

My myopia calls for an indistinct Canada
to counter my ruined Plainview.

I could lose this local basket,
its craft and heft fails
to make a humble carrier.

My myopia keeps me from going
famished. Another test of my rococo
fork. Says Tuscan beets taste like home.
I relish Melbourne pet cakes.
Nile fish muscles are the answer.

My myopia tries to surf on a mop.
Mistakes a typhoon for grist.

WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS

Like the way you
think, she said. Don't ever

lose that, she said. She left
without instructions. He spent

the day with a white flag
around his head.

Tomorrow, he thought,
I will reevaluate.

VACATION

When they head out, he conceives
of the worst. Stands rapt
to the sight: Dodge Omni
growing smaller uphill
before the turn, driveway
gravel trapped in his soles.
He'll dwell on last words,
afraid of those
stuck in his skull.
This talk about feed
the cats and dog, the trash—
what the orders he'll mess up,
not likely to follow
directions—just the way
a silence taps the last sound.

RADIUS TRAP

All's form moving in
and out of focus.
Designs to anticipate
the living's take.

Trees if not ominous
cast no blueprints for camouflage.

If their lines resemble tangled
codes we scan ourselves over,
we could pass without charge
or I.D. at the end, else spell
somewhere a name and a value.

If their lines are nearly stripes
we partly intercept,
they lend and fade
on our hands and such.

RADIUS TRAP II

Misdiagnosed as a universal donor,
he deemed an everywhere anemia.
Limbs fringed to pallor while
each nod bled the difference
between itself and its aim.

Quality sleep, quality sleep.
One loses
sleep over it. For want of
an infinitive *to shush*
and forfeit the mauled,
unreachable pears
one picks a safer lock.

RADIUS TRAP III

Empathy drops
around what's sure
to outlive us. All sometimes
and little others.

When the respite comes,
benevolent pressure
on my skeleton,
blood a tidal massage

I hope not to summon
I hope not to summon
I hope not to summon
the breakers again.

RADIUS TRAP IV

1.
That rusting water tower, built
by the firm that makes flimsy light
bulbs and panty hose. Nothing slow dances.

2.
You would hover over the earth turned map,
seeing a flare when someone recalled you.
By this you might know you had
done something.

3.
These are the terms I bid you under
the assumption I'll continue.

The terms assuming otherwise
I have not found the means to
even simulate a sound.

INELASTIC

What I'd wanted to call
a vertical inclination
this grid deems rather
my horizontal malady.

Something hierarchical
rubbing me regardless
rubbing me regardless:
Gravitate.

I sought as much
as the next to commune
where it wasn't akin
to stretching bands

whose stretching begs
the bands' return.